



MEDIA RELEASE

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Selection of Bent Koch as Fire Chief

La Mesa, CA – The Cities of La Mesa, El Cajon and Lemon Grove, whose jointly managed fire departments make up Heartland Fire & Rescue, have selected Bent Koch as their next Fire Chief. The City Managers for the three cities, Greg Humora of La Mesa, Graham Mitchel of El Cajon, and Lydia Romero of Lemon Grove, made the announcement that Koch will begin serving in this capacity on December 31, 2022. His swearing in will take place at La Mesa’s first council meeting of the year, on January 10, 2023. Koch replaces Chief Steve Swaney, who retired on December 30, 2022.

Chief Koch has moved up the ranks within Heartland Fire & Rescue, most recently as Fire Division Chief. In his prior role, Koch oversaw the Operations Division, which includes eight fire stations and 110 sworn personnel.

Chief Koch graduated from California State University – Long Beach (CSULB) with a Master’s degree in Emergency Service Administration. He also holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Occupational Studies from CSULB, an Associate’s degree in Fire Protection Technology from Miramar College, and a Fire Officer Certification from the California State Fire Marshal.

Chief Koch, a native of Estonia, started his career in fire service in 1994 with the Julian Cuyamaca Fire Protection District as a volunteer. In 1996, he was hired by California Department of Forestry (CalFire) as a seasonal firefighter. He was hired by the City of La Mesa as a firefighter July of 1998. Chief Koch has served a variety of roles that include the positions of Firefighter, Fire Engineer, Fire Captain, Fire Battalion Chief, and Fire Division Chief. Additionally, Chief Koch has served as a Strike Team Leader and Division Group Supervisor on large wildland fires across the state for over ten years. He has also played a large role in regional wildland fire training thru involvement at all levels in the annual San Diego County wildland preparedness drill for nearly 20 years.

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