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Lamar to add 10 fire trucks

By JILLIAN KRAMER

Lamar County will add 10 new fire trucks to its arsenal of fire-fighting equipment by this time next year.

On Sept. 11, the county placed an order with American LaFrance - a company that will manufacture and ship the trucks sometime next summer - to supplement its existing inventory of older trucks, county Fire Coordinator George Stevens said.

"We had bought 10 class A pumpers in 1995," he said. "Part of (the county's need) was the 1995 models are approaching the end of their 15 year life-cycle. The other part is that so many people moving into the county ... and now those areas are being populated and need fire protection."

The county will also add anywhere from 10 to 13 new fire stations within the year, Stevens said in an earlier interview, but is still waiting to see if it will receive a \$1.8 million Community Development Block Grant to build the stations, Stevens said Wednesday.

Regardless of whether it receives the CDBG, county officials will apply for a \$970,000 loan from the Mississippi Development Authority to finance the construction at least 10 of the new fire stations, Stevens said.

A \$500,000 USDA Rural Development grant and a \$1.3 million commitment from county supervisors made the purchase of the new fire trucks possible, Stevens said.

However, it's an expense the county won't have to worry about until its next fiscal year, despite the fact it has already placed the order for the trucks, said County Administrator Chuck Bennett.

County supervisors will choose an annual financing plan from whatever loan they select, Bennett said, allowing them to postpone their first payment of the loan until the 2009 fiscal year.

Attached to the USDA Rural Development Grant was a loan offer with a fixed interest rate of less than 4 percent, Bennett said, which supervisors are considering.

"The USDA has guaranteed that rate but since we don't know the exact month we'll get the (trucks) delivery, we haven't made a commitment to it," Bennett said. "We've got a locked-in rate from them if we choose to do it. When we get closer and get a confirmation of the delivery, then we'll go shop the financing."

The addition of the new fire trucks should help the county continue to lower its class ratings, Stevens added. The completion of two new fire stations on Epley and Hickory Grove roads combined with the new trucks should lower rates in those areas from a class 10 to an eight, Stevens said. Central Lamar and Southwest fire districts should also see their rates drop from 10 to eight.
