

Measure A money at work

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The Calaveras Consolidated Fire Protection District Board of Directors earlier this week used Measure A money to hire six full-time firefighters.

Measure A was a sales tax hike approved by voters in March of 2024. The 1 cent increase in the sales tax goes to the county's nine fire districts, which includes Calaveras Consolidated.

The fire district covers roughly 163 square miles in the western portion of Calaveras County serving approximately 15,000 residents in the communities of Burson, Campo Seco, Jenny Lind, Milton, Rancho Calaveras, Valley Springs and Wallace.

Proponents of Measure A said the funding would be used to hire more firefighters with many of the agencies planning to improve firefighters' compensation to reduce high rates of turnover.

The voter-approved tax measure required that at least 70 percent of the revenue be spent on staffing.

Calaveras Consolidated Fire Chief Rich Dickinson said his board is holding true to those promises to voters and putting taxpayers' money to work with the latest round of hiring.

"More boots on the ground" provide better protection to the community and improves firefighter safety, he added.

With the authorization to hire more firefighters, the district can man its two stations around the clock with three firefighters, he said. As recently as the summer of 2023, the district had to briefly close the downtown Valley Springs fire station because it did not have staffing.

At the time, much of the staffing depended on interns and part-timers who were making a stipend of \$125 a day for a 24-hour shift. In a four-year period before adoption of Measure A, the district saw 40 firefighters pass through its ranks and move on to permanent positions elsewhere.

In addition to being able to hire firefighters on a full-time basis, the district is providing benefits for the first time. Since the tax began to be collected last October, the district has hired 12 full-time firefighters.

"We can now offer a competitive wage within the county and we believe that will provide stability," the chief said. "The rank and file are very happy."