

## **NOMINATION OF CRFD CHIEF STEVE AVGERIS FOR THE GOLDEN SPARKY AWARD**

On behalf of Colestin Rural Fire District Board of Directors, we nominate Chief Steve Avgeris.

The Colestin Rural Fire District is a totally Volunteer Department and we protect 17 square miles of mostly mountainous rural terrain and a small community of about 200 residents who live in the Valley. Interstate 5 bounds our district on the eastern side, so we are involved in both medical situations and vehicle fires as well as responding to local medical calls and wildland and structure fires.

The Fire District was formed as a result of the 1981 Colestin Fire which ripped through the Colestin Valley damaging property and threatening lives (fortunately no one was killed). At that time, telephone service did not exist in the valley and emergency response from outside agencies was slow. A few residents responded with their hoses, shovels and other rudimentary handtools, but this was no match for a rapidly growing blaze; with no local agency, no fire truck, and no other firefighting resources or trained firefighters, and with confusion between the multiple outside agencies, the fire, driven by erratically wild winds, grew to approximately 540 acres, scorching hundreds of acres of managed timber and forcing residents to flee.

The experience of the Colestin Fire resulted, at the suggestion and with the support of the Oregon Dept. of Forestry, in the residents forming our own volunteer fire protection district. Residents held regular meetings, recruited more volunteers, made donations for equipment purchases, fundraised, trained as firefighters, and began work on acquiring an engine. Other resident volunteers worked on improving communications; within a year, the valley had phone service. In August, 1983, we received our legal charter from Jackson County, Oregon, as an official rural fire protection district.

The first fire Chief was, and still is, Steve Avgeris, a second-generation Colestin Valley resident. A logger by profession with firefighting experience, Steve was unanimously appointed by the community members, then elected by the newly formed Board, to serve as Chief. The district has grown since then; we now have several engines, a water tender and a solid crew of volunteer firefighters. We are still an all-volunteer District. No one, including Steve, receives a penny for their service and time.

Steve has been responsible for scheduling and providing training of our volunteers for over 36 years, in conjunction with support from ODF and Cal Fire (since we reside on the northern border of California). He remains committed to education for our firefighters through firefighter training and for first responders who continue to donate their time to attend classes and receive certification.

Our elected Board serves our residents in part by applying for and receiving grant money; we now have a small tax base which allows us to purchase necessary second hand equipment and to outfit our volunteer firefighters. This requires excellent planning and husbanding of resources, which falls under Steve's umbrella.

Prevention and education go hand in hand. We believe that Steve's leadership, which includes leading by example, in encouraging information about fire prevention to our community – initially through a periodic newsletter to our current method of an informative website ([www.crfd.org](http://www.crfd.org)) and postcards

which go out to every property owner and resident several times a year and during fire season, every time there is a change in wildfire regulations - has been part of why fires over the past nearly four decades have not resulted in any fatalities or large fires, and has contributed to an overall greater fire awareness in the community, resulting in fewer human-caused fires.

An example of Steve's success in preventing large fires occurred with the 2018 Klamathon Fire, which decimated Hornbrook (a small community just south of us in California). The fire was raging out of control ; with winds and fuels, the fire was swiftly moving into our valley, and evacuation was initiated. Steve was helping on the fire; he had some dozers at the south end of the valley and got two of the firefighters on them and joined them in cutting a large fire break just below our district. Winds did shift later, but that immediate action kept the fire from entering our district and literally saved our valley.

Steve doesn't sleep with both eyes closed during fire season. He is often out patrolling, speaking to residents about fire safety, and is always on alert during thunderstorm weather, watching for lightning hits, notifying volunteers to be on stand-by as needed. He continually monitors radio emergency communications, and personally responds to every call in the Valley unless he is far away from the district. There are numerous examples of his leadership with our firefighters and skill at stopping the spread of fires, caused by lightning or by careless people.

Steve has served our District as our Chief for 37 years (unofficially, 39 years - since the Colestin Fire). Once a small backwater district, Steve has overseen the development of our District since 1981 as it has become more professional, capable and effective, with several engines, a fire house and year-round service, and firefighting equipment and properly trained and outfitted firefighters. While still small due to population size, the capabilities of our crew of firefighters stands head to head with much larger, better-funded districts, largely because of Steve's leadership and diligence. There are many dedicated Fire Service personnel in Oregon. However, I suspect that few have served as long as Chief Avgeris, and it is highly unlikely that one will ever find anyone more committed, effective, and dedicated.

We strongly believe that Chief Steve Avgeris is highly deserving of the Golden Sparky Award, in recognition of his long-standing volunteer service to our district. We appreciate your sincere consideration of our nomination of Steve for this honor.