CHAPTER NINE
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Township of Lower Merion, LMFD and fire company officials all advised the Study Team that a key component of this Fire Services Study was the preservation and strengthening of the volunteer nature of fire and rescue service delivery. This was a stated goal in the Township's request for proposal and was stated numerous times by officials, stakeholders and service providers during the Study interview and survey process.

For that reason, the Study Team has included this chapter about volunteerism generally, nationally, in Pennsylvania, and in the Township specifically. Recruitment of volunteers, retention of volunteers, current efforts in recruitment and retention, length of service awards program and other related topics are included, with the goal of assisting in maintaining and enhancing volunteer involvement in future fire and rescue services provision in the Township of Lower Merion.

Additionally, associated options and recommendations are outlined for consideration by the volunteer fire companies and the Township.

This Chapter addresses aspects of the following provisions of the scope of service areas for this Study:

1. Preservation of the volunteer component of the fire service to the greatest and longest extent practical; and,

2. Recommendations for retaining and recruiting volunteer members.

OVERVIEW OF VOLUNTEERISM IN FIRE SERVICES

There are a variety of reasons why individuals become involved in volunteer fire and rescue services. An understanding of the multiple reasons helps to better define volunteer service constraints and benefits.
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

OVERVIEW OF VOLUNTEERISM (continued)

Nationally, some volunteer fire departments seem to have a continual supply of individuals who want to volunteer their services. Others, however, have problems trying to recruit enough volunteers to maintain minimal staffing of units and subsequently may have difficulty retaining those members and developing qualified volunteer leaders. The key seems to be meeting the needs or expectations of the volunteers, which are different in many respects from paid personnel.

When an individual becomes a career firefighter, his/her initial concerns may be material needs, such as salaries, benefits and financial security, in addition to their desire to serve the public. The issue of why people volunteer their services has been raised to the Study Team. Therefore, a review of accepted principles of motivation may be helpful. As Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* states, individuals are motivated by five levels of needs. These are in order of highest to lowest:

1. Physiological needs, such as food, water and shelter;
2. Safety needs, such as security, order and stability;
3. A sense of belonging, involving friendship, identification and love;
4. Esteem involving prestige, success and self-respect; and,
5. Self actualization needs which involve psychological needs from within.

Maslow said that people must meet their first need before being able to proceed to meeting the second need. The first need is usually met through regular employment and, in some cases, through a second job. In order to meet this first need, sometimes both spouses must work.

As employment and salary also provide for the safety and security needs, individuals move to the third level, which involves the need for a sense of belonging. One way to satisfy this need is by volunteering to provide some level of community services. It is from this pool of people that volunteers are available for firefighting services.
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

ISSUES FACING THE VOLUNTEER FIRE SERVICE

There are many volunteer fire companies across the United States that play a vibrant and important role in their community; yet, it has been recognized nationally that the United States volunteer fire service is currently in serious difficulty. Although many function at a very high level, many other fire companies struggle for their very existence.

Particularly in rural areas, volunteer fire organizations are closing their doors for two primary reasons:

1. Lack of financial resources; and,
2. Lack of volunteers to staff the fire apparatus.

Unfortunately, this problem is not only found in rural America. Many volunteer fire companies in populated areas are also in a state of crisis and face a struggle to provide adequate fire and rescue services. To retain/regain a vibrant, capable volunteer fire service throughout the country, these complex problems must be confronted directly.

FIRE RESCUE VOLUNTEERISM IN PENNSYLVANIA

Fire service leaders across the United States and many municipal officials have come to understand that the volunteer fire service is potentially in trouble. Likewise, in recent years, many knowledgeable people have determined that the volunteer fire service in Pennsylvania is at a crossroads.

According to local officials in recent years, there has been a significant reduction in recruitment and retention of individuals serving as volunteer fire and rescue service providers in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. As a result of this trend and the apparent problems, the Commonwealth’s Legislative Budget and Finance Committee developed and issued a report entitled The Feasibility of Regionalizing Pennsylvania’s Volunteer Fire Companies, commonly referred to as the House Resolution 148 report.
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

FIRE RESCUE VOLUNTEERISM IN PENNSYLVANIA (continued)

In the opinion of the Study Team, who have assessed and developed plans for more than 120 volunteer fire service agencies in the last 18 years, the House Resolution 148 report is well written. It addresses many findings and recommendations related to the problems resulting from the reduction in the availability of community members serving as volunteer fire service providers in Pennsylvania.

As stated in this report:

“For many years, volunteer fire companies functioned independently and were relatively stable both operationally and financially. This has changed dramatically over the past 20 years as fire companies and other emergency service providers face mounting challenges and service demands.”

The report continues by stating that “significant changes have occurred throughout the state in the past two decades that have altered the organization of volunteer fire services...,” including:

- Large losses of volunteer members
- Challenges in recruiting new volunteers
- Difficulties in retaining existing volunteers
- Changing demographics
- Changing work habits
- Changing work locations
- Changing personal living habits

These and other issues have reportedly had a negative impact on the volunteer fire services in the Commonwealth.

According to this very comprehensive report, the results may have been:
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

FIRE RESCUE VOLUNTEERISM IN PENNSYLVANIA (continued)

- Delayed responses
- Failure to respond to calls
- Insufficient staffing on apparatus for emergency calls
- Greatly reduced ability to function as a business
- Loss of revenue
- Loss of personnel
- Inability to maintain apparatus
- Inability to maintain fire stations and facilities;
- Increased liabilities for volunteers and local governments

The primary findings, relating to the problems and challenges facing volunteer fire service in the Commonwealth, outlined in the report include:

1. "Pennsylvania is experiencing significant losses in the number of citizens who are willing to volunteer to provide fire and rescue services."

2. Rising operating costs and fundraising demands are placing serious strains on the state's volunteer fire companies.

3. The history of the relationship between volunteer fire companies and local governments has been marked by independence rather than interdependence.

4. Pennsylvania has more fire companies than any other state and, in some cases, multiple companies in close proximity results in an unnecessary and inefficient overlap and duplication of firefighting resources."

The House Resolution 148 report presents a number of key recommendations, including comprehensive legislative changes, aimed at attempting to reverse the decline of the volunteer fire services in the Commonwealth. The major overriding finding relates to mutual
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

FIRE RESCUE VOLUNTEERISM IN PENNSYLVANIA (continued)

cooporation and/or regionalization being the primary means of addressing the Pennsylvania
fire services problems and challenges.

VOLUNTEERS IN THE TOWNSHIP FIRE COMPANIES

The Township has been provided fire and rescue services by volunteer members of the
following seven fire companies:

1. Belmont Hills Fire Company
2. Bryn Mawr Fire Company
3. Gladwyne Fire Company
4. Merion Fire Company of Ardmore
5. Narberth Fire Company
6. Penn Wynne/Overbrook Hills Fire Company
7. Union Fire Association of Lower Merion

Each of these fire companies was incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth of
Pennsylvania, operates under Township Code and policies and a set of fire company bylaws
and other rules and guidelines and elects and/or appoints a set of administrative and
operational officers pursuant to their bylaws. Each of the volunteer fire companies receives
a substantial amount of funds from the Township, and, operationally, within the framework
of the LMFD, are under the command of their respective volunteer chief.

Since 1908, fire companies have formed the key fire and rescue services delivery component
of the Lower Merion Fire Department.

Reportedly, for many years the volunteer fire companies located in Lower Merion have
provided the fire and rescue services to the Township with mostly an all volunteer
membership, clearly a very respectable and impressively long history. For a number of years,
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

VOLUNTEERS IN THE TOWNSHIP FIRE COMPANIES (continued)

a limited number of paid firefighter staff have assisted the fire companies in handling many of the mundane day-to-day functions relating to the maintenance and upkeep of the facilities and apparatus. Further, the paid staff have responded on fire company apparatus to serve in a team effort with the volunteers in fire and rescue service provision.

Input from Firefighters and Officers

During the interview/survey process, the Study Team elicited comments from officials, firefighters, and officers in the fire companies and the LMFD on the subject of the volunteer recruitment and retention. These individuals were asked their opinion on the major problem areas and ways to improve the volunteer recruitment and retention aspects of the Lower Merion fire and rescue services. Some of the responses quoted are as follows:

1. Provide affordable housing for volunteer firefighters—we train them and then lose them because they cannot afford to reside in the area;
2. Pay for or subsidize attendance/travel to seminars and trade shows;
3. Provide a pension system for the volunteer firefighters;
4. Provide college tuition incentives;
5. Provide tax rebates for volunteer firefighters that own their own residence in the Township;
6. Remove the “us versus them” mentality level and work together;
7. Need affordable housing in the area;
8. Utilize sign-on duty crews / standby crews, volunteers must be in the fire station to expedite response time;
9. Provide volunteer pension plan;
10. Provide some educational assistance, both fire and non-fire related;
11. Housing plans or program’s so the younger members can buy homes in the areas;
12. Provide wallet badges;
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

VOLUNTEERS IN THE TOWNSHIP FIRE COMPANIES (continued)

13. Make them more aware of the volunteer services in the Township;
14. Provide items, hats, insignia, etc. which makes it easy to spot members;
15. Provide watch or ring for certain mileposts: 10, 20 years, etc.;
16. Special commendations for special acts or special effort: a medal, badge, uniform, sticker for helmet, notice posted on fire station bulletin board and/or notification/publication in newspapers;
17. Provide each member his/her dress uniform;
18. Subsidize mortgages, develop a plan to lower the interest rate of active firemen by one or two points so they could afford to buy a home in Lower Merion;
19. Let the community know we are here;
20. Provide a no-fee or low interest credit card with fire service ID;
21. Provide access to Philadelphia police/fire credit union;
22. Main issue for me and other younger members is that Lower Merion is priced out of my range (for housing);
23. I spent two years bidding on homes and always being outbid;
24. Township could support program for younger members to find economical housing;
25. Pension plans for volunteers having served many years would be helpful;
26. How about builders helping that want zoning changes, etc.;
27. How about offering foreclosures and sheriff sale homes to volunteers;
28. There should be student housing or low-rent Township-owned housing for active volunteers;
29. Create/provide laminated photo ID;
30. Provide a retirement annuity based on superior attendance at fires and drills;
31. Increase PR about the fire service, make more people/residents aware we are a volunteer service;
32. Recruit more young people: high school & college;
33. Arrange with schools and colleges for students to earn community service credits or some other kinds of credits;
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

VOLUNTEERS IN THE TOWNSHIP FIRE COMPANIES (continued)

34. Get the Township to waive trash and cable fees;
35. Provide apartments over engine rooms on a rental basis to volunteers;
36. A housing allowance or voucher for volunteers could help current firefighters, but, would also help with further recruitment and retention;
37. Incorporate more Township events, like the firefighter challenge to increase familiarity among all fire companies;
38. Actively and formally recruit at colleges and schools, printed material, handouts and prepared speeches;
39. Increase the social aspects of firehouse use;
40. Provide each active member with a personal digital pager;
41. As a volunteer, I do not feel appreciated by the community or fire company;
42. Living in Lower Merion is expensive—student housing and mortgage assistance would allow volunteers to live closer, reducing response times and providing more prompt services.

These are only a few of the many substantive comments and input provided by the Lower Merion fire company volunteer officers and firefighters. These are representative of the thoughts and ideas provided that relate to the subject of improving volunteer recruitment and retention in Lower Merion. This input was considered by the Study Team in the development of the conclusions and recommendations in this Chapter.

It is the Study Team’s goal to provide suggestions, as part of this Fire Services Study, that could provide the opportunity for more substantial fire and rescue service delivery by volunteer members.
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

RECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

Each volunteer for the fire and rescue services serves as an ambassador who can encourage individuals to apply for membership. While incentives, as listed in this section, are very important, personal recruitment by the current members is vital to the continued success of the volunteer program.

A number of the ways new volunteers are recruited in many towns and cities with volunteer fire departments include:

1. Development and distribution of brochure material;
2. Word of mouth;
3. Family tradition;
4. Interest after having been a customer of the fire service;
5. Area-wide poster placement in businesses, etc.;
6. Door-to-door neighborhood recruitment;
7. CPR classes open to the public;
8. Televised public service announcements;
9. Radio public service announcements; and,
10. Speakers sent to community group meetings and high schools.

Current Recruitment Efforts

The Study Team was advised that a number of volunteer recruitment tools have been used in an effort to attempt to attract new volunteers for the fire companies. Reportedly, the volunteer fire companies in the Township have recruited new volunteers in a number of the following ways:

1. Word of mouth;
2. Recruiting family members;
3. Township-wide brochure distributed throughout the community;
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

RECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS (continued)

4. Notices and information in Township newsletters;
5. Signs posted in the community;
6. Notices in newspapers and/or community papers; and,
7. Public gathering and school public education opportunities.

Student Live-in Programs

A firefighter recruitment tool that has been used very effectively by a number of volunteer fire and rescue companies that are in reasonably close proximity to colleges and universities is the implementation of a student live-in program. The Lower Merion fire companies are in close proximity to a number of Philadelphia area institutions of higher education, including colleges, universities and technical schools.

A student live-in program essentially provides students interested in serving as volunteer fire and rescue personnel that opportunity. While attending their chosen educational institution during normal daytime class hours, these individuals provide night and weekend staffing for the company. The host fire company provides program organization, oversight, and bunk room and related facilities at the fire station. Typically, prospective students entering such a program at a fire company would enter the program with at least basic firefighter rescuer training. Subsequent to becoming part of the program, participating students would normally be expected to take additional training courses, as determined appropriate, and would be expected to participate in ongoing in-station drills and other required activities.

To be effective, student live-in programs need to be well organized and well managed through comprehensive rules and guidelines, as well as have direct oversight provided by the officers of the fire company. If left unmanaged, student live-in programs can present significant disciplinary and other more serious problems that must be dealt with by fire company leaders.
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

RECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS (continued)

As an example, one of the most successful student live-in programs observed by the Study Team has been that of the College Park (MD) Volunteer Fire Department located near the campus of the University of Maryland, College Park Campus. That student live-in program has been very productive through the years in providing the volunteer fire department with trained volunteer staffing, while at the same time providing the participating students with housing, as well as on-the-job training and experience in fire and rescue work. Many of these participating students have gone on to very successful careers in their chosen areas, especially fire and rescue public service. This and other well-known student live-in programs could serve as models for the possible establishment of one or more student live-in programs at Lower Merion volunteer fire stations.

The Study Team noted that a number of fire stations do not include any volunteer bunk room space and none of the fire companies in the Township includes adequate bunk room facilities in their fire station for the use of volunteer staffing. Prior to considering the initiation of a student live-in program, adequate facilities would need to be available at the fire station. This facilities need is addressed in detail in the Fire and Rescue Stations Chapter of this report. Bunk room-related recommendations are included in the Fire and Rescue Stations Chapter of this Report.

High School Cadet Program

High school cadet programs have been utilized by many fire departments across the United States to recruit and train high school students in fire and rescue work. Basically, the local school board would establish, within one or more of their high schools, a special curriculum that would be fire and rescue-based. High school cadet program curricula are normally based on state and national fire and rescue training and certification programs, also taught by local fire academies to the staff of the local fire departments.
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

RECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS (continued)

In essence, the school board would adopt the existing fire and rescue training curricula as the educational programs to be utilized in the high school cadet program. These programs are normally implemented in a partnership approach between the local school board, the local fire training program staff and participating area fire departments.

The high school student interested in this program would register with the local high school and be guided to a participating fire department for periodic hands-on participation in fire and rescue activities appropriate to the age and training level of the student participant. High school graduates who have completed the high school cadet program often continue to work as a paid firefighter in the fire department in which they participated as a cadet.

There are a number of successful high school cadet programs currently functioning in Pennsylvania and Maryland that could be used as models for the development and implementation of such a program in Lower Merion.

RETENTION OF VOLUNTEERS

Clearly, the management of public safety personnel resources is a critical task, since human resources generally determine the quality of services delivered to the public.

Volunteers may not be available to respond to fire and rescue calls for a variety of reasons. These include days off and away from the area, vacation, sickness, injury, other commitments, and time away for training.

A critical time period for efforts to retain volunteers is the first four years of membership. It has been said that if a new member completes the first four years, he/she will probably remain for many years. Programs aimed to retain volunteers during their first four years of membership should be identified as a priority.
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

RETENTION OF VOLUNTEERS (continued)

Based upon interviews with volunteer personnel participating in this Study, it seems there has been a reduction in some volunteer memberships. As the area has developed as a bedroom community for Philadelphia, recruiting and retaining volunteer personnel may have become more difficult.

When conducting the data collection component of this Study, a number of approaches were taken by the Study Team to determine the total number of volunteers in each of the Lower Merion fire companies. That effort was met with limited success since not all fire companies seemed forthcoming in providing that data. For example, not all fire companies provided the completed Fire Company Survey Form that included a section requesting detailed information on volunteer membership. Survey forms returned to the Study Team by two fire companies did not have the membership section completed.

Fortunately, the LMFD utilizes Firehouse software which includes volunteer member incident response information relating to personnel responding on each incident. This data provides a snapshot of the personnel who are reported to have responded on incidents during the time period of January 1, 2007 through July 11, 2007. The following lists the number of personnel from each fire company who are reported to have responded on 10 or more incidents during this period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fire Company</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belmont Hills Fire Company</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryn Mawr Fire Company</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladwyne Fire Company</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merion Fire Company of Ardmore</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narberth Fire Company</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penn Wynne/Overbrook Hills Fire Company</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Fire Association of Lower Merion</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>269</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Carroll Buracker & Associates, Inc. 321
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

RETENTION OF VOLUNTEERS (continued)

It should be noted that these numbers include paid firefighter staff who respond on calls and may or may not be volunteer members at that fire company or another company in Lower Merion. Moreover, this fire company data may include volunteer members who are members of two or more Lower Merion fire companies. Finally, this call response data may include members who are recorded as having responded on one or more incidents when, in fact, they may not be an active operational member.

Therefore, the actual number of volunteer members of the fire companies who respond on calls is substantially less than 269. The Staffing and Personnel Chapter of this report contains recommendations relating to capturing accurate personnel (volunteer and paid) response data. The implementation of those recommendations will assure that the volunteer member activity data available to monitor response levels is accurate and complete.

The overall philosophy of the leadership of the fire companies is consistent with a very important volunteer retention approach. Pride in the organization and treating the volunteer personnel well seem to be important to the leadership.

Typically, when people are asked their rationale for remaining volunteers, they give a number of reasons, including:

- "Pride in the organization"
- "Once you get a taste of it, you want to continue"
- "Continuing need to help the public"
- "Keep up the friendships"
- "The family atmosphere"
- "The great personal satisfaction received"
- "Physical activity"
- "Continuing involvement is an enjoyable activity for those who are career or volunteer firefighters in other jurisdictions"
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

RETENTION OF VOLUNTEERS (continued)

On the other hand, there are many reasons reported as to why volunteers quit volunteer fire companies/departments. According to one nationally published report the following are the leading reasons why volunteer members stop volunteering in fire and rescue organizations:

- Internal conflicts
- Excessive time demands
- Feeling a lack of support from the organization
- Perceived unfairness of disciplinary actions
- Perceived unfairness or inconsistencies in management

The efforts to retain volunteer personnel seem to vary by fire and rescue organization. There is no official comprehensive program focused on the retention of volunteer fire and rescue members. The retention programs for volunteer fire and rescue personnel should be broad-based and Township-wide because the various fire companies may be competing against each other for a very limited and valuable human resource.

Although the Township leadership may appreciate the services of its volunteer fire and rescue personnel, there are few incentives to retain volunteers. Substantial funds are not currently earmarked on a Township-wide basis to help in the recruitment or retention process.

There are many very successful volunteer fire and rescue services throughout the United States. The basis for their success varies significantly. However, the Study Team has noted that the more successful systems expend a considerable effort to retain their volunteer personnel, including significant efforts to recognize their volunteers and their efforts.

Organizations with successful volunteer programs commit much time and effort to providing training and experience to volunteer personnel. Retaining trained and experienced personnel is more cost-effective than having to constantly train new volunteers or hire additional paid staff. Of course, trained and experienced personnel also provide better service.
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

RETENTION OF VOLUNTEERS (continued)

Although a number of incentives in other communities may not apply to the Lower Merion area, the various benefits reflect a community’s commitment to recruiting and maintaining volunteers. Several of the programs that have been successful in helping to retain volunteers in other municipalities include:

1. Comprehensive awards program;
2. Social events, such as banquets and dinners;
3. Education tuition assistance programs;
4. Workers compensation coverage;
5. Length of service awards programs;
6. Free training and experience for career preparation in fire, rescue and other related areas;
7. Free passes or tickets to community activities;
8. Physical fitness facilities and equipment;
9. Insurance coverage, including medical, dental and life insurance;
10. Various compensation programs, such as out-of-pocket expenses for fuel, clothing, education and training materials, and meals; hourly pay rate ("paid on call" volunteers); and, compensation based on an activity-related point system;
11. Reduced sewer and water rates;
12. Property tax percentage reduction; and,
13. Uniforms, clothing with the department’s logo and individual tools, such as flashlights, and stethoscopes.

The website of one successful volunteer fire department located near the University of Maryland includes the following as its offerings to recruit and retain volunteer members:

- Dormitory style housing
- New bunk room addition—coming this year
- Tuition and food reimbursement
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

RETENTION OF VOLUNTEERS (continued)

- Modern computer facilities
- Quiet study areas
- Less than 20 minutes to the local university
- College credit courses
- Nationally recognized fire and rescue training
- Training equivalency
- Family atmosphere
- Resume builder

The recruitment and retention of volunteers are of prime importance to the continuation of the volunteer fire and rescue service in the Township. Therefore, it is important that the Township and each of the volunteer fire organizations work together to develop and implement programs that are intended to attain and maintain a high degree of volunteerism in the system.

Current Retention Efforts

Reportedly, the fire companies in the Township have initiated limited and relatively inconsistent efforts that impact the retention of volunteer members. These efforts have included the provision of free training and funds for training, some uniform items and dinners/picnics.

There is an LMFD Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Committee that has been meeting, developing programs and recommendations, and providing suggestions to the Township Board of Commissioners.

As a result of these efforts to provide volunteer members with benefits, the Board of Commissioner recently implemented a program to provide volunteer members meeting certain activity levels with parking permits for use in the Township. This seems to be a positive
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

RETENTION OF VOLUNTEERS (continued)

benefit for qualified volunteer members given the limited parking available in some areas of the Township.

Length of Service Awards Program

Many jurisdictions in the United States with either fully volunteer or combination paid and volunteer systems have established a length of service awards program (LOSAP) for the volunteer fire and rescue service personnel. This program has a proven track record of improving volunteer recruitment and retention. The program provides certain benefits to volunteers who have met minimum calendar year service requirements for a set number of years. In other words, it is a volunteer retirement type benefit program.

A number of programs established in other jurisdictions involve differing levels of program requirements. One type of LOSAP is to maintain a defined level of service activity per month.

Another example of a more comprehensive type of LOSAP is as follows:

Requirements

1. Reach age 60 and 20 years of certified service.
2. Reach age 55 and 20 years of certified service, with a reduced payment.
3. Obtain 50 points in a calendar year:
   1 point for each hour training course - maximum 20;
   1 point for each drill - maximum 25;
   1 point for each official meeting - maximum 15;
   1 point for each call - maximum 40;
   25 points for elected or appointed office - maximum 25;
   ¼ point for collateral duties - maximum 25; and/or,
   5 points per month for full-time military service - maximum 50.
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

RETENTION OF VOLUNTEERS (continued)

Benefits

1. $150 per month (age 60 and 20 years).
2. $100 per month (age 55 and 20 years).
3. For each year above 20 years, add $5 per month.
4. Maximum benefit is $200 per month.
5. If disabled as a result of incident, then eligible for benefits regardless of age or length of service.
6. In event of volunteer’s death while receiving benefits, spouse receives 50 percent of benefits until death or remarriage.
7. In event of volunteer’s death after 25 years of service but before reaching age 60, spouse receives 50 percent of benefits until death or remarriage.
8. Death in line of duty, burial benefits of $2,500.
9. If a volunteer reaches age 70 without achieving 25 years of service, retirement benefits can be received for years of service at the rate of $4 per year of certified service.

This type of LOSAP may be more difficult to administer. Length of service award programs should be customized to meet local needs and are typically implemented and funded by the municipality in an effort to maintain strong volunteer staff participation in the delivery of fire and rescue services.

COST OF HOUSING FOR LOWER MERION VOLUNTEERS

In the opinion of the Study Team, the extremely high cost of housing and the relative lack of reasonably priced housing in Lower Merion is the most critical issue facing the continuation of the volunteer nature of the fire and rescue service. Reportedly, the average market value of a house in Lower Merion is $600,000. The inability of the volunteers to live in proximity
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

COST OF HOUSING FOR LOWER MERION VOLUNTEERS (continued)

to the fire stations is a very serious problem and may have a number of serious detrimental impacts on fire and rescue service delivery:

1. Increased apparatus response times;
2. Increased failure of apparatus to respond;
3. Reduced apparatus staffing;
4. Reduced staffing available for service delivery at the emergency scene;
5. Reduced quality of service to the public awaiting assistance;
6. Reduced safety of firefighters at the incident;
7. Excessive demands on the available volunteer members;
8. Increased difficulty retaining volunteer members;
9. Increased requirement to high additional paid firefighters staffing; and,
10. Significant increase in the cost of fire and rescue service to the public.

The impact of the high cost of housing on volunteerism relates to increasing difficulty in both recruiting and retaining volunteers for the Lower Merion fire service.

In the experience of the Study Team, a number of potential solutions seem to have been identified and used by other municipalities who have had to find ways of retaining their active volunteer members in an area with high housing costs. These include the following, in no particular order of priority:

- Facilitating the availability of low interest loans
- Purchasing single/multi family housing units to be provided on a low rental basis to volunteers
- Reduced property taxes
- Reduced cost of water
- Reduced cost of sewer
- Providing vouchers for cost reimbursement
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

COST OF HOUSING FOR LOWER MERION VOLUNTEERS (continued)

- Constructing additions to fire stations to provide apartment units for low cost rental
- Providing tax rebates
- Providing mortgage subsidies
- Developing innovative housing solutions in a team effort with builders and developers
- Developing innovative financing solutions in a team effort with local bankers
- Developing alternative options with assistance of the Chamber of Commerce

The Study Team believes that if aggressive action is not taken by the Township to find solutions to assist in keeping volunteer firefighters and officers in Lower Merion housing, the volunteer component of the LMFD and the fire companies will continue to decline with a related impact on the level of service provided to the public. At the same time, the cost of service provision may increase substantially in a short period of time. The need to find solutions to providing housing for volunteer fire personnel is clearly the most important and pressing matter to be implemented as part of a Lower Merion volunteer recruitment and retention program.

PUBLIC AWARENESS

The Study Team interviewed volunteer leaders and members who expressed concern that the general public is not fully aware of the volunteer involvement in the fire rescue service. Many residents of the service area have moved from Philadelphia or other municipalities to the Study area and believe that they are being served by a fully paid fire department. Most citizens may know they have a local fire station, but some may believe it is fully staffed with paid firefighters and officers. The Study Team has noted that this lack of understanding increases when the community is a bedroom community, such as this Township.
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

PUBLIC AWARENESS (continued)

The Study Team considers the LMFD and the fire companies fortunate that the Township public information officer (PIO) reportedly commits a significant amount of effort to supporting the Township’s effort to “get the word out” regarding the volunteer nature of Lower Merion fire services delivery and the delivery of fire and rescue services delivery by the LMFD generally. This individual seems very dedicated and excited about this important effort.

With this PIO’s leadership and assistance to the LMFD and the Volunteer Recruitment Committee, a number of initiatives have been completed or are underway, including:

- Professionally produced multi-fold poster entitled: “Your Friend, Your Neighbor...Your Volunteer Firefighter. Ordinary People Ready to Do Extraordinary Deeds,” the most eye-catching public relations material seen by the Study Team
- Quarterly fire services-related press in various publications
- 2006 LMFD Annual Report
- Articles published in periodic monthly Township employees newsletter
- Comcast television spots, with a goal of one per month, with the Township chairperson of the Fire Committee as well as other officials
- Work with Main Line Chamber of Commerce involving scholarships for volunteers
- Businessmen’s Luncheon

These efforts illustrate the desire and effort of the Township and various components of the LMFD and fire companies to pursue volunteer recruitment and retention goals and programs. However, there appears to be a continuing need to further educate Township citizens and business people on the programs and composition of the fire service delivery agency.
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PLAN

The Emergency Services Board, LMFD and volunteer fire companies are encouraged to develop recommendations for a comprehensive volunteer recruitment and retention program for consideration by the Township Board of Commissioners. In developing such a program, the volunteers and the Township should consider the program ideas presented in this Chapter, as well as previous experiences of the Township fire companies. This consideration will help to ensure that the program recommendations are both comprehensive and focused on the needs related to improving volunteerism in the participating volunteer fire companies.

Any Township-wide volunteer recruitment and retention program recommendations should include a delineation of appropriate funding requirements. The Township is encouraged to approve the funding necessary to plan, develop, and implement a comprehensive Township-wide volunteer recruitment and retention program.

VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

A national trend in successful volunteer fire and rescue organizations is the appointment of a volunteer coordinator to serve as a focal point of an aggressive volunteer recruitment and retention program. Investment in such a full- or part-time position provides significant long-term benefits in the recruitment and retention of volunteer personnel.

A part-time volunteer coordinator position (possibly a lower level program management position for 20 hours per week) could be beneficial if dedicated to the development and implementation of Township volunteer fire and rescue personnel recruitment and retention programs.

SUMMARY

Currently, fire services are provided primarily by volunteer members, with a limited number of paid firefighters who respond to emergencies. The staffing approach involving volunteer
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

SUMMARY (continued)

members of the communities has provided a very effective service in the past. The viability of this volunteer staffing approach in the future will, to a large extent, be based on the level of effort placed on volunteer recruitment and retention by the fire companies and the Township.

Recruitment of volunteers for the fire and rescue services has been accomplished primarily by word of mouth. Additionally, the volunteer fire companies have been implementing a limited number of retention efforts, including dinners/picnics, uniform items and training.

Nationally, there are a number of very successful volunteer recruitment and retention programs in municipalities that continue to assist in providing the essential volunteer personnel needed for the provision of their fire and rescue service. This Chapter outlined a number of recruitment and retention options for consideration by the Township, LMFD and the fire companies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 The Emergency Services Board, LMFD and fire companies should assure that accurate and complete personnel (volunteer and paid) response data, by category of response, is captured, maintained and monitored for activity level and planning purposes.

9.2 The Township, LMFD and fire companies are encouraged to continue to periodically place articles in local newspapers regarding activities of the volunteer component of the fire and rescue service.

9.3 Elected and appointed officials are encouraged to financially support the volunteer recruitment and retention efforts through annual funding and the hiring of a part-time volunteer coordinator.
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

9.4 The officers of the fire companies are encouraged to:

   A. Develop a standard exit interview form to be completed by volunteer personnel who are leaving the program;
   B. Collate exit interview information, analyze any trends and work to establish a program to reduce attrition; and,
   C. Share exit interview data with the volunteer coordinator (should one be hired) for recruitment and retention program development.

9.5 A comprehensive volunteer recruitment and retention program should be developed. The program should be appropriately funded and include the following:

   A. Implement length of service awards programs or other pension programs, as approved;
   B. Initiate volunteer retention programs based on input received from the exit interview or forms;
   C. Develop a volunteer handbook which can be given to prospective members of the fire companies, explaining the benefits and requirements of becoming a volunteer;
   D. Focus volunteer programs toward retention of members during their first four years of membership; and,
   E. Focus volunteer programs toward the recruitment and retention of volunteer members to participate in the provision of fire and rescue services.

9.6 Consideration should be given to establishing official mentor programs for new operational volunteer members.

9.7 The Lower Merion fire companies, with the support of the Township, are encouraged to develop and implement a fire and rescue student live-in program.
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

9.8 The LMFD, and the fire companies, with the support of the Township, are encouraged to develop and implement a fire and rescue high school cadet program, in partnership with appropriate local public school officials.

9.9 The Township is encouraged to continue to annually recognize the service and heroic deeds of their public safety service providers through an annual business luncheon or awards dinner.

9.10 The Township should take aggressive action to find solutions to assist in keeping volunteer firefighters and officers in Lower Merion housing.
CHAPTER TEN: FIRE PREVENTION