

Public Safety Committee

Date: November 17, 2008
To: Public Safety Committee
Through: Christopher J. Brady, City Manager
From: Harry Beck, Fire Chief
Subject: Fire Department Connector Volunteer Program

Purpose and Recommendation

The purpose of this report is to update the Public Safety Committee on the Fire Department's Connector Program. No action is requested.

Background

The Connector Program was developed in 1998. The main goal was to implement a program to serve as a resource for the Mesa Fire Department and the residents of Mesa. The program began in Fire's Emergency Medical Support (EMS) Division with 20 volunteers and limited hours of operation. The volunteers were trained to perform social service follow-up calls on customers after the initial 9-1-1 call was complete. Volunteers were also to provide them with contact information for the appropriate social service organization that could assist them with their needs.

In 1999, the Fire and Life Safety Education Section of the Mesa Fire Department was created and the Connector Program was transitioned from EMS. One full-time employee was assigned to manage, market, recruit, train, and expand the scope of the Connector Program. Within a short time the number of volunteers increased, training became much more comprehensive, and the volunteer program began to take off.

During the last ten years the Connector Program has gone through many changes. Today, 111 volunteers work seven days a week with hours ranging from 7 AM to 10 PM (midnight on weekends). However, the most significant change has been the increase in services volunteers provide to residents and to the fire department. Non-emergency services currently provided by Connectors include:

- Social service referrals
- Elder care referrals
- Fire victim assistance and fire ground support
- Homeless-shelter needs
- Transports
- Financial referrals
- Motorist assistance

- Customer service calls
- Rehabilitation sector
- Apartment and mobile home site planning
- Helicopter landing zones
- Assistance at special events

In order to provide the above-mentioned services, Connector volunteers initially receive twenty-four hours of classroom training in the following areas: Standard Operating Procedures, Incident Command, Infection Control, Communication, Safety, HIPAA, Car Seat Safety, Motorist Assists, Mobile Computer Terminals (MCT's) training, 800 MHz Radio, AmeriCorps and Service Learning presentations, Customer Service, and Social Service training.

Connector volunteers also receive mandatory quarterly training covering a wide variety of topics. Information and quality continuing education are provided by the fire department to ensure volunteers can perform to the best of their ability and maintain a high quality of service to the community.

To date, the Mesa Fire Department Connector Program has recruited and trained over 600 volunteers and more than 25% of those volunteers have gone on to have a career in the fire service.

Since its inception, the Connector Program has been recognized locally and nationally for its achievements and innovation. Several fire departments from all over the country have modeled their volunteer program after Mesa's Connector Program. Below is a condensed list of some of the recognition the program has received over the years:

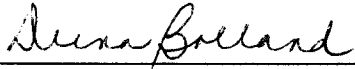
- In 2003, the Maricopa Community College Outstanding Community College Service Award
- In 2003, highlighted at the Emergency Medical Services Conference of the International Association of Firefighters
- In 2005, reviewed by the Office of Domestic Preparedness in Washington, D.C. and the State of Arizona's 411 system
- In 2005, one of five programs represented at the Community College National Center for Community Engagements National Forum
- In 2006, highlighted in the National Fire Corps video
- In 2007, presented at the Colorado Conference on Volunteerism and Service-Learning

The Connector Program Coordinator recognizes the importance of working with other agencies and departments around the state. The Coordinator serves on several local, county and state councils.

- City of Mesa Citizen Corps Council
- Arizona Central Region Citizen Corps Council
- State Fire Corps Council
- Mesa Community College Service Learning Advisory Board

Fiscal Impact

During the first year after inception, Connector Program volunteers provided assistance on 82 social service calls. Since January 2007, Connector volunteers have provided assistance on 5,643 calls and 37,570 hours of service to the fire department with a cost savings to the city of \$732,991.



Deena Bolland,
Fire and Life Safety Administrator



Harry Beck, Fire Chief