

NEWS RELEASE

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Jackson Hole fire chief to resign

Jackson, Wyo., Nov. 16, 2016 – After 39 years of fighting fires, responding to community emergencies and ensuring public safety, Jackson Hole Fire/EMS Fire Chief Willy Watsabaugh will retire in early January.

“I have embraced the opportunity to be a leader in these positions, and more importantly, the opportunity to serve the citizens of Jackson Hole Fire/EMS,” Watsabaugh wrote in a resignation letter to Teton County and Town of Jackson officials. “But I feel that now is the time to pass the torch to a new leader who will continue to look out for the best interests of the community and who will continue to implement the practices that will protect their families, their homes, and their way of life. This is what this community embraces, promotes, and without question, deserves.”

Watsabaugh has been fire chief for seven years, which he called rewarding, exciting and the highlight of his career. He has also held positions as volunteer chief and deputy chief. Among his accomplishments, he noted the strong volunteer contingency. “The volunteers are the life blood of the Jackson Hole Fire/EMS organization, and without them, our program could neither succeed nor continue to maintain its high standards of excellence,” he said.

Watsabaugh said it was with a “mixture of excitement, regret, contentment, sadness and utmost respect” that he would be retiring, and he thanked the community of Jackson and Teton County for the humbling opportunity to serve the community he loves. “It has always been my goal to earn the respect and confidence of the people of Jackson/Teton County in exchange for the privilege that has been bestowed upon me as Fire Chief,” he wrote. “I have always strived to do my best and have wholeheartedly appreciated the support shown to me.”

County Commissioners’ Administrator Alyssa Watkins said that Watsabaugh’s boots would be difficult to fill, but she wishes him happiness and fulfillment in the next stage of his life. “He has led with professionalism, compassion and experience,” Watkins said. “Unquestionably, he has made an impact in his years of service to the community, not just on the department, but also in terms of the safety of all of those who reside in and visit Jackson Hole.”

Watkins said the transition to a new fire chief would likely include the appointment of an interim chief, but that details of the transition and hiring process are still in development. Watsabaugh said he would be available as necessary to help in the transition.

“Our community has been extremely fortunate to have Chief Watsabaugh at the helm of Fire/EMS,” said Barbara Allen, Board of County Commissioners Chair and Fire/EMS liaison. “He’s a delight to work with. He takes his job seriously. He’s well respected, well liked and professional. He will be missed.”

Fire/EMS Department staff are planning a community party in Chief Watsabaugh’s honor for Saturday, Jan. 7. Details to come.

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