



Cherokee County

*Career/Volunteer
Steering Committee*

Report/Recommendations

August 2005

Career/Volunteer Firefighter Steering Committee
of
The Cherokee County Fire Department

The Career/Volunteer Steering Committee presents this document in fulfillment of the request of the Cherokee County Fire Chief and the County Manager. The Committee would like to emphasize that this document includes *feedback and recommendations* relevant to pertinent issues that it believes most deeply concern both career and volunteer firefighters. If these recommendations are considered and implemented, in phases, several of the issues that divide volunteer and career firefighters will be addressed, making it feasible to address other concerns that also currently exist between the volunteers and career personnel.

Career/Volunteer Steering Committee

Members:

J.H. Payne, Jeff Whidby, Mark Orr, Danny West, Bill Smith, Shane West, Karen Mahurin, Commissioner/Post 3, and Jackie McMorris, Ed.D, Facilitator

Introduction

The career/volunteer steering committee was established at the request of the Cherokee County Fire Chief. The primary impetus for this committee was the need to address the gap that has over time driven a wedge between the career and the volunteer firefighters.

The initial charge of the committee was simply stated as “get these guys to ‘like’ each other and to get along”. A more formal charge given was to define the roles and responsibilities of career and volunteer members of the Cherokee County Fire Department. Simply stated—but there is nothing simple about it or the process in which to accomplish this goal.

The career/volunteer steering committee consists of both volunteers and career fighters, chosen by the Fire Chief. The issues, which have led to this serious disconnect between these two very valuable fire organizations, are complex and dynamic and have become an institutionally systemic problem--which affects the effectiveness and efficiency of both organizations. If indeed the most important goal of the Cherokee County Fire Department is to save lives and property, then it is only prudent that such a committee examines the significance of the major issues that have contributed to the ‘them and us’ mentality between our career and volunteer firefighters.

After the first couple of meetings, this committee recognized that it had a much larger charge than merely getting these firefighters to get along. The committee discussed the issues that have led to the problems and knew immediately that there are key *core issues* deeply embedded in the very fiber of these organizations that must be addressed—and if addressed appropriately and in depth—we can begin to lay a foundation and mechanism that begins to bring the career and volunteer firefighters together as a cohesive unit.

Over a period of three months, committee members met to work on this task and visited with both career and volunteer firefighters in the field to discuss the charge and its challenges. The recommendations of this committee include feedback and valuable input gathered from both career and volunteer firefighters. Consequently, these recommendations have not been made hastily or in a vacuum and will require strategic implementation over time with full support of the Cherokee County Fire Chief and his staff, the Volunteer Firefighter’s Association and the Cherokee County Board of Commissioners. It is this committee’s goal and hope that the Cherokee County Fire Department works diligently toward becoming a true combination fire department, and in so doing, these recommendations support such a vision.

Specifically, the key issues that affect, and likely divide, both the career and volunteer firefighters include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Who's in charge at a volunteer station (daily operations)?
2. Who's in charge on an emergency scene?
3. Qualifications of both career and volunteer firefighters
4. Identification and recognition of qualified firefighters
5. Infrastructure: property ownership & maintenance
6. Equipment: ownership and maintenance
7. Standards/Expectations
8. Safety
9. Training of volunteer and career firefighters
10. Rank (issues surrounding volunteer/career firefighters in stations & on a scene)
11. Volunteer Benefits Program
12. Conflict in appearance

The Career/Volunteer Steering Committee organized, codified, and categorized these issues into four (4) strategic areas and one (1) significant safety indicator, including:

- **Management**
 - **Financial Considerations for Volunteer Firefighters**
- **Staffing**
- **Training**
- **Communication**
- **Appropriate Identification and Recognition of Firefighters**

The career/volunteer steering committee examined each of the issues at length and in great detail and makes the following as *recommendations* to the County Manager, Fire Chief, Volunteer Fire Chief's Association, and the Board of Commissioners as consideration of inclusion in the five-year strategic plan. Each area and safety indicator above is outlined in depth to provide a greater understanding of the problems, inclusive of the issues, timeline of implementation, current budget and proposed budget (based on financials provided at time of presentation). This committee certainly realizes that there is no 'quick-fix' to the numerous issues that exist between the career and volunteer fire fighter organizations and recognizes that implementation of these recommendations requires a commitment to *change* of the existing culture, daily operations, and overall mind-set from management (executive team/board of directors) to the firefighters in the field affiliated with both entities. In other words, leadership and organizational change are key factors in the success or failure of the CCFD. It is our recommendation that this document be reviewed on a semiannual basis by the Career/Volunteer Steering Committee.

Special thanks to the members of the committee for their dedication and genuine commitment to making Cherokee County Fire Department and the Volunteer Fire Departments better organizations in which to be or become affiliated.

