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New Avondale fire station will serve growing area

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By David Madrid
The Republic | azcentral.com
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When the fire station at Avondale's Northwest Public Safety Facility opens in January, it will help first responders get to emergencies faster in a sprawling area that has been challenging to serve, fire officials say.

Construction of the station on the Estrella Mountain Community College campus will begin in July and should be completed in December.

A two-man crew will help the Fire Department respond to emergencies until a full nine-person crew and full-size ladder truck come to the station, possibly in July 2014.

The new station will provide an extra level of security to a large, heavily populated area that is far from other Avondale fire stations, Deputy Fire Chief Ron Deadman said.

The Rancho Santa Fe community and the area around the community college are now primarily being served by neighboring communities' fire departments through the automatic-aid system.

"Phoenix comes in from the north, and Goodyear comes in from the west, and their response time is somewhere in the 8 1/2- to the 9-minute time," Deadman said.

"We're hoping to be able to stop that clock and be there within 4 to 5 minutes. Three minutes' difference in each type of emergency is important."

Soon there may be even more residents nearby who need fire services.

City leaders are preparing to annex Wigwam Creek South, a county island community of 1,266 single-family homes and one 300-unit apartment complex.

The community is about a mile northeast of the public-safety facility. Wigwam Creek South residents asked to be annexed into Avondale.

The city has negotiated the annexation with Litchfield Park, which must de-annex a strip so the community will be contiguous with Avondale. Under state law, a city can annex only land abutting it. On June 17, the city will conduct a public hearing on the annexation, and then the community must gather 51

percent of its property owners' signatures.

Based on the number of calls Rural/Metro Fire Department gets from Wigwam Creek South and the calls Avondale Fire Department receives from the northwest area, the new station won't be overtaxed, Fire Chief Paul Adams told the City Council last week.

When the fire station is finished, it will complete the Northwest Public Safety Facility, built in 2010. The complex includes a police substation, campus security offices and public-safety classrooms.

The 18,613-square-foot public-safety facility includes space for a fire station, but the economic downturn left the station portion of the building an empty shell. Avondale, however, uses the police substation.

An agreement between Avondale and Litchfield Park to share the station fell through in 2009 because of declining revenues. Litchfield Park couldn't afford its \$2.25 million share to build the station. Avondale was unable to build and staff the fire station until now.

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When the station opens in January, the two-person brush truck will respond to all types of calls, Deadman said. The team will play an important, early role in medical emergencies, he added.

"When somebody's choking, obviously, the idea is the sooner you get there the better," Deadman said. "If somebody is having a heart attack, the sooner we start doing some intervention, the better."

Avondale Mayor Marie Lopez Rogers said she is pleased that the city can expand fire service to the area.

"Other than the budget, our Number 1 responsibility is public safety, so I'm happy we're able to service that area," she said.

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