



RICHARD GREEN/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

King City volunteer fire Chief Danny Conatser checks out equipment at the fire station.

Blood thicker than fire in King City

Community has been served by multiple generations

By **VICTOR CALDERON**
The Salinas Californian

To hear some of its firefighters tell the history, the King City Fire Department has become a family tradition for fathers and sons who have served in the all-volunteer department.

At least four families have sent multiple generations to work at the station on Bassett Street opposite City Hall and the police station.

"That's good, because it builds community," said assistant Fire Chief Russ Nichols, a

second-generation firefighter who has served about 20 years with the department.

Nichols' father, Fred Nichols, served 20 years in the department, and Russ Nichols' son, Lucas, 21, joined in early February.

Matt Owens is another a third-generation firefighter, whose father and grandfather worked at the fire station before him. Also on the father-son list are Floyd and Terry Hughes — the latter is now King City's mayor — and Willie and Hinigho Salcido.

"In a small town like ours, it's not uncommon to have families who help out in the fire department," said Fire Chief Danny Conatser.

The Fire Department, which has 29 volunteers and an annual budget of about \$110,000, is making do with limited resources in the financially

KING CITY FIRE DEPARTMENT

n **CHIEF:** Danny Conatser

n **STAFFING:** 29 volunteers

n **LOCATION:** 422 Bassett St., King City.

n **HISTORY:** Established in 1908 on Bassett Street. Current firehouse opened in 1976.

struggling city. Last November, King City voters rejected Measure K, which would have raised the utility-use tax rate and provided more funding for fire and police.

The fire department has been working with reduced patrols, but officials said they hope to lease a new fire engine later this year.

"It's unfortunate Measure K didn't pass, and we certainly were hoping for it," Conatser

said. "We'll try it again in the future."

Russ Nichols said despite its tightened budget, the department is clear on its purpose.

"We're here to protect the residents of King City," he said.

The fire district covers about 3 square miles within the city's limits. The department's last "big call" was an electrical fire in early December at King City High School that demolished a portable classroom.

Both Conatser and Nichols said every firefighter enjoys what he does and that they enjoy being community-oriented.

"All the guys have a high level of dedication to residents in King City," Conatser said. "We are like a tight-knit family, as you can see."

Contact Victor Calderon at vcalderon@thecalifornian.com.