

Volunteer membership of the Uniontown Fire Department

The city of Uniontown is fortunate to have a combination paid/volunteer fire service. We, the paid personnel of the Uniontown Bureau of Fire, acknowledge the fact that we alone could not provide as high a level of service to our public without the help of our dedicated volunteer members. They give us additional manpower, which is critical for the successful outcome of fighting a fire. Our Volunteers are well trained and certified personnel, and we appreciate their help very much!

However... for our fire protection system to work, we would not be able to provide most of the services we provide without our current number of paid personnel as well. In fact, we actually could use more!

Our department can guarantee 3 engines and an aerial ladder truck at the scene of a fire in 3 minutes or less, anywhere in the city. Furthermore, our department offers inspection and code enforcement services per the PA Uniform Construction Code and the International Code Council, an advanced life support fire engine that is staffed by a Paramedic and certified by the PA Department of Health, public fire education programs, fire and disaster planning services, and a Juvenile Fire Setter Intervention program just to name a few! None of these would be possible if our paid staff was eliminated or didn't exist!

It is a proven fact, also, that we are doing more with less! In the 1960's and 70's, the fire department had as many as 18 paid personnel on staff and had so many volunteer members, there was a waiting list to get into the companies. It would not be uncommon to turn out nearly 100 men for a fire. Furthermore, the department had less emergency incidents than it does today and did not offer some of the services that it does now. The number of calls for service has probably doubled today compared to those years!

Today, we have 13 full time personnel on our roster. And as far as volunteer membership, it is declining at an alarming rate! The number of new members being taken in are far and few between. There have been years where no new members have joined at all. Furthermore, the existing membership is getting older and less able to be active. Also, there is just too much competing for a volunteer's time. These men and women must work for a living, spend time with family, and many belong to other civic and community organizations. Plus there is a need for their rest and recreation time. No one could expect them to drop what they are doing at a moment's notice time and again, or to be available 24/7, all for nothing!

Declining volunteer membership is a trend everywhere in our state. With the number of volunteer firefighters declining in the state of Pennsylvania, from over 300,000 less than 30 years ago to just around 70,000 today, Uniontown has not been exempt to this trend!

Once again, we acknowledge the fact our department wouldn't make it without the dedicated members we do have. But, those numbers are declining so fast! Which is even more of a reason to keep the paid staff of the fire department! Just look at the figures:

Of roughly 104 members on the volunteer fire companies' rosters in Uniontown:

- Only 21 can be classified as fairly active to very active.
- Only 12 more can be classified as semi active (answering from 1 to 20 alarms per year).
- Four of the active members are auxiliary members who do not engage in active fire suppression.
- Of the 12 semi active members, 3 no longer engage in interior fire suppression work.
- The average age of an active to fairly active member in Uniontown is 40 ½ yrs old.
- The average age of a semi active member in Uniontown is 46 ½ yrs old.
- Most of the semi active members are life members with well over 20 years service.
- 2/3rd of the fairly active to very active members range between 15 to 33 years service.
- A little more than 1/3 of the fairly to very active members are also life members with over 20 yrs service.
- The companies only take in 1 to 2 new members every 2 to 3 years, on an average.
- The existing membership is getting older and near the end of an average volunteer firefighter's years of active service!