

Bourgeois says he is 'humbled by the opportunity' to be AJ district's fire chief

By Nora Heston
Special to the Independent

Paul Bourgeois, who was formally offered the position of fire chief at an Apache Junction Fire District Board meeting on Sept. 10 after serving as interim fire chief since late April, said he never saw the promotion coming.

"I couldn't be happier to be here," Chief Bourgeois said of his new position at AJFD. "I was very humbled by the opportunity to serve as interim chief but even more so to be offered a position as permanent fire chief."

Chief Bourgeois has found great success working as part of fire districts in both Mesa and Apache Junction, a career he stumbled onto while studying business management at Mesa Community College.

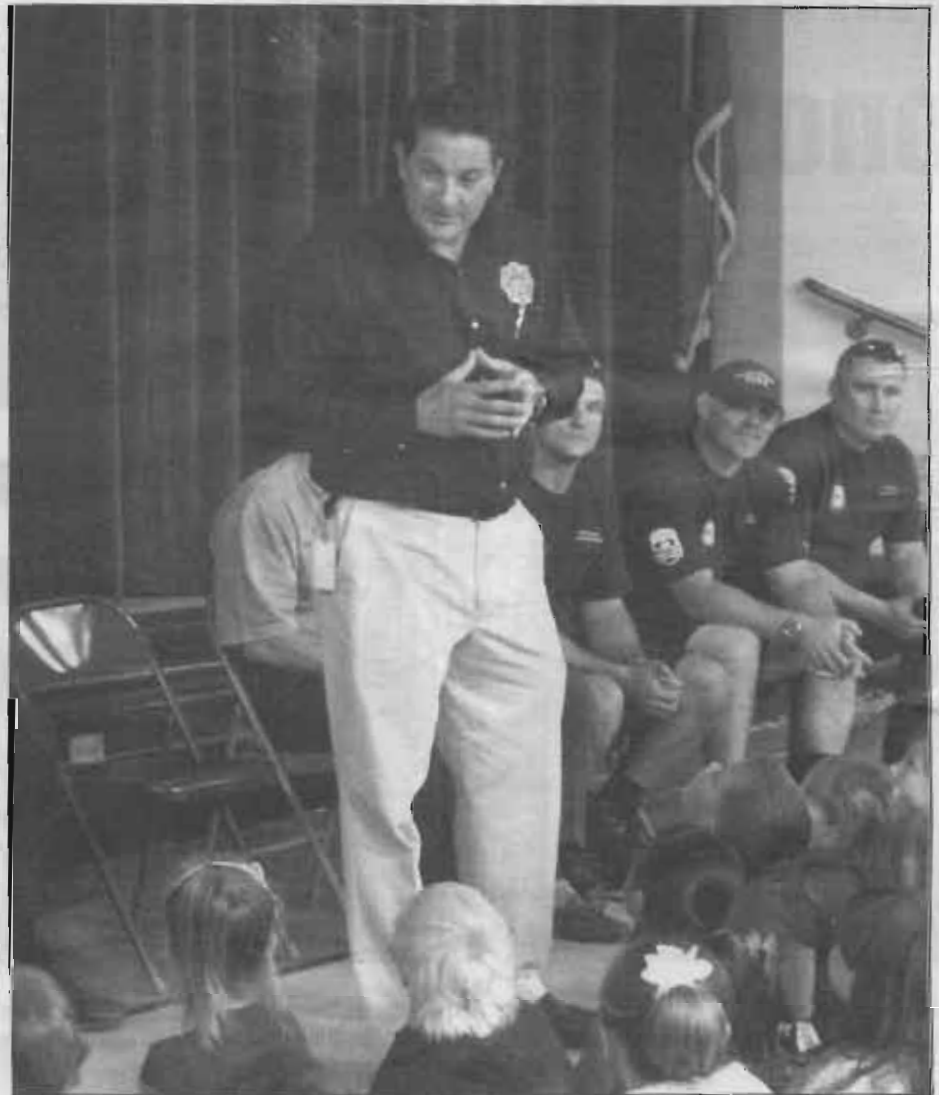
Growing up in New York, Chief Bourgeois said a career as a firefighter never occurred to him, but when he found the EMT/Fire Service program at MCC, that quickly changed.

"Something struck me and I knew right then this was what I wanted to do," Chief Bourgeois said of the program.

Chief Bourgeois promptly enrolled in the EMT program and began taking fire science courses. A year and a half later, Mesa Fire Department picked him up.

"I got lucky and I knew it. I was only 21 when they hired me and I'm forever grateful to then Fire Chief Don Johnson who rolled the dice on a young punk kid from New York," he said. "I feel as though I'm still paying back on that debt of gratitude. I'm still trying to make him proud of his decision."

"(Chief Bourgeois) is a kind and compassionate person and is always striving to bring out the best in his employees," said Dave Montgomery, deputy fire chief at AJFD. "While I did not work with him when he was a firefighter, I would have to believe that he was just as passionate and successful in that role as he is as the fire chief of the Apache Junction Fire District."



Special to the Independent/AJUSD
AJFD Fire Chief Paul Bourgeois (standing) speaks to students at Four Peaks Elementary School.