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Fanning Springs' mayor and fire chief cancel Fifth Annual Easter Egg Hunt; *Easter Bunny and Smokey Bear may not be in that park this year*

By Jeff M. Hardison © March 15, 2017 at 7:47 p.m.

FANNING SPRINGS – Fanning Springs Mayor Howell “Trip” Lancaster III on Tuesday night (March 14) cancelled an annual event that was very well received in years past, where children would win bicycles, and have many other gifts bestowed upon them.

In years past, the children hunted for plastic Easter eggs; they met the Easter Bunny; and they even met Smokey Bear of the Florida Forest Service. Not this year, though, unless something as-yet unknown unfolds very quickly.

Mayor Lancaster said that after a conversation with Fanning Springs Interim Fire Chief Roy Bass, the two of them decided to cancel the Annual Easter Egg Hunt this year.

Mayor Lancaster said on Wednesday (March 15) during a telephone interview that he felt the interim fire chief is too busy to add this responsibility to his duties. Chief Bass is also a lieutenant with Dixie County Fire Services, whereas former and now retired Fanning Springs Fire Chief Ron McQueen focused only on Fanning Springs.

Last year, rainy weather caused the Fourth Annual Fanning Springs Fire Rescue Easter Egg Hunt to be moved to the Suwannee River Fairgrounds a week after the normal time -- which is the Saturday before Easter. However, that turned out very well overall. Former Deputy Chief Elania Spain led that effort last year, because Mayor Lancaster had removed Chief Ron McQueen from his post, due to the mayor's choice to interpret a law. A hearing officer later ruled the mayor was in error in his interpretation.

During the 2015 Fanning Springs Easter Egg Hunt, which traditionally has been sponsored by the Fanning Springs Fire Rescue Department, there were hundreds of children who hunted for Easter eggs.

That hunt in and around Fort Fanning was on March 28, 2015, thanks to the Fanning Springs Fire Rescue Department and several volunteer organizations, and sponsors.

The fire department has been the leader, however, in making this annual event happen as it went into its third consecutive year in 2015 – and actually led to it having an official annual title.

Back in 2015, now former Fanning Springs Fire Chief McQueen, former Deputy Chief Spain and former Lt. Ken Missel were the officers of the department who were at the top of the command structure.

Back then, now former Deputy Chief Spain said she was impressed in 2015 by Firefighter Brett Boyce who stayed all day and into the night on that Friday with her and now former Chief McQueen as the three of them prepped for the Saturday morning unfolding of the project that was assembled with the efficiency of a well-made Swiss watch.

Among the other Fanning Springs firefighters pitching in to assure success back in 2015 were Chris Anderson, Quinn Leshner, Mike MacKenzie, Roy Spain and Will May.

Back in 2015, there was another set of the many groups of significant volunteers that were “the ladies from Silver Oaks,” which is a subdivision in Fanning Springs. This group stuffed 5,000 Easter eggs with candy in 2015, former Deputy Chief Spain said back then.

Traditionally there are 350 or so children who show up for the event.

In 2015, the Easter Egg Hunt festivities were even better than the two previous years. In addition to the 5,000 plastic Easter eggs, there were eight bicycles given away.

There was even more from the 2015 and 2016 Easter Egg Hunts.

However in 2017, the mayor of Fanning Springs and the interim fire chief have cancelled the event.