

CHIEF

from C1

Eight years later, Simms was promoted to Hauser's part-time fire chief working one day a week, then three, then five. Eventually, the Hauser Lake Fire District board of commissioners decided it was time to make Simms the first full-time paid chief.

Wes Micheal, president of the Hauser Lake Fire District's Board of Commissioners, said Simms has played a crucial role in advancing the volunteer service.

"Chief Simms brought us kicking and screaming into the 20th century," Micheal said. "He was a professional before we hired him as chief. We felt he was the one that could do the job, and he did more than we expected him to do."

Simms said he had three primary goals for his time with the district: to update equipment, improve training, and transform into

more of a professional organization.

"I think we've accomplished that for the most part," Simms said. "We have good equipment now, the guys have been trained, and it is a great group of people to work with."

Simms brought in over \$1.5 million in grants for Kootenai County and Hauser Fire District equipment.

He said the position was not something he did for the recognition, but to simply help the community.

"It's not about the attaboys. It's about if I can make a difference in somebody's life one time," Simms said. "Even if it is only once in 34 years, it was worth every minute."

The district showed support for Simms and new Chief Neils in a pinning ceremony at the Hauser Lake Fire Station Wednesday night.

Neils, 51, has spent over half his life with the district. Joining at 24, Neils was drawn to service after watching his father and two

grandfathers volunteer with their hometown fire departments. Being chief for Neils means more than just a title; it's a chance to make a difference in the community and the volunteer organization.

"This is not an opportunity that comes twice in a lifetime," Neils said. "I get to work with the most amazing group of people to help create something bigger than we already have."

One of Neils' goals for the district is to increase community involvement, connect with other public safety districts, and improve volunteer training. Neils said that with the team he has, the future of the district looks bright.

"What I'm going to do is use all the things Chief Simms has created and expand it to make it even better for the person after me," Neils said. "When you work with all these talented people, and you bring your own pieces, it makes a stronger whole that you can leverage to do better."



MADISON HARDY/Press

New Hauser Lake Fire Protection District Chief James Neils is presented with the certificate of promotion by Fire Commissioner Andrea Maddalone at Wednesday night's ceremony.