



HSV Fire Chief Gives Presentation at Board Retreat

Description

Hot Springs Village Fire Department Chief Offers Insight at the Board Retreat

Jason Miller, Hot Springs Village Fire Chief, gave a presentation to the HSVPOA Board on May 12, 2021. Miller has been a POA employee for close to 26 years with 23 years in the fire department. Miller said the responsibility of the Fire Department is to protect the lives and properties inside the Village.

The fire department answers 600 to 700 calls and around 27 structure fires a year. Due to COVID, the fire department put a stop to medical calls in 2020. Their main goal right now is to fight fire.

Firefighter Staff

HSV employs 21 paid firefighters who work three 24 hour shifts. They work a day on, a day off, day on, day off and another day on. Then they are off for 96 hours.

Cortez, Balboa, Coronado, and Desoto Stations are manned around the clock. The stations are manned by one person (except Cortez). The job of this person is to get the pumper to the fire.

The two biggest obstacles the department face are budgeting, and limited staff. Sometimes the firefighters need to be called in and this results in more overtime pay. Training also is paid in overtime.



Hot Springs Village Firefighters Hard at Work

Equipment

HSV has four pumpers, a ladder truck, and a rescue truck. Miller said they also have a UTV [utilitarian work vehicle], which is used to rescue people on the trails.

Revenue/Expenses

Miller said, "we thought this year we would have a new EMS [Emergency Medical Services] contract but reading the fine print, it will be next year." There are three EMS ALS [Advanced Life Support] units in the Village which are located at Cortez, Calella, and Balboa Stations.

Revenue – EMS pays the POA \$13,200 to rent our facilities.

Expenses – 1.9 million dollars – Most of this is spent on payroll. Eight hundred and fifty overtime hours are built into the firefighters' pay per year. The average overtime pay for each firefighter in a two-week pay period is 56 overtime hours. Because we are not a municipality we pay overtime after 40 hours.

This year (2021) the fire department doesn't have any capital expenses but wants to replace two engines in the next two years. The engines Miller wants to replace are 22 and 23 years old. Front-line pumpers cannot be more than 20 years old. Miller said, "we are a little out of date. With the revenue and financing, we have pushed them off each year..."

Villagers are billed on their utility bill for EMS service. This goes to the EMS contract. The POA pays the EMS \$755,000 for stationing themselves in the Village. (If you should need an ambulance, this does not cover the cost and you and/or your insurance company will be billed for services.)

Paul said interest has been shown from other EMS companies and there may exist the possibility of saying money in the future with a different company.

Safety Officer

Miller is the Safety Officer for HSV. He investigates on-the-job injuries and safety in the buildings (electrical cords, etc.). HSVPOA employees who are safety conscious and go above and beyond may be awarded a Subway card.

Retention of Firefighters

Miller said they lost two firefighters to another department. One left because he didn't want to be at the station by himself. Another firefighter left to go to Hot Springs. We are down one firefighter.

The average pay, which includes overtime, is \$36,000 a year. Most of the firefighters also have an additional job(s). One firefighter has two businesses. Firefighter pay is less than what the HSV police officers make. Starting pay is \$12.25 per hour.

Firefighter Retirement Plan

The retirement plan is through the state of Arkansas. The POA helps pay for this, in addition to the firefighter contributions to the plan. Eligibility for retirement is after 28 years of service or 20 years if you are over 55 years old. To retire at 100% pay, you must work 32 years.

Volunteers

The number of volunteer firefighters is down. Miller said, "the generation that we have in Hot Springs Village might not make a good firefighter. So your younger generation, they are not volunteering." There is lack of volunteering in hospitals, the Boys and Girls Club, Board Members, etc.

In the past, on average, the fire department had 35 volunteers. Presently, there are only 13 volunteers.

Smoke Alarm Program

The fire department has a smoke alarm program. If your smoke alarm is over ten years old, the fire department will come to your home, inspect your alarms and replace them at no cost. This is for battery systems. If your smoke alarms are wired, it is recommended you purchase your own. The fire department will help with the installation of new wired smoke alarms.

By Cheryl Dowden, May 13, 2021

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