

## Linton served 14 years as chief

Written by hebronjournal

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In his 14 years as Hebron fire chief, BJ Linton saw the department increase equipment, and calls since Highway 81 went from two lanes to four.

“When the four-lane went through, we had a bad time, about four to five fatalities in short order at that intersection,” he said about Highways 81 and 136.

As the outgoing fire chief, Linton was presented with a plaque at the city council meeting Monday evening and thanked for his years of service.

Wayne Kugel, a captain and 26-year member, was elected and began serving as fire chief Jan. 1.

Linton spent time at the department while growing up because his dad served. He joined the department as soon as he was eligible, right after high school 28 years ago.

At the time, he was the youngest member.

The department was close to full back then, Linton said. Its limit used to be 40 members and then it was changed to 45 due to a waiting list.

Linton, an emergency medical technician for more than 20 years, said equipment upgrades over the years include air packs, the ladder truck, ambulances, Jaws of Life and pumper trucks.

He went to work on organizing the budget and building the sinking fund.

“It wasn’t up to where it should be. Our first couple of ambulances we had to go door-to-door for fundraising,” he said.

Now, upgrades are part of the budget and planned out for the next 30 to 40 years.

“That was something we worked on with the city. We’re on a schedule now to replace instead of being surprised,” he said. Meetings between Linton, the city council and administrator Chris Fangmeier ironed out the details and a spreadsheet tracks department equipment for timely upgrades.

“It made things easier for the future. It’s a benefit to everyone,” Linton said.

It also doesn’t require department members to go door-to-door asking for donations. The volunteers do fundraise through a street dance and dinner for the July 4 celebration, fall gun raffle and for the last 11 years, annual golf tournaments.

Kugel said he isn’t sure about the dance this year because July 4 falls on a Thursday.

Last year, the department served a meal to about 600 people on July 4.

The number varies from year to year, Kugel said.

In addition to being a captain, Kugel has overseen, in part, emergency management services for about 10 to 12 years. The department has 11 EMT’s, with at least one member taking online courses through Southeast Community College.

Certification for an EMT can be completed in six months with a few trips to Lincoln for training.

Kugel said the online course is a benefit because members complete the training on their own time outside of their daily schedules. The online course has a 98 percent passing average.

Some members go to fire school in May for three days. Leadership skills are also taught.

As an EMS, Kugel must renew his license every two years and in the meantime, complete 20 hours of continuing education.

“There are people willing to dedicate themselves to complete the class, he said.

As a rule, Hebron Fire sends two EMT’s and a driver out.

“That’s our department policy,” Kugel said. “The state is one EMT, ours is two.”

On scene training includes burning houses down. Drills are on the third Wednesday of every month. Meetings are on the first Wednesday.

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“We’ve burned a lot of houses down in training,” Kugel said.

The 34-member fire department had 176 calls in 2018 with 151 of them medical calls, Kugel reported to the council.

“We’re fortunate to have good equipment. We don’t have a lot of accidents on Highway 81, but it’s not just one vehicle,” Kugel said.

He said a new ambulance would arrive at the end of January with the former vehicle going to an EMS service in Iowa, which may want to negotiate for future equipment.

As fire chief, Kugel has a new assistant chief, Shane Day. Captain for the city truck is Colt Vieselmeyer. The rural truck captain is Andrew Fangmeier.

Kugel’s 26 years with Hebron Fire has gone fast.

“Time flies when you’re having fun,” he said.