

hallway of Big Blue Café, which sits in the line of old buildings that make up the Arcata Plaza's east side. A crew knocked that fire out quickly and, while there was some damage to Big Blue and smoke damage to adjacent businesses, kept it from spreading. Another few minutes in response time and it could have been a very different story, Cannon says, glancing out the department's west-facing window, which overlooks the alley behind that row of buildings.

"If this station wasn't staffed, we'd have a much better view of the plaza here," he says, gesturing toward the window.

McDonald, Mendosa and Cannon seem to know Measure R has an uphill climb. Times are tough economically out there for a lot of people and the measure needs two-thirds of the vote to pass. But they say they also know it's the district's best bet to maintain its level of service into the future. And that means a lot to them.

Firefighting can be a brutal job, McDonald says, noting that his firefighters start at \$14.76 an hour. The benefits are good but well earned, he says, adding that the job is hard on the body and mind. Firefighters get hurt and have higher cancer and premature death rates than the general population. They also see things nobody should see — in a small town those images sometimes include familiar faces. Instead of watching the Super Bowl with his family, Cannon spent Feb. 2 at two fire scenes. (He jokes that he got paid time and a half for the extra work, as two-and-a-half times nothing is nothing.)

But they also take tremendous pride in the job, knowing that in someone's moment of greatest need, they'll be there to answer the call. They also know that until you're the one making the call, it's hard to recognize the value in it, kind of like that insurance policy you bemoan until it's time to report a loss.

If Measure R fails, McDonald says it will be up to the board to decide the district's next steps but there's simply no way it can stay the course without additional funding, so he would expect some major decisions to be made at the board's March meeting.

Ultimately, McDonald says he just wants district voters to make an informed choice March 3, to know what their vote means and why.

"It's one of the purest forms of local government," he says. "The voters have direct control of the level of service they will receive." ●

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IF MEASURE R PASSES:

7 PERSONNEL ON-DUTY
24/7/365 +
3 STATIONS Retained



ALL 3 BATTALION CHIEFS Retained



9 CAPTAINS Retained



9 FIREFIGHTERS Retained



IF MEASURE R DOES NOT PASS:

Reduction to
4 PERSONNEL ON-DUTY
24/7/365 +
2 STATIONS



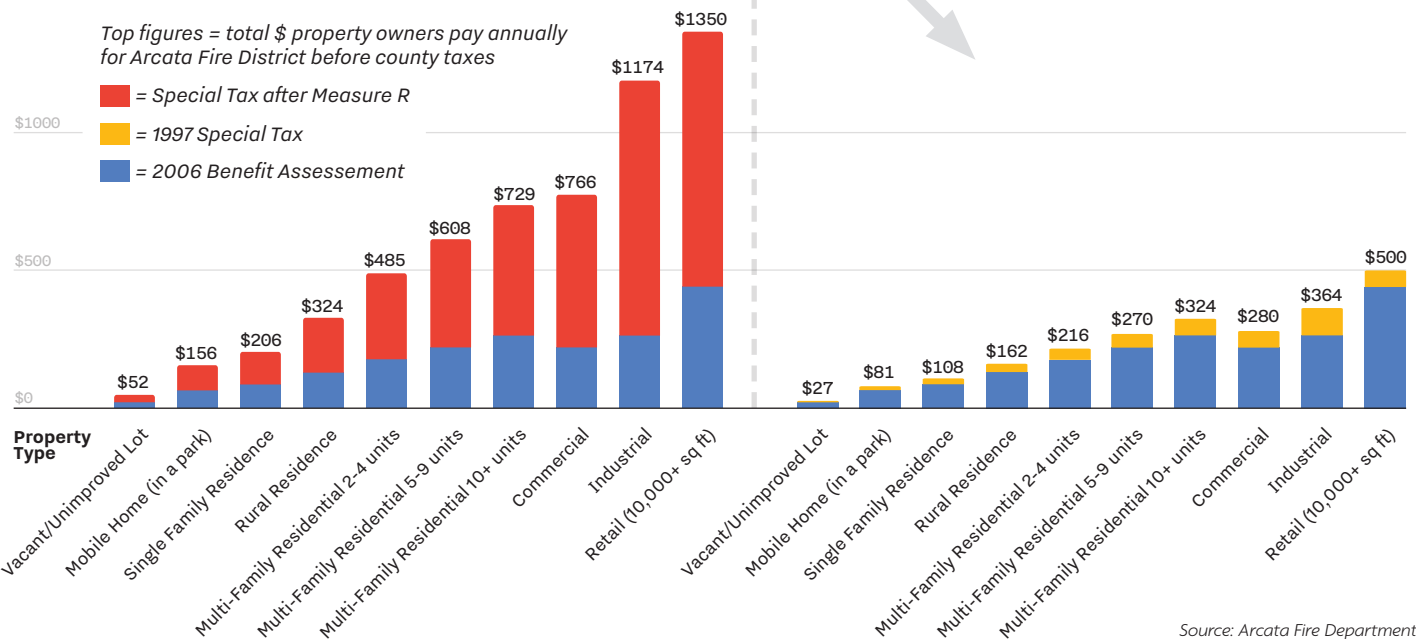
ALL 3 BATTALION CHIEFS Demoted



6 CAPTAINS Demoted



6 FIREFIGHTERS Laid Off



Source: Arcata Fire Department
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