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Tanker a 'great tool' — shiny, too

By TODD GOTTULA , Hub Staff Writer

KEARNEY — Talk about a guy with a passion for fire trucks.

Assistant Fire Chief Steve Johnson has a hard time sitting still when asked about the Kearney Volunteer Fire Department's newest truck.

"It's an awesome piece of equipment," said Johnson, his inflection matching the reflection bouncing off the sparkling silver tank of the new 2005 Sterling Vacuum Tanker. "What more can you say? This truck is another great tool for our department."

The new tanker features a 3,500-gallon tank that makes it less likely firefighters will run out of water at the scene of rural fires, says Johnson. It also uses a vacuum system that improves the speed at which water can be collected and distributed.

"The company that built this told me the record time for filling the tank is 75 seconds. I'd like to see if we can beat that," Johnson said excitedly, pacing the length of the 31-foot long truck. "That's going to be a goal."

When a tanker runs out of water, it is refilled using the closest hydrant or irrigation well, said Johnson. It also can be filled with water from rivers, ponds and similar bodies of water.

"This truck will self-fill at 1,000 gallons a minute and empty at 1,000 gallons a minute," Johnson said. "One of our biggest challenges in rural areas where we don't have access to hydrants is keeping a supply of water at the scene. This truck will haul 3,500 gallons of water and helps us meet that challenge."

The new tanker replaces a 1968 Chevy model and is one of three tankers in a fleet of 21 trucks used by KVFD. The tanker mostly will be used to fight structure and grass fires in rural areas.

The \$204,000 truck arrived last Saturday from Southern Fire Equipment in Laurel, Miss. Firefighters used it at a fire near Gibbon Monday night. It will officially be put into service in the next 10 days after it is equipped with a radio system and given decals, Johnson said.

The truck was paid for with tax dollars from the Suburban Fire Protection District of Buffalo and Kearney Counties.

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Hub photo by Brad Norton Assistant Fire Chief Steve Johnson, right, said the Kearney Volunteer Fire Department's new vacuum tanker truck will make it less likely that firefighters will run out of water at rural fires.

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