

The Yachats Gazette

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INTERVIEW WITH FRANKIE PETRICK

The Yachats Gazette finally got a chance to hop over to the new fire station on Highway 101, and received a wonderful guided tour from Frankie, Yachats's Fire Chief.

TYG: So, how did you guys design this place—how did you guys get the idea to build a place like this?
Frankie: Well, Shelby and I drove around to fire stations that had been built in rural parts of the state in the last ten years. Fire stations in other parts of the United States are kind of brick, square buildings designed to fit on a city lot. We had previously built the station up-river [the East station, as it's known]. That's a small station, but we had some ideas. So we went around looking at what other districts had done in the last ten years: things that we liked, things we didn't like, things that they had put in that they didn't like; from some pretty small departments to a big one in Tualatin that was a huge structure designed for a lot of community use as well. So in our travels, then, we found some ideas we liked. One was two stoves in the kitchen, with a space [between them]—we went to one [place] that had two side-by-side, which made cooking hard, particularly if you were trying to do it for a large amount of people. We just



The new fire station at 2056 Hwy 101 N, Yachats

started making notes about the kind of things we would like to use our station for. Some places had really large meeting rooms, which is also a training room like this. But because we're on a "conditional use" in a residential area, we can't have huge groups that are coming and renting out the station. We can have fire training-type things—events that would be relevant to a fire station. Because at the old station we had no kitchen—we had a sink, and a refrigerator, no kitchen—we wanted our kitchen to be user-friendly. We were also thinking in terms of being able to have a little bit of storage, so we have a pantry area where we can have a whole section of canned goods for something in a three-year

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The Yachats Gazette

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period. The provisions we have for long-term are 25-30 years of storage so we don't have to try and rotate those through. And at the old station, there was no space where the on-duty crew could sit. So now we've got a dining-room table for them in the crew room, which means that not everybody has to be doing the same thing.

We had no reception area at the old station, and actually, the door wasn't un-lockable, so we always had the bay door open. We wanted to have an area that could break the weather, but people could sit on the "porch" if you will.

TYG-Graphic Design: I saw that bench out there—that's a nice idea.

Frankie: Yes—so there will be more plants in there and probably another couple of chairs. That area closes automatically. At the old place, they weren't ever sure whether they should come into the office. So we wanted to have that reception area. And then the upper level, the mezzanine, which was originally designed for work-out equipment, will be another office.



Frankie Petrick, Fire Chief for Yachats RFPD

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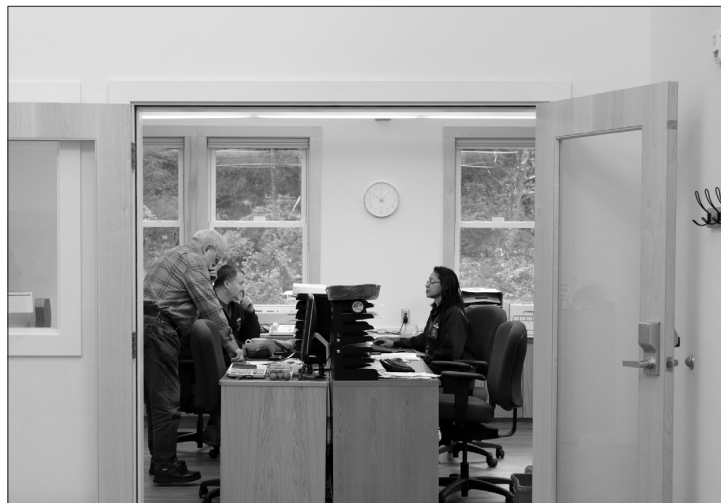
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At the old place, the desks faced each other, and we wanted to keep that open environment so that people would feel free to come in. The architect was a little reluctant about our openness, but I have just always had the feeling that we go into people's homes when they need help, [so] why should we have barricades when they come here? So we wanted to keep that openness, but we wanted a section for the crew that would be their space. So on the crew side [which we did not visit], there are four sleeping rooms, and each room has accommodations for three people. So if you're not here, you can leave stuff in your locker until your next shift. There are also two showers on that side. This means that people can come and go through the building; if the crew has a late night, they can have down time without somebody parading through. At the old station, they had to sleep in the meeting room, so if you had to go to the shop, there you went traipsing through. So the square footage is bigger, but when you consider that we couldn't even put all our apparatus in the downtown station, you had to figure that part of the square footage outside the building, and what Clark's (now C&K Market) allowed us to use. That stuff should have been under a roof.



The administrative offices

TYG-GD: So one thing I don't know, is how many crew you have.

Frankie: So there are three people on a shift that are fire-fighter paramedics, and depending on the day, Shelby, I, and Yvette. Yvette's part-time, and she does office work. With the idea being that one of the crew members would be stationed up at the East station. So there would be two here, one up-river; depending on the nature of the call, that person might need to come down. Which means that they could respond a vehicle out of there directly to a fire, and the truck

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Serious Whimsy



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from here—and of course we have automatic mutual aid agreements with Central Coast and Seal Rock to come our way.

TYG-GD: Central Coast being Waldport?

Frankie: Waldport. It's in Waldport, but they're not a city department.

TYG-GD: So, doesn't that person out east get lonely?

Frankie: Well, the idea being, some people like being out there more than others, but there's some apparatus there, there's also an office—they've got wi-fi, and they can work. And in the summertime, there's a little bit of outside stuff to do. One of the things I wanted to do out there was clear back into the trees a little bit, put in a couple of picnic tables, and if the valley wanted to have a potluck, then it could happen there. The inside's not very large—the bed's in the kitchen—but for somebody doing a potluck, that wouldn't be a big thing: they bring everything with them, and take their dirty dishes home. And, with the idea that it wouldn't be the same person. So, the crews work two days in a row, so that one of those days, somebody would be up-river. With three people, that means you're going to do that a couple of times a month. You have the time to catch up on specific work for up there, like on the trucks, making sure that



The big red truck and the ambulance

compartments are dry, clean—some of that mundane work that needs to be done. Not much truck washing has occurred up there, because our water at that station comes from the generosity of the neighbors, and so it's primarily their water, and we have overflow. Now, we have big tanks. Washing the fire truck and the ambulance is a safety thing—when washing, you discover if there's anything amiss. In the cities, they do a lot of polishing because they just do that. But it's not particularly exciting out there. My original plan was to have a couple of garden spots on the grounds

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around [the East station]. Either somebody could take that on as their project, or somebody up-river could use the space. It's hard, in a remote spot like that, to communicate with everybody up and down the river. My goal is that somebody up there would drive around, stop in, [ask] "How's Mrs. Jones doing today?" While they're doing that, they can check whether the roadway is wide enough for the truck, because a lot of people have smaller cars now, and getting the ambulance and the fire-truck in, or knowing places where you can't go with the big red truck—you have to take the smaller truck—[will] make them feel more a part of the community.

TYG-GD: Yes, some of the bridges across the Yachats River wouldn't accommodate the big truck, would they?

Frankie: Well, the one at my house, for example, is stout—it's [made of] railroad flat cars. However, railroad flat cars are narrow, and so, when the ambulance crosses the bridge at my house the wheels rub. So having a smaller piece of apparatus that can come across [will help bridge the gap] if a truck can come [to the beginning of the bridge] and you can lay a line over to a smaller piece of equipment to shoot water. Fortunately, homes [are] being better

constructed nowadays, and protected I guess. When I was growing up, everybody had a coal oil stove or a wood stove. Nobody had electric heat. Well, both of those lead to flues that need cleaning, and there was no drywall, so nothing to stop fire spread. Well, we've improved on that by a bunch. Now, however, your house fire is way more toxic than it was in the 40's and 50's, because [then] wood was burning. Or your horse-hair couch. Nothing toxic about it. *[laughter]* Unpleasant, but not toxic. Now, of course, all of the things in homes are too much man-made materials. That's really changed the evolution of fire service, to not have as many fire calls, which means you have less people volunteering. In my growing up in Waldport, the fire whistle probably went off once every ten days. When I was younger, more frequently—which meant that all of the businesses locked the door and went to the fire. And on Saturday, they all showed up at whoever's house that had the fire to patch it up until it could be repaired. It made it way easier for somebody to say, "So, I think I want to be part of the fire department," because there was a visible need. We still have the need, but the problem is that it's not near as glorious-looking, and, the requirements for firefighter safety and education is huge now as opposed

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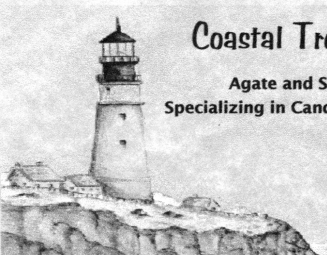


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to what it was. And of course over the years they've discovered that there are things in homes that burn that cause cancer, and so protective gear has gotten more expensive. My dad, I think he probably had the same pair of turn-outs the entire time that I grew up. He retired in 1962, and we moved from Newport to Waldport in 1949. So, that's a long time—I'm pretty sure it wouldn't have passed any safety standards [today]. [laughter] But that's the way it was! Some places didn't even have any turn-outs to offer, nor did they have any SCBAs for breathing air going into a fire. Years ago, I was looking for stuff in the old minutes, and at one of the meetings the volunteers came to request that the Board buy ONE SCBA so that somebody could go in with canned air into a fire.

TYG-GD: What does SCBA stand for?

Frankie: Self-contained breathing apparatus. Now, without somebody having one on, and somebody behind them, you can't send somebody in. But for years...

TYG-GD: ...you kind of held your breath and went in?


Frankie: Well, and I remember a fire south of town at one of the pull-offs quite a few years ago, it was a motor home fully involved, and three of the crew for almost a month had strained voices and bad coughs

because of not using SCBAs. But it was an outside environment—things burning outside were deemed to be carried away by the breeze. Of course now we have BAs for everybody, and spares, and they're all tested regularly to make sure they're serviceable and meet all of the safety requirements. It's nice that it's safer, but it certainly makes it harder to get people interested in volunteering, where before it was all the working people, and they all lived in town, they lived close. When you got off at three thirty, and the fire siren blew, you knew you were going to the fire and then you'd just go home. Now, quite a few of our folks live out of county—our paid staff live out of county. This means that if you call them, they'd report for duty but it might be three hours before they got here. This is why they work two days in a row with four days off. Of course, if there's something happening when it's time for them to leave the next morning, they stay—but it doesn't give you the availability to call them in and have them show up in half an hour.

TYG-GD: Maybe you need a Dalmatian to help bring people in!

Frankie: Well, it's interesting—one of our new employees does actually have a Dalmatian! [laughter] I guess he has a couple of them, but one of them does really good PR. So he's talking about whether to bring him in on the days that he works. [laughter] And he's

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been raised in a firehouse, so he knows how to kennel, and knows not to wander off down the road. [...]

TYG-GD: So, how many volunteers would you rather have?

Frankie: Well, it would be nice to have another half a dozen. Simply because what they're doing is supplementing. So for a fire, you want as many people as you can. We do have the automatic mutual aid agreement with Central Coast and Seal Rock, so we know people are coming, but it's almost impossible to have too many people at a fire. And like with an automobile accident, where the ambulance comes and deals with the patients, you still need firefighters to be able to manage the scene because there can also be a fire. ODOT will send somebody down, but ODOT never sends two people down, so it's always a safety concern of making sure that scene is safe. And, depending on the nature of the injuries, your three crew might need to leave with the ambulance. So having volunteers is really nice. But it's difficult if they're working a ways away, they come home, there's a family that wants to see them... When we were a logging community, everybody got off work at the same time. So there was always that "My house might be

the next one that has a fire; I'm going to go." And of course now, with there being smoke detectors and a lot more safety in the home, it's not as common to see a fire. So if there's an automatic alarm—and I'm going to use the Overleaf [as an example], because they're one of those that have an alarm in-house—that would generate an "all call." So Seal Rock and Central Coast are going to be coming until we tell them to stop. But, they're subject to—when the wind blows and the power snaps—it sets off that alarm when there's probably nothing happening. However, every time you have to go as if there were something happening, because that might be the time that it is. We're fortunate that we only have a couple of places that have alarms, but they're places like the Overleaf and the Adobe, that have a lot of people and could really be impacted. So yes, another half a dozen of people who lived in our district that wanted to respond for fire and first response medical—that would be nice. That would be a nice thing.

TYG: So, just a question I had that I was thinking about after you said how much rarer fires in the

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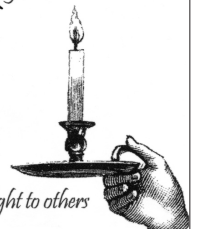
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homes are, when did having a fire extinguisher in a home become common? If it even is.

Frankie: Well, I would say that probably ninety per cent of the homes don't have a fire extinguisher. All of the vacation rentals are required to, under the county's ordinance and the city's requirements for licensing. And we certainly encourage people to have one at the edge of the kitchen—not over by the stove, because if the stove's on fire obviously you need to be able to get to it. But it's fairly uncommon for people to have fire extinguishers in their home. It's a very good idea. Fire extinguishers have been in garages for a while, because of Dad working in the shop kind of thing. The fire extinguishers we use are all refillable, which means they have to be hydro-tested. The ones that you can buy at Walmart or Ace Hardware or something that are one-time use and you throw it away are less cost. But they're just designed for one sitting. And having them—you know, you need to shake them every so often because the material will cake in them—

TYG: That's a good thing to know!

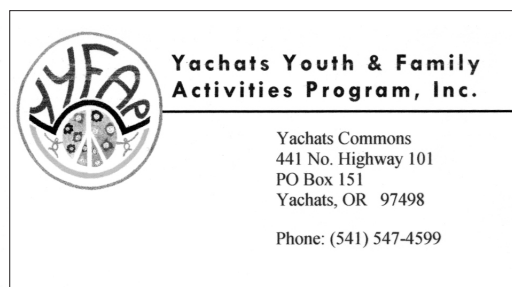
Frankie: Yes, you should know that! —and when the guy comes around to test ours, he has a rubber mallet to tap on them with, and it just loosens up that

material. Every so often there will be a push where people will call about "What kind of fire extinguisher should I get?" And it's usually because they've seen something in the news, or something has brought it to their attention—it's not on the top of their Christmas list to get a fire extinguisher. And of course for many years, people had the idea that sprinkler systems in homes destroyed all of your stuff. Because in the movies, if one head opens, they all do; in real life, that's not the way it works. So there was quite a push—probably ten years ago, now—from some people in Medford. Medford had a terrible fire, and a whole bunch of residential areas were being built with no sprinkler system. So there was quite a push to get it to be code in a residence. Well, if you retrofit, it's expensive. But, if you do it when the home is being constructed, then the cost per residence is minimal. But people will resist it, because, like one guy said, "I don't want my wool carpet and my paintings to get wet!" I said, "Well, wool dries, paintings can be restored, but when they burn up, they're gone." Even though there's quite a coalition out there to try and encourage counties to require residential sprinklers, there's a lot of resistance from people who build

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sub-divisions. Because they come in, and if they're going to build a hundred homes, and if they can save one thousand dollars on every home, that's profit to them. And those are really the places [sprinklers] need to be, because they're so close together. I go into homes all the time, and there are no sprinklers, and not too many fire extinguishers. And then of course some people get one, and don't ever read the instructions, so when they use it, instead of squirting the fire extinguisher at the base of the fire, they shoot at the flame. And it's a one-time-and-now-you're-done... and you still have a fire burning. When Betty Johnston and I were doing CERT classes, we had a lot of people who said, "You know, I don't think I can help anybody!" But we said, "Well, if you can help yourself..." So if you learn how a fire extinguisher works, then that's one person we don't have to worry about. And I was surprised that we had quite a few people sign up for our classes, but none of them had ever discharged [a fire extinguisher]. So let's say somebody gets one and it expires—leave it here, and we can use it for training and then dispose of it. And one lady said, "You know, all this time I've had a fire extinguisher, but I never would have had a clue how to operate it." Because it's one thing if you want to practice—but now you don't have anything in your extinguisher.

TYG-GD: And of course in an emergency, you don't have time to sit there and read the fine print.

Frankie: Fires in kitchens tend to inspire a lot of anxiety because they're usually related to the oven or something on the stove, and where you might not be able to reach through and turn the burners off, which is what you want to do first—kill the source. And people don't necessarily go look at their panel and find the one for the kitchen. Some places, particularly older homes, have them behind pictures; they're not clearly marked—especially with vacation rentals, we always encourage people: don't hide the panel, don't paint it the same color as the wall, because it needs to stand out. But a lot of people don't know what's the quickest way to turn off the power. At the top of the box is the main, but there's no required class for these things in your home—there's no book that comes with your panel. If you get a brand new home, there will be something about your toaster, and something about your stove, but nothing about the electrical panel.

[laughter]

TYG: So, out of interest because I'm not sure ours has a main, unless it's on the top left—there's no

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especially marked main, that's for sure—would it work to just flip them all off?

Frankie: Yes. What happens when the power comes into your house from the electrical company, there will be one at the top that says "The Main." Flipping that breaker will kill all of the power to your house. As opposed to, say, you were going to replace the outlet in your living room, then your breakers should be marked to say "living room lights," "kitchen lights," "garage," but the main at the top will kill the power from where it comes to your house.

TYG-GD: *So, how old do you have to be to be a volunteer?*

Frankie: Well, some places have a cadet program for junior high through high school. But anybody who is 18 can be involved in learning to drive equipment. We've always done it based on the person. Some people might never make it past driving a pick-up, as opposed to the paid staff that's got to be fluent in driving every piece of apparatus. We used to have a really good cadet program, but almost all of them had a family member volunteering, and so the kids were raised up [in that environment.] We stopped seeing young people living in Yachats, which was about the time when they shut the school down [1983]. There was a dynamic change in the county for work; we had a time when if we saw anybody young on the street, that meant there was a tourist in town. And one fellow—he was so funny—we were raising money for the Yachats Youth Council—for the first skate park, way back when Blythe's mom was still here—well, he said, "Why do we want to encourage having children in town?" [laughs] And I said, "Well, gosh, I don't know, maybe I'll only send my people who are over 70 to you when you need help!" And he said

"Oh!" He hadn't thought about that the way you end up having generations come behind you is that you're not a 100% retirement community, like they have in some of the places in Arizona, where you have to be 60 to be there! Now, they bring three buses down [from Waldport schools]. They go up the Yachats River, but the people who live on the North Fork—that girl gets off and walks home! She only lives about a half a mile up, but...

TYG: *That's a lot for a six year old!*

Frankie: Yes! And in the winter, it's almost dark...

However, the kids who are in kindergarten of course, if there's not somebody to get them, of course, they won't let them off the bus. Which is a good thing. But it used to be, nobody had just one person get off a stop! The Lions' Club used to build shelters, so all of the main bus stops from Yachats to Waldport, you could put six people in the bus shelter. If you were the littlest guy, you were lucky to sit on a high schooler's lap! So we have a high amount of retired people, and some of them volunteer for a lot of activities—I think our community is really good about that—but of course some of them think they're a bit old to get into the fire service business. They've come with some volunteer things they might do as related to filing and that kind of help, but yeah, somebody moving here at 65 is not apt to sign up to go to fire academy.

TYG: *Is there anything else you wanted to say in the Gazette?*

Frankie: Well, just pass on our appreciation for passing the bond, and taking on the responsibility of the cost. For some people, that will stay on with the property long after they're gone, but certainly the building

(Continued next page)



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(Continued: Frankie Petrick)

should last us for way more than the thirty years' life of the bond. We did way more than that with the old building we had, which was built in 1949. The contractor did an outstanding job for us on this building, and it was nice to have Lincoln County people working on our building. It gave attention to detail, because they know what the weather is, and were happy to share with us any changes they thought might occur, as well as cost savings. We really appreciate the community stepping up. We're helping ourselves, but it was still a financial obligation people had to take into account. Oh, and the SPIRE Grant [State Preparedness and Incident Response Equipment]! At the old building, we had a manual generator. We pushed it out the door and plugged it in, and we had lights throughout the building. No heat! So the State Emergency Preparedness offered the opportunity for a grant for a generator to power up a whole building. We knew that that was coming, so we had the building pre-wired to be able to take it. [...] We were fortunate enough to be one of the agencies that got the grant, and it wasn't a matching grant, it was an outright grant. The State of Oregon retains ownership of it, and it has to be portable so that if there's some major thing in Lincoln County, they might come and borrow that from us. We have the

obligation to maintain it to their specifications, and at some point when they decide it's reached its useful life, we'll be the first people who can purchase it for a nominal fee. But that's pretty exciting! It's not an automatic system; somebody will have to activate it if there's a power outage, but that's okay—we're not a hospital. [...] It holds about 90 gallons, which is quite a bit of diesel.

TYG: Yes, that should be enough for a couple of days.

Frankie: Yes. And looking at a period of time where we might have an issue, for example, a tsunami, when you're out of diesel you're going to be out. So the crucial time is going to be those first few days while people get used to what the plan is to move forward. There will be a lot of debris around, a lot of wood, which means we'll be able to make shelters, but the highway won't open, and the way [a tsunami] would affect the entire coast, people won't be rushing here [to refill the generator]. And what will happen is that, once again, the beach will be our highway until the highway gets rebuilt.

TYG: Well, thank you so much!

Frankie: Yes, yes! Thank you for coming!

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