

Highlands County Fire Rescue

HCFR – On the line or threading the needle...

Leaning forward, always ready

ISSUE 1 – November 2018

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WELCOME, HISTORY, & INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 1st edition of the Highlands County Fire Rescue Newsletter. In this public forum, the monthly HCFR newsletter will strive to keep our growing fire and rescue family up to date, and our Highlands County Florida community engaged.

The HCFR was established by resolution as acted upon by the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners on October 2, 2018. The new seal, emblazoned with the Latin phrase “Semper Paratus” is shown above. Semper Paratus, also the Coast Guard motto, is translated as “Always Ready”. Prior to the HCFR establishment, Highlands County Fire Services coordinated the activities of ten independent Volunteer Fire Companies, providing service to Highlands County since approximately 1967. Prior to 1967, all firefighting services were provided by the Florida State Forestry Division.

Emergency Medical Services have been provided by Highlands County paid Paramedics and Emergency Medical Technicians since 1976, originally through the Sheriff’s Office. Prior to that, EMS transport service was provided by the local funeral homes.

Over the remainder of fiscal year, incremental steps will be taken to combine fire and EMS response and organizational elements which will maximize efficiencies, streamline processes, and ultimately improve our service delivery capacity to the community.

WELCOMING NEW EMPLOYEES

There has been a lot of employee activity with our fire and EMS family. Please join us in welcoming two of our newest employees, both of whom Chief Bashoor visited with recently. Debbie Braden joins us from the EMS industry.

Pictured here with newly appointed EMS Manager Dustin Fitch, Debbie started work October 29th in the EMS billing office.



Larry Money recently joined the HCFR, in a temporary firefighter role. Larry, a Sebring resident, retired earlier this year from the Hialeah, Florida Fire Department after 20+ years of service. Larry hopes to continue in a full-time capacity with the growing HCFR family.



We expect to hire our first 24-hour firefighters around January 1, 2019, to include firefighters, Lieutenants, Battalion Chiefs, and a Deputy Fire Chief. The first 24-hour firefighting crew will be assigned to the Sun N Lakes of Lake Placid fire station on Sun N Lakes Boulevard. Our existing day-time firefighters will have the first opportunity for these new 24/7 positions.

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WORK GROUPS ESTABLISHED

Four voluntary workgroups were established to begin the organizational building process. Thirty-two volunteers and paid employees volunteered to serve on: 'Apparatus & Facilities', 'Wear-test & Innovation', 'SOP's & SOG's', and 'Safety & Training'. Each WG was provided 30, 60, and 90-day benchmarks, with the 60-day mark quickly approaching. The work these groups produce will provide the basis for much of the initial organizational process.

CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS INITIATED

First steps have been taken on five construction projects. Initial meetings have been held with staff, station Chiefs, and selected architects. The 5 projects include: replacement of the Highlands Lakes station 1; buildout of headquarters in existing County space on Kenilworth Boulevard; additions at Highlands Park station 33 and Venus station 45; and renovations at Desoto City station 18. Construction of a replacement for Lake Placid station 36/37/38 and a new station in the Spring Lake/Airport area are also projects in the discussion phase. The ambitious construction schedule will be overseen by Chief Bashoor and County staff.

FIRE DISTRICTS & FIRE ASSESSMENT

October 1, 2018 marked the start of the single county-wide fire assessment district. New funds will be used by Highlands County to continue funding volunteers and fire station needs, hire new employees, fix and build facilities, and improve the apparatus and equipment fleet.

FIRE TRUCKS & AMBULANCES

A previously ordered transport unit and WSVFD engine will arrive soon. Apparatus, including 4 new pieces, will be detailed in our next issue.

EMS IN THE NEW HCFR

Emergency Medical Services has begun a phased integration into the new HCFR. It is important to understand the difference between non-ad-valorum fire assessment and General Fund dollars. HCFR administration must ensure funding streams are properly accounted and services are not compromised. This administrative exercise WILL require patience from those who wish to see a quicker transition.

Existing EMT's & Paramedics will NOT be required to take fire certification courses. Current EMS employees who have documented fire certifications, will be provided the opportunity to cross-staff fire & EMS units as the system integration unfolds. Tremendous administrative work and training needs to occur to ensure there is a smooth transition – this is a work in progress, not a single-switch process.

NEXT STEPS

New 24/7 fire employees begin soon. We have heard angst amongst folks concerned with the integration of paid, volunteer, & EMS staff. We have demonstrated on several recent major incidents that these elements CAN work together effectively – it is also important to recognize, HCFR is not the first organization to combine paid, volunteer, and EMS together.

NOTE FROM CHIEF BASHOOR: MISSION, VISION, & VALUES

Our MISSION is simple: SERVICE. Our VISION & VALUES are captured in "THE PROMISE"; Trust, Honor, Ethics: Professionalism, Responsiveness, Outreaching, Mentorship, Inspirational, Safe, and Energetically enthusiastic in everything we do. Keep safe and stay smart!