



[News Tips](#)  
[Letters to Editor](#)  
[Subscriptions](#)  
[Classified Ads](#)  
[Contact Info](#)



# Hood River News

Official Newspaper, City of Hood River and Hood River County



Gorge Weather

November 24, 2005

HOME

## Kaleidoscope

### Local News

[News Headlines](#)  
[Kaleidoscope](#)  
[Features](#)  
[Business](#)  
[Classtime](#)

### Local Sports

[Sports Headlines](#)  
[Sidelines](#)  
[HRV Schedules](#)

### Lifestyle

[Entertainment](#)  
[Opinions](#)  
[Letters to Editor](#)  
[Obituaries](#)

### News Links

[W. Salmon Enterprise](#)  
[The Dalles Chronicle](#)  
[Oregon Live.com](#)  
[Bend Bulletin](#)  
[East Oregonian](#)

### HRN Archives

[Click here to search our selected news archives](#)

### City/State Links

[City of Hood River](#)  
[HR County Chamber of Commerce](#)  
[Hood River County](#)  
[Hood River Fire](#)  
[Hood River Police](#)  
[Port of Hood River](#)  
[Gorge Kids](#)

### Education

## Fired Up... in the heat of the job

*Twenty volunteer firefighters/EMTs provide protection for Cascade Locks*



Photos by Raelynn Ricarte

The walls of their old fire station are literally held up by steel rods and yet they are spending hours of their own time on training opportunities.

### By RAELYNN RICARTE

News staff writer  
 November 23, 2005

A small band of firefighters is blazing new trails to protect the 1,151 residents of Cascade Locks. "Our call volume has seen a 100 percent increase in the past two years," said Fire Chief Jeff Pricher, who also serves as the community's only paid paramedic.

**GORGE SATELLITE INC**  
 WE BRING SATELLITE TELEVISION & INTERNET DOWN TO EARTH  
**SALES - SERVICE INSTALLATION**

**HOOD RIVER FORD MERCURY**  
 800 875-7564

**HOOD RIVER NEWS COVERS THE GORGE**

[HR Community Ed](#)  
[HR Parks and Rec](#)  
[HR County Schools](#)  
[CGCC \(The Dalles\)](#)  
[MHCC \(Gresham\)](#)  
[U of O](#)  
[Oregon State](#)

## Services

[Gorge Classifieds](#)  
[HR County Library](#)  
[Oregon Blue Book](#)  
[Gorge Commission](#)  
[The Next Door, Inc.](#)

He believes the higher call volume is due to an increase in the number of visitors to the Gorge. An estimated 1.3 million tourists, said Pricher, are now stopping in or around the rural town each year.

Since the start of 2005, he and the other 19 members of the local fire/medical service have responded to 282 ambulance calls. One of these calls was memorable because it involved the emergency delivery of a healthy baby. Two others were traumatic because they involved injured children; a young boy who had been struck by a truck and an elementary school-age male without a helmet who catapulted into a tree after going over an embankment on his ATV.



"The last thing you want to see is a kid hurt, especially when it could have been prevented," said Pricher.

In addition to medical calls, the rural department assisted in 10 wilderness rescues this summer. The majority of these operations involved injuries sustained by cliff jumpers at an 80-foot waterfall along the Eagle Creek Trail.

Pricher said home base for all of these endeavors was the firehouse that is almost 90 years old. The walls of the structure are literally held up by steel rods that extend from one side to the other.

"By all accounts, if we have a big earthquake we're going to lose everything in this building," he said. In addition, he said the \$90,000 operating budget leaves little extra cash to replace pieces of equipment

that are up to 32 years old.

Pricher said that can make things tough for the department that provides fire/medical protection services along 22 miles of Interstate 84. Cascade Locks' territory begins at Multnomah Falls to the west and extends east to Viento State Park. In addition, the city's ambulance provides coverage for 50 square miles in and around the town.

"It's the volunteers that make the fire department work," said Pricher.

During the last two months, local volunteers have put in more than 80 hours of training time. And eight firefighters have recently qualified to enter a burning building by completing a level one program. Not only did they qualify, said Pricher, they all passed with an 80 percent or better score.

"They gave up five weekends of their free time to go through this training and that's to be commended," he said.



Pricher said the department might be small but its volunteers are fired up about their protector role. And they have been actively seeking out grant funds to upgrade equipment that is needed for the job.

The city is in the process of applying for a \$500,000 state Community Development Block Grant in hopes of building a new fire station. The department already obtained a U.S. Forest Service grant of \$48,000 for the architectural design. Cascade Locks is negotiating to buy about one acre from the county at its eastern border for the new facility. Then the old station, located in the central business corridor, can be sold for revenue – and provide space for another commercial enterprise.

Pricher has already been successful in netting \$127,000 from the Federal Emergency Management Agency grant for 18 new airpacks, extra face masks, 10 new radios, and textbooks for training.

In July, the department received a \$22,000 thermal imager to seek out heat sources in dark or smoky environments. The device, obtained through a Homeland Security grant, is being loaned out to other emergency responders as needed.



"For us, getting the equipment we need has been really tough. We have a small tax base so we keep going for the grants," said Pricher. "We are not letting a small budget stop us."

In October, the fire department posted a Web site to inform the community about its activities. Pricher said residents and visitors alike can now access burning information, ambulance rates and other pertinent data.

"This is a big step for us because we want to do a better job of advertising who we are and letting the public know what we're doing," he said. "The citizens here give everything that they can to help us out and we want them to know how much we appreciate that."

The fire department Web site is [www.cascadelocksfire.com](http://www.cascadelocksfire.com)