New fire chief enjoys larger station for Six Mile area

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

SIX MILE — Last year marked several significant changes for the Six Mile Fire Department.

Following the retirement of longtime fire chief Ronnie Duncan, the department became part of the Pickens County Rural Fire District and vacated its headquarters adjacent to Town Hall. The fire district now operates in a new facility on Mount Olivet Road under the direction of Michael Barrett, hired as rural fire chief last spring.

Barrett said the new facility has received an enthusiastic reception by the 30 volunteer firefighters.

"It's bigger, with a larger training area," Barrett said. "There wasn't enough room for everyone to sit at the other fire station when training would take place. The (fire truck) bays are also larger, as the former facility's doors only had about an inch on each side when backing the trucks in."

A 2000 Daniel High School graduate, Barrett is excited to be serving his hometown and hopes the public will attend the upcoming open house of the new facility. The event will take place at 5 p.m. Feb. 26.

Among the new fire chief's future goals are to see full-time employees, at least on a small scale.

"The new facility is set up for living quarters for future full-time employees, although we're unsure when that will take place," Barrett said. "Having one full-time fireman at the station per shift would be great for us. It would actually be two during the day, because I would be here as well."

Barrett has already made an impact during his brief tenure, adding first responder calls for medical issues such as cardiac arrest and heart attacks. On average, he said the department responds to 150 calls annually that, in addition to fires, include vehicular accidents and false alarms.

The fire chief also wants to see the ISO rating improve to lower the insurance rate, build a substation and increase firefighter training.

"I'm a big advocate for training," Barrett said. "I always push my guys for training because the more you know, the better."

When it comes to fire equipment, Barrett feels blessed that his department features a 2009 tanker truck with a 1,250-gallon per minute pump, as well as "a brand new" brush truck. Even its oldest fire truck, Engine 4, a 1994 model, is "in good shape."

Barrett said the location of the new fire station is also advantageous because it is in "the dead center" of the rural fire district.

"We cover Six Mile and the rural part of Six Mile, which is about 49 square miles, all the way to the Oconee County line on S.C. 183, and also go all the way to Pickens and Liberty," he said. "We have a pretty big fire district, but we also have Keowee Springs, a special purpose district which responds to calls in that community. But when we get a call, they also get a call, and we will help them if there is a fire in their community. It's been a great benefit to both."

Not only does the rural fire district have an adult volunteer force, Barrett said the department also features an Explorer program for youth ages 14-18.

"When they're 18, they can join the fire department and they have a little bit of knowledge," Barrett said.

Barrett is appreciative of the support received from Pickens County Council, adding the cost to build the new facility was around $500,000.

"I think the county's been a blessing helping get this new fire station established," he said.



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Michael Barrett, a 2000 graduate of Daniel High School, is excited to be serving his hometown as chief of the Six Mile Rural Fire District. Barrett, who began his new duties last July, said the new fire station on Mount Olivet Road will be open to the public during an open house at 5 p.m. Feb. 26.

goliver@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6687