

Hernando deputy fire chief named to succeed longtime Groveland fire chief



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New Groveland Fire Chief Kevin Carroll. (Courtesy photo)

With longtime Groveland Fire Chief Willie Morgan set to transition to a short-term role before he retires, the south Lake city soon will have a new person running the department for the first time in decades.

Hernando County fire services veteran Kevin Carroll, 49, has been tapped to take over for Morgan, who has been with the department for more than 44 years, the city said Tuesday. Morgan first led the city's volunteer force and then became the first full-time fire chief in 1999 when Groveland transitioned to a paid firefighting force.

Referring to Morgan's successor, Mayor Evelyn Wilson said, "I think he will be helping to move the city forward as we're growing."

Carroll, deputy fire chief for Hernando County Fire Rescue, is expected to start in Groveland in early February. A ceremony to transfer responsibilities will take

place a few weeks later, according to City Manager Mike Hein. “This will allow him a chance to acclimate,” Hein wrote in an email. “Since Willie will be with us for the foreseeable future, we have the benefit of a gradual transition and will continue to rely on Willie’s unique expertise and familiarity of the community.”

Once Carroll takes over, Morgan will shift to project manager for construction of the city’s new 33,000-square-foot, \$13 million Public Safety Complex on State Road 50 east of Tractor Supply.



Longtime Groveland Fire Chief Willie Morgan photographed Aug. 20, 2019, outside Fire Station 94 on Cherry Valley Trail. (Jerry Fallstrom / Orlando Sentinel)

Hein said Morgan is perfectly suited for the task, noting he has experience as a licensed contractor who built one of the city’s fire stations. “Also, I felt it necessary and appropriate to have a new Chief with a new vision on the future to develop the culture before they move into a new facility, coupled with the fact that we recently added 12 new firefighters,” he said.

The firefighters are funded through a \$1 million grant through the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s SAFER — Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response — grants program.

Carroll has more than 30 years of fire and rescue experience. He began his career as a firefighter paramedic in Pasco County before joining Hernando

County Fire Rescue, where he moved through the ranks. He has a bachelor's degree in fire administration from Columbia Southern University plus degrees in fire science and emergency medical services.

In a news release, Carroll, whose salary will be \$117,500 annually, lauded “this solid rock of foundation that Chief Morgan has built over so many years ...” Hein said Carroll has “the ideal blend of technical and administrative background with an authentic energy.”

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