A RESPONSE TO RECENT EDITORIALS

By: George Stephens, ACFRAB Chairman

2 April 2007

County of Albemarle
Board of Supervisors
401 McIntire Road
Charlottesville, VA 22902

To the Honorable Members of the Board of Supervisors,

Many times, the efforts of the Board of Supervisors, Fire Rescue Advisory Board, and staff are misrepresented, and even more often, their contributions to support our developing fire rescue system are completely overlooked. As Chairman of the Albemarle County Fire Rescue Advisory Board, I am taking the opportunity of this, an open letter to the Board of Supervisors, to highlight and summarize some of the many ways the Fire Rescue Advisory Board, Board of Supervisors, and staff continue to support our combination (volunteer and career) system – specifically as it applies to volunteer services and programs.

Recently, our volunteer organizations were editorially compared to the “poor cousins left out of their rich uncles’ Christmas parties.” We disagree with this comparison, and we consider the contributions to our volunteer system by the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors, Fire Rescue Advisory Board, and staff as extraordinary.

You will see that these contributions to our system are aligned with our core values of integrity, innovation, stewardship, and learning. We appreciate that the Board continues to support the fire rescue system in Albemarle County and that staff contributes daily to further develop the volunteer system. These contributions, specifically administrative and support functions, are recognized and valued because it allows our volunteer personnel to focus on our most important roles of training and emergency response.

1. Full funding of basic operational costs for all fire rescue stations;
2. Full funding of capital apparatus purchases, including the functional standardization of apparatus, for all stations equally, based on an established fleet size model;
3. Continued investment in capital infrastructure improvements, like the new stations at Hollymead, Pantops, East Ivy, and the new joint CARS/Seminole Trail station;
4. Active sponsorship and participation in the Regional Fire Rescue Study underway, as well as the Regional EMS Revenue Recovery Study;
5. Funding and support of a state-of-the-art 800MHz communications system and model emergency communications/management structure;
6. Procurement, accounts payable, and accounts receivable of many services including communications, apparatus, gear, equipment, and insurance;
7. Direction of important fire prevention and life safety initiatives such as child passenger safety programs, Knox Box security & access systems, plans review, and rural water supply;
8. Certification and continuing education training that parallels the adopted minimum training policy in a schedule conducive to the unique needs of volunteers;
9. Programs designed to enrich the knowledge and capabilities of our volunteers for both fire and EMS disciplines;

- CONTINUED ON PAGE 2
A RESPONSE TO RECENT EDITORIALS

- Continued from Front Page

10. Custom training programs developed for many stations that identify gaps in cognitive and psychomotor abilities; Since 1994, Albemarle County has increased the number of personnel in the volunteer ranks from 476 to 660. This 39 percent increase, while perhaps not enough to keep pace with the demand for service and training requirements, should be viewed as a success as it clearly defies the national trend. In 2006, staff worked to survey new volunteers to determine the effectiveness of our recruitment and marketing campaigns. 86 percent of respondents indicated that he/she joined a volunteer fire rescue organization because of the initiatives conducted by the volunteer stations and staff. There are always opportunities for improvement and additional efforts; however, we are proud to say that with the help of the Board and staff, we continue to make progress in the recruitment and retention of volunteers.

11. Career staffing coverage to volunteer fire companies and rescue squads (at their request) to ensure essential, basic emergency response needs are met; It should not be said that volunteers can't handle the job, for their abilities and successes are demonstrated in many places from coast-to-coast and border-to-border. Certainly, we see the vital role of volunteers in Albemarle County daily, but where demand outpaces the ability of volunteers to deliver services, local leaders are challenged to find creative ways to meet their community's needs. With the help of the Board and staff, we continue to make strides to meet community needs by finding ways to reinvigorate the volunteer staff of our system and improve their performance, and we have supplemented our volunteer corps with needed career staff.

12. Experienced career and volunteer mentors are provided for new volunteer personnel to ensure appropriate skills, abilities, and knowledge; We continue to embrace the philosophy that it takes the contribution of both volunteer and career personnel to make our system work, and we appreciate the support of the Board of Supervisors to help us realize our vision of becoming home of the model combination volunteer-career fire and emergency medical services system. Collectively, we are committed to providing the highest quality services to protect and preserve the lives, property, and environment of our community at the lowest possible price.

13. Assistance to volunteer stations with the development of incident pre-plans, mapping resources, and the maintenance of stations, equipment, and apparatus; Respectfully yours,

14. Comprehensive wellness and fitness programs to improve the quality of life for all of our personnel, including equipment, programs, and vaccinations; George A. Stephens,
Chairman
Albemarle County Fire Rescue Advisory Board

15. Hard work to promote cost-neutrality for volunteers by way of an impressive list of volunteer benefits including uniforms and personal protective equipment, on-duty meal reimbursement, personal property tax discount, free county vehicle decal, on-duty accident and life insurance, free parks and recreation passes, and free training/career development; We would like to hear from you. Please send comments and suggestions to the address above.

16. Implementation of community-specific recruitment and marketing plans to recruit quality volunteers and execution of plans to diversify the volunteer workforce outside traditional roles (support functions); and George A. Stephens, Chairman
Albemarle County Fire Rescue Advisory Board

17. Aggressive efforts to develop and adopt system-wide and regional policies and guidelines aimed at developing an efficient and effective fire and EMS system.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and the United States Fire Administration (USFA), the number of volunteer firefighters in the United States has declined 10 percent since 1983. Major factors contributing to the decline include increased time demands, more rigorous training standards, and the proliferation of two-income families whose members do not have time to volunteer. During the same period, the NFPA & USFA report that volunteer fire rescue systems have experienced a 60 percent increase in the volume of emergency calls.

PUBLISHER
Sirens is the official magazine of the Albemarle County, Virginia Department of Fire Rescue and is published monthly.

The magazine is available online at www.ACFireRescue.org, and hardcopies are printed by PrintSource of Charlottesville, Virginia.

DEPARTMENT LEADERSHIP
J. Dan Eggleston, Chief
John Oprandy, Deputy Chief
Jason C. Nauman, Captain
Robert B. Brown, Assistant Chief/Operations
M. Scott Lambert, Battalion Chief/Training
James Barber, Assistant Chief/Prevention*
George Stephens, Chair/Advisory Board
Doug Smythers, Vice-Chair/Advisory Board

DI SC L A I M E R
The opinions of authors expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of the County of Albemarle and/or the Department of Fire Rescue.

HOW TO CONTACT US
Albemarle County Department of Fire Rescue
Attention: Sirens Editor
460 Stagecoach Road, Suite F
Charlottesville, Virginia 22902-6489
Voice: 434.296.5633
FAX: 434.972.4123
E-Mail: jnauman@albemarle.org
Website: www.ACFireRescue.org

SUBMISSIONS
Articles, feature stories, cartoons, photographs, classifieds (buy or sell), upcoming training, station news, and station events and functions are welcome at any time.

We would like to hear from you. Please send comments and suggestions to the address above.

REPRINTS/PERMISSIONS
No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means, including photocopying or electronic means, or utilized by any information storage and retrieval system without written permission from the Department of Fire Rescue. Please direct requests for reprints and/or permissions to the attention of the Editor.

© 2007 by Albemarle County Department of Fire Rescue, Charlottesville, VA. All Rights Reserved.
Local officials are updating the status of a consultant study that began in September, 2006, to provide an objective assessment of possible opportunities for the county and city to work together offering consolidated fire and rescue services.

The purpose of the study was to consider the potential advantages that exist to both localities through the consolidation of any or all services. The agencies studied include the Albemarle County Department of Fire Rescue (ACFRD) and its volunteer components, the Charlottesville Fire Department (CFD), and the volunteer Charlottesville Albemarle Rescue Squad. The consultant, Matrix Consulting Group out of Herndon, Virginia, was selected by a joint city/county committee appointed to guide the process.

The consultant has produced a draft report based on interviews with a broad range of city and county personnel, meetings with the project steering committee, detailed operation and service information from each operating agency, and automated data provided by the regional Emergency Communications Center. While the report is still in draft form and is undergoing final review for accuracy by the appointed Steering Committee prior to being released to the public, the study reached the following general conclusions:

- A consolidation of the departments would result in additional costs rather than cost savings because of increased wage and benefit costs and an inability to reduce personnel needs through the consolidation of stations and functions
- Consolidation of the departments would offer minimal opportunities to reduce staff levels
- While consolidation isn’t recommended, the study recommends that service providers should continue to work together to coordinate services and share resources
- The report recommends establishing a multi-agency steering committee to oversee the review and implementation of the report’s recommendations as a preliminary implementation step
- The fire station location analysis supports the construction of ACFRD fire stations in the Ivy and Pantops areas of the County and the relocation of the CFD fire stations #10 to Route 29 and Fontaine Avenue.

The analysis of the ambulance transportation system identified the need for a minimum of three 24-hour ambulances and one 12-hour peak ambulance in Charlottesville and the urban development areas of the County surrounding the City. A mix of ACFRD, CARS, and CFD personnel would staff these ambulances to guarantee coverage.

The steering committee will be completing their review next week and will forward any suggested corrections to the consultant. The report should be released to the jurisdictions and public in the next few weeks.

The Albemarle County Board of Supervisors recognized officials from the Emergency Communications Center (ECC) for their recent accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) at a ceremony held on Wednesday, 4 April at 0900 Hours at the County Office Building on McIntire Road.

The accreditation was awarded following a 24-month process during which the ECC was ranked in six areas including organization, direction and authority, human resources, recruitment, training and operations. During the assessment the agency had to meet or exceed 216 national standards in these areas.

The ECC is only the fourth public safety communications agency in Virginia, and among only 50 in the United States to be accredited by CALEA.

"We are very pleased to receive this accreditation which is an objective assessment ranking us among the best of the best in public safety communication operations," said ECC Director Tom Hanson.

The Department congratulates the leadership and staff of the Emergency Communications Center for their successful accreditation!

ACFR has become an accredited/authorized provider of Continuing Education for the American Council on Exercise (ACE). This will allow our ACE-certified fitness trainers to complete continuing education and recertification without correspondence courses or travel.

Peer Fitness Trainers are required to complete 2.0 continuing education credits (20 contact hours) every two (2) years in order to be eligible for recertification.

The Con-Ed workshop schedule is available online at www.ACFireRescue.org.
Approximately 61.2 million people volunteered through or for an organization at least once between September 2005 and September 2006, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor reports.

The proportion of the population who volunteered was 26.7 percent. This is 2.1 percentage points lower than the volunteer rate in each of the prior 3 years and slightly lower than in 2002, the first year for which comparable data are available.

These data on volunteering were collected through a supplement to the September 2006 Current Population Survey (CPS). The supplement was sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service. Volunteers are defined as persons who did unpaid work (except for expenses) through or for an organization. The CPS is a monthly survey of about 60,000 households that obtains information on employment and unemployment among the nation’s civilian non-institutional population age 16 and over.

**Demographic Groups**

Over the year ending September 2006, both the number of volunteers and the volunteer rate were lower than in the previous year ending September 2005. About 30.1 percent of women and 23.0 percent of men did volunteer work in the year ended in September 2006, down from 32.4 and 25.0 percent, respectively, during the prior year. As in previous years, women volunteered at a higher rate than men across all age groups, educational levels, and other major characteristics.

Persons age 35 to 54 continued to be the most likely to volunteer (31.2 percent), while persons in their early twenties were the least likely (17.8 percent). While all age groups showed declines in volunteer rates from the prior year, the largest decline was among teenagers. The volunteer rate for females age 16 to 19 fell from 33.5 to 28.8 percent, and the volunteer rate for males of that age fell from 27.4 to 24.1 percent.

Whites continued to volunteer at a higher rate (28.3 percent) than blacks (19.2 percent) and Asians (18.5 percent). Among Hispanics or Latinos, 13.9 percent volunteered.

Married persons volunteered at a higher rate (32.2 percent) than those who had never married (20.3 percent) and those with other marital statuses (21.3 percent). Parents with children under age 18 were substantially more likely to volunteer than were persons without children of that age, 34.4 percent compared with 23.6 percent.

Individuals with higher levels of educational attainment volunteered at higher rates than did those with less education. More than 4 in 10 college graduates volunteered, compared with about 2 in 10 high school graduates and less than 1 in 10 of those with less than a high school diploma.

Among employed persons, 28.7 percent had volunteered during the year ended in September 2006. By comparison, 23.8 percent of unemployed persons and 23.1 percent of those not in the labor force volunteered.

Among the employed, part-time workers were more likely than full-time workers to have participated in volunteer activities—35.5 versus 27.3 percent.

**Total Annual Hours Spent Volunteering**

Volunteers spent a median of 52 hours on volunteer activities during the period from September 2005 to September 2006. Men reported spending about 52 hours volunteering and women reported about 50 hours.

**Number and Type of Organizations**

Most volunteers were involved with either one or two organizations—68.5 and 19.8 percent, respectively. Individuals with higher educational attainment were more likely to volunteer for multiple organizations than were those with less education. Parents also were somewhat more likely to volunteer for more than one organization than were persons without children under 18.

In 2006, the main organization—the organization for which the volunteer worked the most hours during the year—was most frequently religious (35.0 percent of all volunteers), followed by educational/youth service related (26.4 percent). Another 12.7 percent of volunteers performed activities mainly for social or community service organizations.

Older volunteers were more likely to volunteer mainly for religious organizations than were their younger counterparts. For example, 44.7 percent of volunteers age 65 and over did their service mainly through or for a religious organization, compared with 30.1 percent of volunteers age 16 to 24 years.

Among volunteers with children under 18 years old, 46.1 percent of mothers and 36.5 percent of fathers volunteered mainly for an educational/youth service related organization, such as a school or sports team. Volunteers without children under 18 were considerably more likely than parents to volunteer for other types of organizations, such as hospitals or other health organizations and social or community service organizations.

**How Volunteers Became Involved**

About 43 percent of volunteers became involved with their main organization after being asked to volunteer, most often by someone in the organization. A slightly smaller proportion, about 2 in 5 volunteers, became involved on their own initiative; that is, they approached the organization.

For more information, visit www.pointsoflight.org