

## Acting City Manager's Report May 14, 2012

As the City Manager is utilizing some much deserved leave time he suggested that I take this opportunity to provide a short report on the status of the Homer Volunteer Fire Department. This year marks the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Department which was founded in 1952 (incorporated at a non-profit in 1954), predating the establishment of the City of Homer by some 12 years. The Department has a long and proud history of providing fire protection and ambulance services to the citizens of Homer and the surrounding areas. Our members, including the 5 paid staff and some 46 volunteers provide a wide range of services to the community beyond simply extinguishing fires and taking those in need to the hospital for treatment. We provide hundreds of hours each year presenting fire and injury prevention programs to various groups; we oversee the Open Burn Permitting program within the City of Homer; we take blood pressures for folks that drop by the station when requested by their care providers; we function as the City's Emergency Management Agency and house the City's Emergency Operations Center and coordinate the development and revisions of the Emergency Operating Plans (EOP) and All Hazard Disaster Mitigation Plans; we provide CPR and other training to city employees so that they can take care of folks until the ambulance arrives (we were the first city in Alaska to have Automated External Defibrillators in police cars); and we act as ambassadors of good will for the folks that drop by the fire station to trade fire department patches or ask questions about almost anything, all on top of training and responding to every manner of emergency.

In 2011 the Homer Volunteer Fire Department responded to 513 requests for assistance including: 438 ambulance calls; 15 structure fires; 11 wildland fires; 8 vehicle fires; 4 rescue calls and 37 "public assist" calls for some accumulated 2,210 hours of actual service by our members. In addition we conducted a myriad number of training classes for our members totaling over 3,439 "man" hours. We don't even attempt to track the countless hours our members are simply available for call both on their assigned week-long shifts or not (all large fire and EMS calls are what we term as "all call" meaning that any and all available members should respond).

Like many departments within the City we are providing the best services we can while staying within budget and strive to make every dollar we get from the taxpayers go as far as it can but our facility and fleet are aging. While our first out fire engine and ambulance are relatively new and top of the line we have two fire apparatus that are well past recommended time to either retire and replace or refurbish (a 1984 Engine/Pumper and a 1989 Tanker/Pumper). We also have a 1990 F-350 that functions as our only wildland/brush truck that is seriously overloaded and needing to be replaced. Our station (constructed by the volunteer corporation in 1980 and upgraded in 1997 by the City) is also in need of expanding or replacing (was on the City CIP list for many, many years until removed due to lack of potential funding). The fire department vehicles are all currently on the CIP list for funding and we are seeking state grant funding to possibly replace our oldest ambulance next year. The Department has been very fortunate over the last ten years or so in securing federal and state legislative funding. We replaced one ambulance and our 35 Self Contained Breathing Apparatus

(SCBA) through legislative funding and our large breathing air compressor and live-burn training systems through the Assistance to Firefighters Grants.

As busy as we are for a small, mostly volunteer Fire Department we would like to be able to expand our services to include a Fire Marshal's Office/Building Official to be able to conduct local commercial building plan approval and routine fire inspections of commercial occupancies. Currently, as a non-deferred jurisdiction, those responsibilities fall to the State Fire Marshal's Office in Anchorage. With only a handful of plan reviewers and inspectors for all of south central Alaska they don't have the time or ability to inspect every commercial building within this large area. We are the only municipality on the Kenai Peninsula that is not deferred (meaning we cannot conduct our own plan reviews and inspections). While this would require an additional employee trained to conduct plan reviews and inspections we feel that much of that cost could be re-captured in the collection of plan review fees currently being charged by the State Fire Marshal's Office.