

## Donations get big 'thank you' from Gearhart Fire Department

*Two Gearhart families and Pacific Power present department with \$15,000 check to buy equipment*

***By NANCY MCCARTHY  
The Daily Astorian***

GEARHART - Gearhart Fire Chief Bill Eddy and his volunteer firefighters are celebrating Christmas early this year with a big thank you from two Gearhart families and the Pacific Power Foundation.

The "thank you" comes in the form of a large check -- both in size and amount - which will be used to buy equipment to help rescue fire victims in burning buildings.

The \$15,000 check was presented to Eddy, the firefighters and the City Council during a presentation Wednesday. But the "thank you" stems from the Aug. 4 plane crash in Gearhart that killed three children and two adults and injured three others.

For Dick Reiten, a part-time resident with strong ties to Gearhart, the response by the town's volunteer fire department to the tragedy was amazing, and he told Eddy after the crash how much he appreciated the department's work. From that conversation Reiten, who retired this year as chair and CEO of Northwest Natural, learned how difficult it was for the firefighters to see images in a burning, smoke-filled house. But he also learned that tools -- expensive tools -- were available to solve that problem.



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**Members of the Gearhart Fire Department and City Council are celebrating Christmas a little early with a \$15,000 check donated by the Pacific Power Foundation and two Gearhart families. The money will be used to buy rescue equipment. From left are: City Councilor Chuck Mattocks, firefighter Ryan Dietrich, firefighter Stacy Baker, Mayor Kent Smith, Assistant Fire Chief John Baum, Fire Chief Bill Eddy, Pacific Power President Patrick Reiten, Dick Reiten, Schmitt Industries Executive Vice President James Fitzhenry, firefighter Matt Hofman and firefighter Gary Burns. The Reitens and Fitzhenry families donated the funds to thank the fire department for its service.**

Reiten told his son about the conversation. Pat Reiten is the president of Pacific Power, and Pacific Power has a foundation. When Reiten's friend, James Fitzhenry, heard about the department's need, an idea formed. From that idea came a \$10,000 donation from the Pacific Power Foundation, \$2,500 from the Richard G. Reiten Leadership Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation and \$2,500 from James and Michelle Fitzhenry.

Although Fitzhenry, also a part-time Gearhart resident, is now executive vice president of Schmitt Industries Inc., he is the former executive with Flir Systems Inc., which makes infrared thermal imaging sensors. Those sensors are contained in the Bullard thermal imaging device that the fire department will buy to see through the darkness and the smoke to find victims in burning buildings.



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**Patrick Reiten, president of Pacific Power, signs a \$15,000 check that was given to the Gearhart Fire Department as a “thank you” for the service provided by the volunteers. With Reiten was James Fitzhenry, executive vice president for Schmitt Industries and part-time Gearhart resident, and Dick Reiten, Pat Reiten’s father who also owns a house in Gearhart. The Pacific Power Foundation provided \$10,000 and Dick Reiten and Fitzhenry donated \$2,500 each. The department will buy rescue equipment with the money.**

The money also will be spent on a fire nozzle that takes only one person to set up and that can douse flames without being manned. If the nozzle moves, it will automatically turn off until it is aimed once again at the fire. Usually it requires two or three firefighters to hold and operate a nozzle, Eddy said.

Dick Reiten told those gathered at the fire department Wednesday that his family narrowly missed being hit by the single-engine Cessna 172 when it crashed through a house at 398 N. Marion Ave. on that August morning.

"We had five members of our family only 300 yards away. It very well could have been our family," he said. "It brought home how fragile the life is that we all have. But the fire department made a difference. It saved lives with an extraordinary response. We're here to say thank you in several different ways."

Pat Reiten said he understood what is needed in an emergency.

"At Pacific Power, we know a little bit about being first responders," he said. "We know that it requires people, it requires heroic people. The fire department and its staff represent those people.

"It also requires tools, the right tools for the awful event that will happen next."

As he received the check, Eddy said it would help purchase "something we normally would not be able to get with our limited budget." Mayor Kent Smith called the donation "extremely generous."

"We're still working through the tragedy," Smith added.

The firefighters, he said, work out of an outdated fire hall with equipment that needs to be replaced. "But they have a 'can-do' attitude."

After posing with the firefighters in front of a Gearhart fire engine with the much larger-than-life check, James Fitzhenry said the plane crash caused him to think about the "randomness of life."

"None of us are recovered from that event," Fitzhenry said. "As parents, as citizens, we don't say 'thank you' enough."

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