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Gates secures grant for new fire hall

Money will be used to acquire land for future construction

By Kathleen Ellyn
The Stayton Mail

The rural community of Gates may have a community center able to provide both emergency services and a place for community activities soon.

The United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Development Division, has awarded the Gates Rural Fire Protection District a \$50,000 grant to put toward their new fire hall/community center.

That just leaves about \$2 million to raise, according to Fire Chief Gary Swanson.

The district plans to put the USDA money to use as seed money for property acquisition Swanson said. The Gates Rural Fire Protection Fire District has already targeted a property.

An ambitious capital campaign will be unveiled later this summer.

The fire district has been working on the plan for two years, Swanson said.

"We've outgrown our current location," Swanson explained. "As the population of the district has grown, so have community needs."

Primary needs include the immediate and eventual upgrade of equipment, secure adequate storage for current and future firefighting and

rescue equipment, and provision of an emergency location for the community.

"We've quit buying needed equipment because there is no place to put it," Swanson said. "For instance, we're currently storing extra hose under the tailgates of trucks."

The district also needs to purchase a new rescue vehicle, but has no space to store it, he said.

However, the part of the plan that Swanson feels is "critically important," is building a facility large enough to serve as a community emergency resource.

The need for such a building was brought home to the community just a few months ago when winter windstorms caused a power outage that lasted for three days.

"During the windstorm we had senior citizens in our community who were in circumstances where they did not have heat in their homes and had no relatives they could stay with. For some of them, even basic needs like food water became real serious issues. Our current facility has no way to provide disaster relief to any of our citizens."

The building could also be used for community gatherings and celebrations, Swanson said.

The Gates Fire District Emergency Services Support, a nonprofit corporation created to raise funds for the facility, expects to be able to receive donations from the public by midsummer.