

Evaluating Winthrop Harbor FD's recruitment/retention problem

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Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this research paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that the appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

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### Abstract

The majority of firefighters in the U.S.A. are volunteers. A growing trend across the nation is that volunteer and part-time fire department members are leaving faster than they can be replaced. The problem is that the Winthrop Harbor Fire Department (WHFD) struggles to recruit and retain volunteer and part-time firefighters and EMT's. Simply put, WHFD and other similar agencies are hurting for personnel and emergency services to the community could be adversely affected. Using the descriptive research method, the purpose of this research project is to identify why WHFD has retained less than 50% of its recruits over the past 10 years, continues to have problems recruiting and retaining new part-time firefighters and EMTs, and what can be done to help with this problem. Questions directing research were: 1) what have the trends of WHFD employee retention shown over the past 10 years, and what does that reveal; 2) why are Winthrop Harbor and other part-time and volunteer agencies experiencing a shortage of qualified firefighter and EMT's; 3) what can be done to change the trend of part-time and volunteer agencies experiencing problems with recruiting and retention of firefighters and EMT's.

Through robust literature review and a survey with detailed follow up conversations with fire chiefs dealing with the same issues, data was obtained and results evaluated to determine how far this problem reaches, which it exists, and what can be done to reverse the problem. The majority of volunteers leave their departments for higher-paying career positions. Recommendations moving forward include hiring more personnel each year with the expectation not all will stay; increasing recruiting efforts through the community; expanding the Boy Scouts' fire explorer program; working with the Village to increase funding for the fire department; considering more joint responses with WHFD's neighboring agencies; and considering adding career positions.

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## Evaluating Winthrop Harbor FD's recruitment/retention problem

According to the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC), 70% of firefighters in the U.S.A. are volunteer (NVFC, 2019). Even though members of the Winthrop Harbor Fire Department (WHFD) are paid an on-call stipend and a modest hourly rate for the time they cover shifts at the fire station, it is still considered a volunteer fire department by the State of Illinois and employs no full-time or career personnel. The problem is that the WHFD struggles to recruit and retain volunteer and part-time firefighters and EMTs.

The purpose of this research project is to identify why WHFD has retained less than 50% of its recruits over the past 10 years, and continues to have problems recruiting and retaining new part-time firefighters and EMTs. Furthermore, the questions arises as to what can be done to help with this problem. WHFD is not alone in dealing with this problem; volunteer fire companies across the nation are struggling with recruiting members of their community to come staff their department. Also, many departments with all or mostly all paid staff supplement their rosters with volunteers and part-time members. These departments are also struggling to keep their rosters full as many members work for a short time, receive firefighting and EMS training, then move on to the next thing in their lives. Utilizing the descriptive research method, data and trends of WHFD and other similar fire agencies were evaluated to determine the extent of the problem, and why this continues to be a problem for smaller fire and EMS agencies around the country. Additionally, ways in which this problem can be dealt with were researched, and multiple recommendations were evaluated and suggested.

Research for this project was driven by the following questions: 1) what have the trends of WHFD employee retention shown over the past 10 years, and what does that reveal; 2) why is the WHFD and other part-time and volunteer agencies experiencing a shortage of qualified

firefighter and EMTs; and 3) what can be done to change the trend of part-time and volunteer agencies experiencing problems with recruiting and retention of firefighters and EMTs.

### Background and Significance

Located in Illinois on the western shore of Lake Michigan, the Village of Winthrop Harbor borders Wisconsin to the north – almost exactly midway between Chicago and Milwaukee. Winthrop Harbor is home to the largest marina on the Great Lakes and attracts nearly a million visitors per year (WinthropHarbor.com, 2019). With a population of approximately 7,000, Winthrop Harbor is largely a bedroom community, consisting of only small local shops and very light industry. Many residents leave the village for work in the morning and return later in the day, or are retired and stay home most days.

Winthrop Harbor is protected by the all part-time Winthrop Harbor Fire Department (volunteer as identified by the State of Illinois) and generally employs a roster of 40-50 dedicated firefighter/EMT-Basics and Paramedics; *generally* is a key word since this number changes almost monthly as members leave for a variety of reasons, some with little or no notice. WHFD utilizes a unique schedule where all members work a combination of daytime shift hours ranging from three to 15 hours and overnight duty nights to provide emergency coverage 24 hours-per-day, 365 days-per-year. WHFD members largely fall into one of three categories: some are career firefighters at other departments and work with WHFD as a part-time job, some are eager to work toward a career in the fire service and join our department looking to obtain the training and experience necessary to do so, and other members simply want to help the community by working shifts and responding on calls when they are free from their “other” careers. The members receive a modest hourly wage for the day hours worked, training sessions attended and calls responded to, and also receive a small stipend for sleeping in the station every

sixth night while earning their hourly rate for any calls occurring during that evening shift.

Examples of the company assignment breakdown are provided in Appendix A, and provide great insight to the unique way WHFD personnel are dispersed among coverage groups.

A major problem WHFD has faced in recent years is recruiting and retaining proper personnel to cover all shifts. WHFD has a current roster of 45 members, with many recently hired and are just starting their training programs. When this researcher took over the department in January of 2014, the roster was over 50. Furthermore, more than half of the current roster is made up of members who were hired within the past few years, as is made evident by the 2014 roster (Appendix A). Additionally, since 2005, WHFD has hired and trained 100 volunteers - only 26 of those remain with the department today! Generally speaking, less than half of those WHFD hires will actually stay with the department more than three years. While the way that WHFD operates with a variety of shifts to cover is unique, the problem of recruiting and retaining personnel is not unique. This issue extends nationwide as a simple Google search yields thousands of articles such as "Local fire protection districts cope with volunteer shortages" (Blanchette, 2019), or "Volunteer firefighter shortage raising concerns in Russell County" (Adams, 2017). Blanchette's article referenced that the Williamsville, IL, fire department typically employs a roster of around 30 volunteers – they currently have nine! In New York, programs to help with this problem have been established at the state level offering full college tuition reimbursement for students working with a volunteer fire department (Murphy, 2019).

There are many reasons why the current recruitment and retainment problem exists at WHFD and departments nationwide, which will be further detailed in subsequent sections of this research project. The National Volunteer Fire Council (2019) reports that volunteer fire

companies save localities and taxpayers \$46.9 billion per year; many areas simply cannot afford a paid fire department of career members. Ranking among the highest concerns, however, is the connection to this researcher's current EFOP course – Executive Analysis of Fire Service Operations in Emergency Management (EAFSOEM). A top reason for the course, according to the student manual of EAFSOEM, is that the third-year EFO student will “Prepare their communities for large-scale, multiagency, all-hazard incidents” (FEMA, 2016). One of the ways the chief of a department needs to prepare his or her community for these incidents is by actually having a properly trained and staffed department! To continue, one of the top strategic priorities as outlined by the United States Fire Administration is Goal 2: Promote Response, Local Planning and Preparedness for All Hazards (USFA, 2014). If we cannot maintain proper staffing across our fire/EMS agencies, we will not be able to meet this goal.

#### Literature Review

The problem WHFD and countless volunteer fire departments nationwide face with regard to recruiting and retaining personnel was immediately evident upon the commencement of research. Thousands of articles and commentaries by experts in the firefighting field are available by many means, including internet searches and searching trade journals at the National Emergency Training Center library in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Many articles are available showcasing the trends of participation in the volunteer fire service. The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) headline posted on their website does not need much explanation: “Volunteer fire departments in recruitment crisis” (USFA, 2018). It was not long ago volunteer fire companies had plenty of willing and able men and women showing up to serve; it is now much more dependent on fire departments and volunteer companies to invest time and resources to actively recruit members.



In Russell County, Alabama, Seale Volunteer Fire Chief Joseph Granger does not mince words when stating, "We have 11 volunteer fire departments in our county and every one of them is struggling for members" (Adams, 2017). Chief Granger points to the aging population of the rural area with minimal recent economic or housing growth as one of the main reasons they struggle to recruit members. He adds that it does not only mean public safety in his area is at risk, but that home insurance rates are projected to rise as insurance inspectors have been taking volunteer membership data into account when setting their ratings for Insurance Service Office (ISO) inspections and certifications.

The Blackhawk Fire Protection District covers Milan, a town in downstate Illinois. Their current roster of volunteer membership numbers 17; 20 years ago it was more than double that number (Hepner, 2018). Blackhawk's activity level is similar to WHFD's, averaging around 3 calls per day. Assistant Chief Todd Fitzpatrick acknowledges how their lower number of volunteers not only effects the availability of personnel to cover their calls, but the wear and tear on those few handling them stating, "It's working our normal guys that respond to the calls all the time, it's wearing down on them guys." He cannot point to the exact reason their numbers are down so much, but believes the heavy training requirements for firefighters and a minimum six to nine months for basic medical certification is a big part of the problem.

In McHenry County, Illinois – roughly 30 miles from Winthrop Harbor - the situation is similar. Harvard Fire Protection District Battalion Chief Don Davidson breaks it down in terms that are very similar to WHFD:

We are struggling to find young recruits, and it's a difficult situation because the volunteer position is not really what it once was. People don't have as much free time as they used to, and ambulance calls have increased over the years. (Linhart, 2017)

Spring Grove neighbors Harvard, and Chief Richard Tobiasz points to how the job of a firefighter and the training requirements have changed over the past 30 years, and appear to be a hindrance to recruiting interested candidates. It can take up to two years before a new hire can be ready to function as a certified firefighter and paramedic, and the additional requirements such as hazardous materials, building construction updates and the medical field constantly changing just add to the demand of a young person learning the job.

Further south in Illinois, similar problems with recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters are seen in the farming community of Taylorville. Journalist Brittany Hardaway (2018) reports another concerning issue a shortage of volunteers presents rural areas such as Taylorville: a delay in response time to fires. Taylorville Chief Mike Crews admits a fire can double or triple in size every minute, which is driven home further by Underwriters Laboratories (UL) as part of their "Close while you doze" program (UL offers, 2018). UL reports that changes to home products, construction methods, and furnishings over the past 40 years have reduced the time frame someone has to escape from 17 minutes to three minutes. The shortage of volunteers reaches further than not being able to fill typical rosters or covering false alarm calls; not being able to get to a fire within a few minutes could have deadly consequences.

Second in the country in terms of reliance on volunteer firefighters, 97% of Minnesota fire departments consist of all or mostly volunteer staff (Klecker, 2018). Lake Elmo Fire Chief Greg Malmquist notes that his department's roster looks like a *Revolving door*, even after adding paid and on-call positions a few years ago. Gone are the times where local firehouses were community hubs, filled with generations of firefighters. Issues similar to this across the state have lead agencies to consider strategic changes from paying staff to work assigned nights rather than simply be on call all of the time, to many agencies considering applying for federal Staffing

for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grants to add full-time personnel. SAFER grants have been awarded to more than 40 departments across Minnesota over the past decade, though many chiefs admit that it is not a permanent, long-term solution. SAFER grants do not guard against high employee turnover rates, and also do not provide funding past three years after the hire date (FEMA, 2019).

In southern Wisconsin, not far from Winthrop Harbor, reporter Adam Rogan (2018) published an article further explaining the problem with young recruits titled, "Extinguishing a shortage: struggling to find new recruits." Rogan's research found that between 1984 and 2015, the total count of volunteer firefighters nationwide has reduced by 12%. Applications to local fire departments – both paid and volunteer – have reduced tremendously over the last decade. Reasons given for this decline in applicants include a lack of work ethic from young adults, to other jobs taking priority. Local fire departments have partnered with a local technical college to help recruit potential firefighters. Through this partnership, they have attempted to better market firefighting and EMS, as well as reach out to local high schools in an effort to increase interest in students pursuing it as a potential career.

Across Wisconsin in the town of Palmyra, creativity has helped their problem with recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters. Using a public safety model, police officers are also trained firefighters and EMTs (Geraldo, 2018). Along with just one or two other cities in the state, this has partially addressed the shortage Palmyra has been facing on the fire side. This has been fairly successful, in large part because Palmyra is a smaller community that does not typically experience many emergencies at the same time. Village president David Turner admits that resources would be spread thin and response times could be negatively affected in the event

of a large incident or multiples occurring. However, in most cases, with a minimal increase in their personnel budget, their joint police/fire/EMS program has been successful.

Also in Wisconsin, a three-part series by *Journal Sentinel* reporter Tyler Langan (2018) discussed the widespread volunteer firefighter shortage and what could be done about it. Broadly agreed upon was the fact that in many areas of rural America, funding will never allow fully paid fire/EMS departments. The state of Wisconsin legislature has recently formed a committee to review this issue and make recommendations on how to improve volunteer services. This will be discussed further in other sections of this research paper, however the key topics included increased state funding to smaller fire departments for fire and EMS training, establishing tax incentives and credits for volunteer firefighters, and amending recertification requirements for firefighters and EMTs to allow for four year certifications instead of two. This series of articles by Langan is one of the few that also references the mental and physical stress of emergency work that also pushes some members to give up the service.

The numbers are even more staggering in Pennsylvania. A recent commission of lawmakers, municipal officials, and industry professionals has released a report documenting volunteer firefighters across the state number 38,000, down from over 300,000 in the 1970s (Bond, 2018). While 90% of the state's 2,400 fire companies are volunteer, many are turning to paid staff to solve the problem. This is not feasible in many areas lacking the resources to fund salaries and benefits of a properly staffed fire department. Similarly to the Wisconsin report previously noted, recommendations from the PA commission included tax incentives for volunteers and increased state resources for fire and EMS training, however, almost 100 other proposed concepts included the removal of past bureaucratic regulations and barriers to encourage smaller companies to combine forces and also creating a statewide recruiting network

to cut down on each individual company being on their own for recruiting potential members. In some areas of PA, National Guard members have been stepping into some of the areas with decreased volunteer numbers (Angell, 2018).

In Sam Ruland's poignant 2019 article, "The volunteer firefighter, an icon of American life, struggles to survive in Pennsylvania," the author points out bluntly:

But as the number of volunteer firefighters in the state — in the country — continues to dwindle amid funding needs and training challenges, it is a question most fire companies can't ignore: It's taking longer for volunteer companies to get to the scene of a fire as they wait for a full crew. They are forced to use outdated equipment because they can't afford new replacements. And taxes could skyrocket if communities move from volunteer to paid fire departments.

The volunteer fire company Ruland documented as part of his article also pointed out that it was not long ago that 20 or more members would show up for fire calls. Today, they are lucky to have three or four show up.

The Alpha Fire Company, near State College, PA, has been looking at increasing the annual stipend their volunteers receive for serving (Thomasson, 2018). Nonetheless, Chief Steve Bair acknowledges that even raising the current \$850 per member stipend to \$5,000 may not be enough to keep their volunteers from looking for better paying part-time jobs: "Fire companies near us have been going out of business, because they don't have enough people that worry about tomorrow." He also stated that their ideal roster count would be 125, and that they currently struggle to maintain 100.

In Julian County, California, an interesting ballot referendum is actually pending in order to potentially eliminate the one remaining volunteer fire company in the county (Jones, 2018).

In this case, not being able to recruit volunteers is not necessarily the issue; the Julian Fire Company has actually been a source of community pride since the 1970s and has not had trouble finding locals to serve. Moreover, county executives have seen all volunteer companies in nearby San Diego County absorbed by the larger county department, and feel the same should be done in this case. They cite the resources, training opportunities, and larger organization as being able to better serve the public from both a fire and EMS perspectives. The vote is scheduled for mid-March 2019.

The trends of diminishing volunteer and part-time firefighter membership are clear: the service is hurting. Why this may be the case is also heavily discussed in many articles and commentaries around the nation. Perhaps the biggest source of information is the NVFC Fact Sheet (NVFC, 2019). Many reasons and root causes are detailed as to why membership among volunteers has decreased. One of the biggest reasons discussed was time availability for volunteer work across the nation. People simply do not have the time to devote to the 'extras' as they once did. Many families are two-income families where both husband and wife work and childcare is an issue. Also many families move more often as in the past due to changing work needs in the recent uncertain economy. To make matters worse, increased training demands for both the fire and EMS side, including continuing education requirements, have hampered the ability for many to devote that amount of time to their local fire department. Additionally, the 'me' generation was mentioned multiple times in the fact sheet; essentially the younger generation simply does not have the work ethic, especially for little or no pay, that past generations have had.

Another top reason the younger generation is not volunteering like in the past is personal and family finances. Millennials (defined as born 1982-2004) earn 20% less than the past baby-

boomer generation at the same age (Bodin, 2017). Additionally, many carry student loan debt that hampers them for years, causing them to seek one or multiple jobs immediately after school. The fire department in West Barnstable, MD, that Bodin documented for her article also deals with high turnover while their call volume has increased over the years, contributing to burnout of their current members. Furthermore, the training requirements do not differ from volunteer to paid. NVFC chief of communications Kimberly Quiros stated, "Even as people have less time to volunteer, the training required to volunteer has become more intensive, taking more time" (Bodin, 2017).

In Washington state, a symptom of the problem with fire departments potentially not sending enough to a scene was evident as the Camas-Washougal Fire Department was recently fined by OSHA for operating understaffed at a house fire (Varone, 2018). The two-in-two-out mandate, stipulating that a crew entering a fire shall have a backup crew in place, had been violated when a two person crew operated on the scene of a fire. In this specific case, the fire department was a career organization with full-time members and labor-management issues dealing with staffing (Moyer, 2018); however, a small volunteer department could face the same fate if operating short at a fire.

Also complicating matters with volunteer fire departments is the fact that training requirements do not differ whether a firefighter is paid or not. Simply put, a raging house fire does not care how much the responding firefighter makes and will not be any safer for a less trained attacker. Some states differ on their volunteer training requirements, but most require a minimum training program to meet NFPA 1001: Firefighter professional qualifications (NVFC, 2019). This entails a roughly 100+ hour initial training program followed by regular skills review drills to ensure everyone on the roster is ready for a fire, whether it is one per month or

10. NFPA 1851 also makes strict recommendations for turnout gear, stipulating gear over 10 years old should be taken out of service (NFPA, 2013). Many small companies cannot afford turning personnel and gear over, but they do risk liability for potentially not following NPFA recommendations (Murphy, 2008).

Research question three asked what can be done to change the trend of volunteer fire departments struggling to recruit and retain members. Many previous articles discussed have documented legislative action and creative ways to address the problem, such as in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has also weighed in on the issue. In a 2016 website post, "Can we do more for America's volunteers?" additional common-sense suggestions are given for addressing the issue such as increasing virtual training opportunities to aid in time-management issues (DHS, 2016). Furthermore, other technological advances could aid departments and regions in creatively putting together recruiting and outreach tools to spread the word to areas that normally do not receive much exposure to the vocation. DHS (2016) identifies that "community coherence and pride are waning, and volunteerism is less valued." By escalating new technology and reaching to different areas, perhaps fresh excitement can be had by community members.

In a follow-up article to his documentation of volunteer fire companies in Pennsylvania, Sam Ruland (2019) did not beat around the bush with his title – "Your local volunteer fire company needs you, here's how you can help." He urged community members to join their local fire department, even if they did not have it in them to don the turnout gear and respond to emergencies. There are many support duties that need to be filled such as record-keeping, fundraising, public education events, and many others. If that does not work for the civilian,



then perhaps donating money to the company or helping arrange events to raise funds or support the department in other ways would be a common-sense way to plug in.

In summary, this literature review shows that the problem WHFD and other fire departments are facing with recruiting volunteers and retaining those already on their roster is real and widespread. Research questions regarding where and why departments face this problem show that no state is immune to experiencing volunteer membership concerns. Prevalent reasons for this around the nation include an apathetic culture shift away from volunteering, time management and financial concerns for many Americans, and heavy initial and continuing training requirements hindering the ability for many to commit to a service in which little or no compensation is available. In order for beneficial change to be made, improvements at the state and federal level regarding volunteer tax benefits, streamlined training opportunities with funding assistance, and creative recruiting methods must be implemented. Any agency sitting back with the hope that volunteers will continue to show up will be sorely mistaken.

### Procedures

Three main questions directed research toward the stated problem, which utilized the descriptive research method:

1: What have the trends of WHFD employee retention shown over the past 10 years, and what does that represent?

This research question was relatively simple and straightforward, attempting to specifically identify the problem and data associated with only WHFD. Assistant Chief Alicia McCoy has coordinated WHFD's recruit training academy since 2005. She was asked to provide detailed data of members hired each year since then, how long the recruits stayed with WHFD,

and how many members are still employed by WHFD. Details and analysis from the data are discussed and depicted in table form in the Results section of this research project. A very noteworthy limitation of this research is the fact that it was narrow and included only WHFD data.

2: Why is WHFD and other part-time and volunteer agencies experiencing a shortage of qualified firefighters and EMTs?

Procedures for this research question included multiple areas, and the research was aimed at identifying how and why the problem, apart from only WHFD, was widespread across the country. A robust internet search for agencies reporting problems with recruiting and retaining volunteer and part-time firefighters provided countless results. One of the big resources of information was the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC), which is a national, non-profit organization representing the interests of volunteer fire and emergency services around the nation. NFPA recommendations and what they mean for smaller fire companies with limited resources are also a concern for all involved and were a good source of data contributing to the issue.

Additional WHFD data was obtained, which detailed many reasons members left the department over the past two-and-a-half years (Appendix B). A limitation to note regarding this source of data is that not all persons leaving WHFD in the past two years were able to be spoken to directly about their reasons for choosing to leave. Much information was discussed over emails or phone conversations as the members decided they could not continue volunteering. A spreadsheet was kept by the fire chief only over the past two years in order to better track those leaving the department or requesting a leave of absence.

Another procedure for this research question was a local survey neighboring fire chiefs that employ part-time personnel were asked to complete (Appendix C). Since the fact that this nationwide problem of volunteer shortages is not in dispute, survey questions were somewhat broad to invite more intimate details and actual discussion about the issue. Scheduling changes, personnel turnover, and some creative ways to attract and retain part-time and volunteers were discussed and will be documented in the Results section. A further limitation to note is the small number of departments in the area that utilize part-time personnel. The populous suburban Chicago location that WHFD falls in allows most area agencies to employ all or mostly all career employees. Survey questions asked of local chiefs were:

- Approximately what percentage of part-time personnel you hire are retained more than two to three years?
- Do you identify any specific challenges related to recruiting and retaining part-time personnel?
- Have you had to change staffing, or the way your department operates, due to the challenge of retaining part-time employees?

Chiefs in WHFD's area polled were Beach Park, Newport Township, Antioch, Lake Villa, Lake Bluff, Nunda Rural, and Pleasant Prairie, WI. Unfortunately, surveys were not returned by Lake Bluff, Nunda Rural, and Lake Villa, despite numerous attempts to connect.

3: What can be done to change the trend of part-time and volunteer fire departments experiencing problems with recruitment and retention?

Research for this question was able to mainly be accomplished in conjunction with the wide-ranging internet searches related to question number one. Many articles detailing the problems fire departments nationwide are facing also discussed possible ways to help. States

such as New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin have attempted legislative action to assist volunteer and smaller fire departments with limited resources. Furthermore, agencies such as the NVFC and U.S. Department of Homeland Security have published initiatives that work toward the issue. Also aiding this research question was input from local fire chiefs employing part-time or volunteer members as they grapple with similar problems.

In summary, the procedures for obtaining data and information for this applied research project included the extensive review of published periodical articles, journal articles, discussions, and commentaries about the problems faced with recruiting and retaining volunteer and part-time firefighters and EMTs. A survey and follow-up discussion with fire chiefs in WHFD's area to gain more specific detail was very helpful. Worth noting again, the problem on a large, nationwide scale is not in question. The smaller and broad survey was done in an effort to gain specific and local insight on the issue.

### Results

Research question number one was: What have the trends of WHFD employee retention shown over the past 10 years, and what does that reveal? Results obtained from the procedures of answering research question number one were obtained by contacting the director of WHFD's recruit training academy. Assistant Chief Alicia McCoy researched her records from hires and the subsequent training academies since 2005 and the results were astounding. 26 of a total of 100 hired since 2005 remain with WHFD today. Many recent years saw zero, one or two remaining from six, seven, and even eight hires. Table 1 details each year since 2005 and shows that WHFD truly has had a difficult time retaining those hired.

Table 1

<b>WHFD Hires 2005-2018</b>		
	Hired	Remain
2005	7	1
2006	6	0
2007	7	0
2008	8	1
2009	8	0
2010	7	1
2011	6	2
2012	8	1
2013	7	1
2014	7	1
2015	6	3
2016	7	4
2017	8	5
2018	8	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>26</b>

Additionally, data compiled by the researcher since the beginning of 2017 shows that 30 members have either left or requested leaves-of-absence for various reasons (Appendix B). These reasons will be discussed further in this section under question two, as they help to detail *why* part-time and volunteer members are leaving their departments. Three of the members actually returned from their leaves of absence which was a pleasant surprise to the department, however, losing 27 members over a two-year span is devastating to a smaller fire department such as WHFD. Results from this research question clearly supported the original claim that retention of personnel is a problem for WHFD.

Research question number two was: Why is WHFD and other part-time and volunteer agencies experiencing a shortage of qualified firefighters and EMTs? Multiple areas helped dig into this research question of why we are seeing a decline in volunteering and having trouble

retaining current members: heavy literature review provided a high quantity of talking points and reasons for this, the researcher keeping records over the past two years regarding why WHFD personnel were leaving, and a survey with follow-up discussion with local fire chiefs employing part-time/volunteer members provided a valuable, higher quality of data.

The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) was a big source of information in terms providing input on many reasons why volunteer agencies are losing members across the nation. One resource the NVFC showcases on its website is a publication from the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), "Retention and recruitment for volunteer emergency services, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition" (2007). While this source is a few years older than most references for this applied research project, the key points and reasons discussed for the problem align closely with almost all current articles. The top documented reason for the turnover and lack of the ability to replace volunteer members is lack of time. Many families today are two-income households where both husband and wife work careers, leaving little time to be a part of a volunteer organization. Other reasons cited by NVFC and USFA include health and medical problems (early generations of volunteer growing older), family and other work responsibilities, lost interest in the job, conflicts within their respective organizations, and heavy training requirements.

Many other articles cited a steeply decreased amount of applicants for fire jobs. Simply put, members are not going to show up at firehouse doors asking to volunteer. In many areas of Wisconsin, departments are struggling to recruit applicants for fire jobs (Rogan, 2018). Creative recruiting methods by attempting to reach students at local high schools, community and technical colleges have not yielded the results many smaller departments have hoped for. Similarly, in Pennsylvania the data is staggering: volunteer positions through the state number well under 50,000, when they numbered over 300,000 just a couple decades ago.

Another important result to research question two is the fact that National Fire Protection Association guidelines and state training requirements are not any less important, stringent and do not take a back seat for volunteer or part-time members. Williamsville (IL) fire chief Scott Gaddy comments on this very issue: "We still have to have certification just like Springfield firefighters, and that's kind of a hard thing for a lot of people to do when you are not getting paid" (Blanchette, 2019). Additionally, the added services many emergency agencies have had to add over the years - such as EMS service, special team participation (dive, HAZMAT, technical rescue operations) - make it very difficult for anyone to maintain appropriate training and continuing education if firefighting and EMS is not their career. Add the potential liability of not following NFPA recommendations (Murphy, 2008 & Varone, 2018), and the difficulty level increases for smaller fire departments such as WHFD.

NFPA 1001: *Standard for fire fighter professional qualifications* (NFPA, 2019), contains training program recommendations for firefighters and EMTs that do not distinguish training for volunteers any differently than career personnel. In fact, the 35-page document outlines skills and knowledge points for almost any emergency situation one may encounter without any sections lessening the recommendations for volunteers. Similarly, NFPA 1851: *Standard on care, selection, and maintenance of protective ensembles...* (NFPA, 2013), also specifies certain minimums of standard personal protective turnout gear that does not differentiate between volunteer and career personnel. Additionally, due to the increased turnover of personnel, many smaller agencies struggle with complying with Chapter 10 of NFPA 1851, which specifies, "Structural firefighting ensembles...shall be retired no more than 10 years from the date of manufacture." (p. 23).

Over the past two years, the researcher has attempted to keep records of why WHFD personnel were leaving the department. A spreadsheet of data is depicted in Appendix B, and details who and when members asked for leaves-of-absence or resigned from the department, and in most cases, why. In some cases, the member actually returned from their leave, however, that result was certainly the minority. In most cases (11), the member left due to working at a career department and unable to continue with WHFD. Five members left as they pursued other employment out of state, multiple members left for personal reasons, two were terminated, and two returned from medical leave and remain with WHFD today. This data is a good, general illustration of why members leave WHFD and similar departments, but is not all-inclusive as not all members were able to be communicated with personally to gain complete details about their leave.

To continue possibly the most valuable result of researching question two is the personal connection with local chiefs employing part-time and volunteer members. The term *volunteer* in this case is a board term, as most departments in WHFD's area have moved away from volunteer service over the past decade due to the problem with retaining personnel. In nearby Antioch, Illinois, Chief Jon Cokefair is blunt as he describes the evolution of Antioch's thought process about retention: "My staff and I felt it best to try to manage our loss with a robust replacement plan. Don't worry about retention, worry about replacement." Antioch has a deep history of volunteer service since 1913 (AntiochFD.org); however, Chief Cokefair states that the increased demand for service over the years and declining volunteer force has caused them to employ contract firefighter/paramedics to cover shifts. As well as that, he estimates that 70% of his staff has three years or less experience in the fire service. The biggest cause of employees leaving is moving on to a career firefighting position with another department.



The Beach Park Fire Department (BPF) neighbors a portion of WHFD's response district, and has traditionally employed mostly volunteer and part-time firefighters and EMTs, but have evolved to employing career and paid-on-premise personnel in recent years to ensure proper coverage for their area. Chief Paul Tierney (personal communication, February 8, 2019) reports that a couple main reasons have contributed to their staffing issues, also noting that personnel leave quite often for career jobs at other fire departments. But, he also points to a similar issue previously reported in nearby Wisconsin – the decreased amount of young people interested in pursuing a career in firefighting and EMS: “In current times, the number of millennials desiring to be a firefighter/paramedic is sparse.”

The Newport Township Fire Department borders the western portion of WHFD's response district, and their department makeup and model is very similar to WHFD. They have a rich history of volunteer members, but have had to invest a large portion of their budget in recent years to personnel, and have hired career personnel to enable them to provide the around-the-clock coverage necessary for their rising call volume. Chief Mark Kirschhoffer responded to the research survey and noted that they have hired 34 members since 2015 and have retained 20 (personal communication, February 11, 2019). Some of those are contracted career personnel, so the comparison is not exactly the same as WHFD, which is another limitation to note regarding this research. The premise, however, is the same – Newport also has seen significant challenges with retaining personnel, to the tune of almost 50%. Chief Kirschhoffer notes that a lack of interested members in the community, and younger folks in the area searching for higher pay scales are two of the top reasons Newport is struggling to attract and retain members. Another noteworthy response as part of Chief Kirschhoffer's survey return is an unprovoked matching

phrase from an article documented as part of this project's Literature Review: "Revolving door" of personnel.

Pleasant Prairie, Wisconsin, borders WHFD to the north, and has also relied on part-time personnel in past years as part of their staffing model. Although, Pleasant Prairie is a rapidly growing community in southeast Wisconsin and has added many career firefighter/paramedic positions in their department, so Chief Craig Roepke's data and information did not entirely support the original hypothesis of struggling to retain personnel. In fact, Chief Roepke reports that they have not brought on any part-time personnel in the past three years due to the changing demographics in their community (personal communication, February 8, 2019). He also points to a logistical and financial impact working against the hiring of part-timers: the commitment to a time-consuming training academy for new hires, and the expense associated with not being able to share turnout gear, prevents them from pursuing more part-time or volunteer positions.

Research question number three was: what can be done to change the trend of part-time and volunteer fire departments experiencing problems with recruitment and retention? Results for this research question, again, were largely obtained from heavy literature review with some input from surveying local fire chiefs. More detail will be provided in the Discussion and Recommendation sections, but there have been many initiatives attempted across the nation, including funding assistance to qualifying agencies from the federal government to help address this problem as part of Federal Emergency Management Agency's Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program (FEMA, 2019).

The NVFC was awarded one such SAFER grant in 2015, which was aimed at creating a national resource for fire departments to draw from as an effort to reach new volunteers (NVFC, 2019). This provided opportunities for fire and EMS organizations to use various resources to

help reach out in the community to recruit volunteers, customize campaign materials, track interested members as they work through the hiring and training process, and also provided a centralized location for fire departments nationwide to post needs and opportunities to join.

The NVFC website also offers an easily navigable search function for members of the public to locate agencies with openings in all areas of the country.

Other specific areas of the country have also developed creative initiatives to help change the trend of decreased retention of volunteers and part-time members within their local departments. In southern Wisconsin, multiple volunteer fire/EMS agencies have begun aggressive recruiting campaigns in local high schools and technical colleges in an effort to attract members (Rogan, 2018). Officials in these areas are finding many students preparing to graduate high school are not aware they can begin firefighter and EMT training at the age of 18, and even begin emergency driver training shortly after starting a position with their local fire department.

In Palmyra, Wisconsin, a different approach has been taken as a result of addressing the problems of recruiting and retaining volunteer members in their smaller community: police officers have been trained as firefighters and EMT's to ensure all areas of the emergency response can be covered (Geraldo, 2018). City officials have acknowledged this is not a perfect plan in the event multiple emergencies occur in the area simultaneously; however, thus far their new staffing strategy has been successful, and when resources do get stretched thin, they have been able to rely on mutual aid from neighboring agencies.

Legislation at the state level has also been enacted in multiple areas as the problem with recruitment and retention of volunteers has been recognized as a serious issue. In Pennsylvania, many initiatives have been recommended by the state senate committee on Emergency Preparedness, a number of which have been signed into law (Bond, 2018). These initiatives

include directing the state department of education to work with community colleges to offer free or reduced tuition to first responders, offer free background checks through the Pennsylvania State Police for new hires, offering tax incentives for volunteers, and many others. In Wisconsin, state-level initiatives are much the same, and include ideas such as extending firefighter and EMT re-licensure cycles from two years to four, which lifts a recurring training burden from those who do not work the service as a career (Langan, 2017). Other Wisconsin resources enacted include the ability for certain fire districts to levy additional fire protection taxes, providing state funding for EMT and firefighting training programs, and creating financial benefits for those who serve volunteer agencies.

Some articles point to money as being a way to help the problem, as many have a hard time committing to a fire department and all the training necessary, while receiving little or no compensation. Director Steve Bair of the Alpha Fire Company in State College, Pennsylvania, has recommended to his governing body that member stipends be increased to \$5,000 annually next budget year, up from only \$850 this year (Thomasson, 2018). He points to the fact that he could reason with a prospective volunteer that that amount is similar to picking up a part-time job working 10-15 hours at a standard employer in the area. Multiple areas of Minnesota are also working on ways to add funding to per-call stipends for their volunteers, and even add paid positions that volunteers can work towards (Klecker, 2018). It is pointed out, however, without community support in many areas in terms of increased funding for departments, many of these plans simply are not sustainable.

Also important to note, a result of research that agreed with the stated problem of volunteer retention, but did not agree with money being an answer, was how several articles suggest that funding is not all that matters with some volunteer agencies. Rochester Fire

Protection District near Springfield, Illinois, struggles with finding volunteers but trustee Marty Fairchild stated, "Financially we're in very good shape, but we are always looking for volunteers." He goes on to report that they have a million dollars of equipment sitting in their station but, "No one to man it" (Blanchette, 2019). The same article did note, though, that many of these smaller volunteer agencies do lose members to bigger career departments, such as Springfield, after they receive their training and are able to pursue the paid positions many of them are ultimately after.

To conclude, the results of the research confirmed the problem of WHFD and other departments nationwide struggling to recruit and retain volunteer and part-time members continues to exist. There are many reasons for this, with the decreased time availability of many young adults today, coupled with the increased training and activity expectations of firefighters and EMTs nationwide at the top of almost every list. Many agencies struggle with training recruits, keeping them for a year or two, then losing them to higher-paying career fire departments. Often times there is simply a lack of interest in smaller communities as many are busy juggling one, two or even three jobs while supporting their family. There are many initiatives nationwide to try to combat this issue including creative marketing and recruitment, increased funding and training resource availability from public and private sources, and changing staffing models and compensation. Despite this, many areas do not see a viable way that their small, volunteer-based way of operating will work much longer.

#### Discussion/Implications

Research conducted for this applied research project has proven that the Winthrop Harbor Fire Department (WHFD) is not alone in struggling to recruit and retain volunteer and part-time fire/EMS personnel. Literature review was the most instrumental in noting relationships

between the study problem statement and actual details of what is happening across the nation, though, speaking directly to fire chiefs in WHFD's area going through similar problems was very helpful in gaining a personal and local perspective on the issue. Furthermore, one does not have to look far to find literature and extensive discussion on how many smaller fire departments are struggling to recruit and retain personnel.

Early in the research phase of this applied research project it became clear that the problem statement would be easily proven. The fact that WHFD and similar part-time and volunteer fire departments are struggling to recruit and retain members cannot be disputed. The numbers for WHFD alone are staggering: 26 of the last 100 hired remain on the roster. The reasons for this vary widely, including many leaving WHFD for a career firefighter/paramedic position at a larger fire department, some of which do not allow for a secondary position at a smaller department. Many others feel they do not have the time to invest in covering duty nights, training requirements, and other department commitments while they either attend school, have multiple other jobs covering their bills, or are raising a young family and simply cannot spend additional time away from home.

Aiding research were countless articles and commentaries documenting where and why this problem persists. Not far from WHFD, the Harvard Fire Department is of similar size and staffing model and faces the same struggles. Chief Don Davidson acknowledges their problem seems to persist because there are not enough eager youngsters in their area wanting to do something like emergency work on a part-time basis (Linhart, 2017). This is also a similar problem WHFD faces. Not long ago most, if not all, members on WHFD resided in Winthrop Harbor or just outside of the village limits. Currently, nine of the 45 members live in the village! A side problem this causes is the fact that very few on the roster are close enough, or even have

the time available, to respond to a call outside of their assigned duty times. "Callback" as WHFD terms it, is essentially a thing of the past, and that means mutual aid from neighboring agencies is used more often in multiple call situations.

The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) has made it their mission to provide a meaningful voice for the volunteer fire service across the country (NVFC.org, 2019). The NVFC has recognized that volunteer agencies struggle to keep members and have established aggressive campaigns on a national level to assist. They aim to "Foster the next generation of volunteer firefighters" by not only helping agencies recruit and retain members, but support the members' safety and mental health in addition to providing training resources that small agencies without significant resources lack. The NVFC also boasts the ability to represent volunteer fire departments' interests at the state and federal legislative levels, and have assisted in crafting many of the law changes that have been discussed in the Literature Review section. Examples of this include Wisconsin initiatives to improve training funding, tax incentives for volunteers, and streamlining licensure requirements for EMTs (Langan, 2018). Similarly, in Pennsylvania, a panel commissioned by the state legislature came up with many comparable recommendations such as tax credits, assistance with training, and many others in an effort to improve the serious problem the state is seeing with volunteer participation (Bond, 2018).

Another area relating research results to the problem statement that was found in reading through numerous published articles, is the effect National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) guidelines have on volunteer fire departments as they struggle to recruit and retain members – specifically related to NFPA standards 1001 & 1851. NFPA 1001 is the *Standard for professional fire fighter qualifications* (NFPA, 2018). NFPA outlines the minimum training specifications recommended for anyone joining a fire department and certifying as a firefighter I

and/or II. There is good reason for these requirements in terms of making sure firefighters follow standard training objectives and remain as safe as possible. In contrast, though, volunteers and new hires that are not doing the job as a career could struggle finding the time to commit to the rigorous training program requirements necessary to be a safe firefighter.

NFPA 1851 is the *Standard on selection, care, and maintenance of protective ensembles for structural firefighting and proximity firefighting* (NFPA, 2013). As with NFPA 1001, the safety of firefighters is why these recommendations exist: "The overall protection and safety of firefighting personnel depend not only on adequate protective clothing but equally on the organization's policies, training and administration of the correct use of the proper protective ensembles" (p. 1851-1). One of the major affects NFPA 1851 has on smaller fire departments with limited budgets pertains to turnout gear for firefighters. NFPA 1851 specifies that gear should fit properly and be retired after no longer than 10 years of service (p. 1851-23). Essentially, the age-old practice of the newest recruits receiving hand-me-down gear from older firefighters no longer complies. Based on WHFD's numbers of hiring 100 members since 2005, over \$150,000 would need to be spent in turnout gear alone – and 76% of those hires do not work for WHFD anymore!

While many smaller volunteer fire companies without the budget for new turnout gear could, and presumably do, disregard the recommendations of NFPA, there carries significant risk in doing so. As documented in the Literature Review section, the Camas-Washougal Fire Department in Washington was recently fined by the state safety and health department for operating understaffed at a house fire (Varone, 2018). While this specific case does not involve turnout gear, the fines were upheld by the appellate court and shows how the disregard of any official safety recommendation could be subject to fines - or worse.



Another valuable source of research for this problem was a survey and subsequent follow-up conversation with fire chiefs of similar departments in WHFD's area (Appendix C). While some departments in the area have taken to hiring career personnel to ensure 24/7 staffing, they also rely on part-time and volunteer staff. In Antioch, Illinois, Chief Jon Cokefair admits retention of new hires is not on their radar screen anymore; they concentrate on a robust replacement plan and take members for as long as they have them (personal communication, February 28, 2019). In nearby Newport Township, Chief Mark Kirschhoffer also struggles to retain volunteer and part-time staff, even when offering temporary residence at one of their stations (personal communication, February 11, 2019). In all conversations and surveys of these local chiefs, a recurring theme among everyone was one of the popular causes of members leaving: each department experiences losing employees for higher paying career jobs throughout any given year.

Research for this problem also centered on what other agencies and regions are trying to do about reversing this trend of smaller fire departments struggling to operate. Since a major issue across many areas includes being able to recruit members of the community to join, many articles centered on more aggressive recruiting campaigns. In Wisconsin, high schools and technical colleges are being targeted to convince young adults to consider volunteering, or even a career fire job (Rogan, 2018). Across the state in Palmyra, police officers are being cross trained as firefighters and EMTs in an effort to ensure first responders across all fields are covered (Geraldo, 2018). In Pennsylvania, National Guard members have been stepping up to help their local volunteer fire companies (Angell, 2018). These creative ways of thinking, especially when funding does not allow for a transition to career personnel, are certainly paramount to making sure emergency service is not compromised in any given community.

After analyzing this research and reviewing countless articles of literature on the subject, WHFD's organizational implications of this research are clear: the status quo of operating in today's volunteer and part-time fire service will not work moving forward. No longer are young community members knocking on the door of the firehouse looking to volunteer. Time constraints on double-income young families are prohibiting mom or dad from being able to commit to a side job or hobby for little or no compensation. Those who do decide to pursue firefighting or other emergency responder jobs are doing just that – looking for career training and do not always stick around their starting point when they reach their goal of a paid position. Ultimately the decision is up to WHFD and other smaller agencies to be creative with recruiting, work better with their neighboring departments, and understanding that finding inventive ways to provide higher compensation or other benefits to part-time personnel may be some of the only answers to keeping members around.

### Recommendations

Upon analyzing numerous articles of literature and commentaries by industry professionals, survey results and conversations with chief officer peers, it is apparent that change is necessary if WHFD and other volunteer or fire departments using part-time personnel hope to keep the number of members required to successfully complete their mission. The following recommendations are a result of analyzing how others in the fire service have attempted to help with the problem of recruiting and retaining volunteer and part-time personnel, as well as other creative ways in which WHFD specifically can help the current personnel problem. The goal is not simply to solve the current problem, but to also create organizational change and improvements so future leaders of the department can run a successful department and will not have to continually deal with the same issues.

### **1. Hire more personnel each year with the expectation that WHFD will not retain all recruits.**

The first recommendation is supported by multiple sources of research data. First, and probably most noteworthy, is the fact that WHFD and many other fire departments have identified that multiple members are going to leave each year as they obtain positions with fully paid, career fire departments. There is nothing monetarily that can be done about this, even increasing the per-call or per-hour stipend does not change the fact that they are leaving due to another career position. As Antioch Chief Cokefair pointed out, they have essentially written off retention and have concentrated on hiring more to use as long as they can.

### **2. Increase recruiting efforts in the community.**

This recommendation follows many other areas of the country that have begun creative recruiting efforts within their communities. WHFD, and other fire departments experiencing similar issues, should actively search the community for potential members by visiting local high schools and other vocational or technical schools if available. This also works in conjunction with recommendation one, by potentially bringing an increased hiring pool to the fire department. Along with this recommendation is a suggestion that the fire department's electronic presence should be intensified: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media platforms, along with a modern and well laid-out website, are paramount to attracting those who have been brought up in this current electronic age.

### **3. Expand the Boy Scout fire explorer program.**

Late in 2018, WHFD did begin a Boy Scout fire explorer program. At this point, it is too new of a program to determine if this is going to help recruit and retain future firefighters. Nevertheless, the start of the program has been successful with 12 young boys and girls having

begun taking informational training sessions once per week at the fire station. Within the next few years, as they become old enough to apply to be actual members of WHFD, time will tell if hosting an explorer program will be successful. In the meantime, the program must be continually evaluated and new members need to be recruited from local Scout groups and middle schools as it is not expected that all participants will determine this line of work is for them.

#### **4. Work with Village leadership to invest more budget funds to hourly rates.**

This was identified in recommendation one as *not* helpful to retain members who leave the department for higher-paid, career fire departments. Even so, an increase in the hourly rate and per-call stipend very well could help keep those who leave the department for other personal reasons, or those who feel they need to leave for a better paying part-time job. As seen with the Alpha Fire Company near State College, Pennsylvania, they believe increasing the stipend for their members would be equivalent to a member leaving for a 10-15 hour part-time job at another local employer (Thomasson, 2018). An additional financial area to increase funding for would be tuition reimbursement for college classes. In states such as New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, legislation has been passed or considered for this area of improvement. Being able to offer a young recruit tuition assistance may be the key to him or her sticking with the department. Agreements that the member would stay a certain amount of time if receiving tuition reimbursement would be instrumental to making this investment successful.

#### **5. Consider expanding joint responses with neighboring agencies.**

WHFD has always worked very well with its neighboring agencies, and will always continue to do so. On the other hand, with most of these neighboring agencies experiencing problems with recruiting and retaining personnel, there must be a stronger partnership and not just a "call if you need us" agreement. Regular communication among chief officers of

neighboring agencies regarding specific times of short-staffing and agreeing to cover calls during a certain time frame – or at the least consider a first-response program – would help get emergency response to these requests quicker. Only one of WHFD's neighboring agencies is a completely career agency, and even Zion Fire Rescue calls upon WHFD and others for coverage during their busy time periods. WHFD and the other neighbors would certainly benefit from an expansion of joint responses.

#### **6. Consider adding career employees**

Finally, WHFD will eventually have to consider adding career employees if the trend of losing more members than hiring continues each year. This will be a major decision for the mayor and Village Board, as the funding of career employees including salary, benefits, equipment, and gear would be a tremendous addition to the annual budget. If structured correctly, though, and the correct data and information was presented to the Board (and ultimately the public if a potential tax increase would be needed), hiring career employees to ensure proper firefighting and EMT coverage is always available is one way the residents and visitors of Winthrop Harbor would be better protected.

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Appendix A

WHFD Roster 2014

\* Highlighted names no longer work for WHFD

Winthrop Harbor Fire Department  
Chain of Command

Fire Chief Justin Stried  
Deputy Chief/P Bill Beetschen  
Assistant Chief/B Eric Burraw  
Assistant Chief/B Alicia McCoy  
Inspector Ron Levin  
Administrative Assistant/B Donna Kauppi

**Black Company A**

Lieutenant/P Eric Zack  
Engineer/P Joe Hernandez  
FF/P Victor Herrera (D-E, T-TN)  
FF/P Keith Peacy (D-E, T)  
FF/B Mike McBride  
FF/B James Milakovic (D-TN)  
Recruit/B Joseph Qzhibene

**Red Company A**

Captain/P Joey Peterson  
Engineer/P Doug Michael  
FF/P Kaysy Adams (D-TN)  
FF/P-Student Russ Wollert (D-E, T)  
FF/P Jason McGahan  
FF/B Brent Kuffell (D-Tn)  
Recruit/P Craig Lloyd  
Recruit/B Brock Sorenson

**Gold Company A**

Captain/P Shauna Haske  
Engineer/P Dan Buhrmaster  
FF/P Leticia Arias (D-E, T)  
FF/P Megan Dowd (D-E, T)  
FF/B Matthew Williams  
FF/B Keith Kauppi  
Recruit/FF Jordan Hock

**Black Company B**

Lieutenant/P Brandon Martin  
Engineer/P Joel Randall  
FF/P Brian Sheehan (D-E, T)  
FF/P Christina Ward (D-Tn)  
FF/P RJ Herrera (D-E, T)  
FF/B Matthew Ludtke  
FF/B Mike Bottmann  
Recruit/B Luis Delgado

**Red Company B**

Lieutenant/B Keenan Stone  
Act. Engineer/P Kelly Learmont  
FF/P Norm Paschal (D-E, T-TN)  
FF/P Mitch Torres (D-Tn)  
FF/B Joshua Ennesser  
Recruit/P Jasmine Cardelaria  
Recruit/B David Steele  
FF/P Brian Haske (RFF)

**Gold Company B**

Acting Captain/B Tom Fierro  
Engineer/P Pat Michael  
FF/P Tom Moran (D-E, T)  
FF/P Sarah Solo (D-E, T-TN)  
FF/P Dan Herby  
FF/B Joshua Trice (D-Tn)  
Recruit/P Richard Schneider  
Recruit/B Geoffrey Jordan

D- Driver  
E- Engine  
T- Truck  
Tn- Engine Training  
RFF- Reserve Firefighter

WHFD Roster 2019



**Winthrop Harbor Fire Department  
Chain of Command**



Fire Chief **Justin Stried**  
 Deputy Chief/**P Bill Beetschen**  
 Assistant Chief/**B Alicia McCoy (Red Company Command)**  
 Assistant Chief/**P Shauna Haske (Black Company Command)**  
 Assistant Chief/**B Keonan Stone (Gold Company Command)**  
 Inspector/**P Brian Haske**  
 Administrative Assistant/**B Donna Kauppi**

**Black Company A**

Lieutenant/**P Eric Zack**  
 Engineer/**P Victor Herrera**  
 FF/**B Jordan Buckholtz (D-tr)**  
 Recruit/**B Travis Ring**  
 Recruit/**B Blake Moody**  
 FF/**P Rebecca Jacobs \*injury leave\***

**Red Company A**

Lieutenant/**P Brandon Martin**  
 Engineer/**P Brian Sheehan**  
 Engineer/**P Jason McGahan**  
 FF/**P Brock Sorenson (QD)**  
 FF/**B Christopher Starck**  
 Recruit/**P-Student Elizabeth Garza**

**Gold Company A**

Lieutenant/**P Joel Randall**  
 Act. Engineer/**P/P Ayman Reffat**  
 FF/**P Matthew Williams (QD)**  
 FF/**P Tyler Howard (D-tr)**  
 FF/**B Geoffrey Jordan (D-tr)**  
 Recruit/**B Teofanez Lopez**

**Black Company B**

Lieutenant/**B Joshua Trice**  
 Chief Engineer/**P Kelly Stone**  
 FF/**P Michael Collins (QD)**  
 FF/**P Sean Buldiban (QD)**  
 FF/**B Allison Hancock (D-tr)**  
 Recruit/**B Justin Schorn**

**Red Company B**

Lieutenant/**P Keith Peacy**  
 Engineer/**P RJ Herrera**  
 FF/**P Robert Ritacca (D-tr)**  
 FF/**P Adurr Chiappella (QD)**  
 FF/**B Samantha Schcenke**  
 Recruit/**B Sydney Kolber**

**Gold Company B**

Lieutenant/**P Russ Wollert**  
 Engineer/**P Doug Winston**  
 FF/**P Scott Piotrowski (QD)**  
 FF/**B Joshua Ennesser (D-tr)**  
 FF/**B-Student Bryan Vantress**  
 Rec./**P-Student Jenna Sigafus**

QD – Qualified Driver for engine & truck  
 D-tr – Driver Training

## Appendix B

## WHFD Leave of Absence Detail 2016-2018

2016-18 Leave Detail			
Name	Effective Date	Return Date	Notes
Eric B*****	3/31/2017		Retired/resigned
Kelly S*****	2/1/2016	11/1/2017	Maternity
Kaysey A*****	1/1/2017		resigned 10/5/17
David S*****	12/20/2015		Not returning - Schaumburg FD
Sarai S***	7/1/2017	<del>10/1/2017</del>	personal leave (insurance approval)
Ayman R*****	6/26/2017	10/2/2017	<del>Knee injury</del>
Karl G*****	<del>7/1/2017</del>	4/10/2018	Terminated 4/25/2018
Jasmine C*****	7/24/2017		Resigned 3/1/2018
Ashley P****	5/25/2017		No contact, not returning
Mike R*****	8/16/2017	<del>Jan-Feb 2018?</del>	Unlikely to return
Craig L***	7/24/2017		Not returning - Grayslake FD
Dan H*****	9/6/2017		Resigned 9/30/2017
Rich S*****	1/10/2018		Resigned - hired Austin Texas FD
Ben G***	11/1/2017		Not returning - St. Charles FD
Jordan H***	7/28/2017		Not returning - Mt. Prospect FD
Eddie A*****	10/1/2017		Not returning - Rosemont FD
Mitch T****	11/2/2017		Resigned - other employment
James W*****	11/2/2017		Resigned - Waukegan FD
Chris W***	2/1/2018		Resigned 4/6/18 - personal
Recruit B*****	3/12/2018		Resigned 3/12/18 - moving
Recruit S*****	3/22/2018		Resigned 3/22/18 - moving
Joe O*****	3/19/2018		Resigned 3/19/18 - moving
Sarai S***	5/10/2018		Resigned 5/10/2018 - Zion FD
Megan D***	6/1/2018		One year request - doubtful to return
Matt H****	12/16/2018		Resigned - injury concerns & Zion FD
Matt L*****	12/26/2018		Resigned - moved
James S*****	12/12/2018		Resigned - other employment
Brooke L****	11/1/2018		Personal issues, may return?
Brian S*****	6/1/2018	2/19/2019	Lake Zurich FD
Alex C*****	1/6/2019		Hired Palatine Rural FD, may return?

## Appendix C

## Local Fire Chief Responses to Survey Requests

**Survey response**

Jon Cokefair [REDACTED]  
 Sent: Thursday, February 28, 2019 4:12 PM  
 To: Stried, Justin

Chief Stried,  
 Sorry for the delay.

I consider us as a part-time department supplemented with Contract personnel. We have 12 positions open per day, this include a Shift Commander, 7 are contract positions and 5 are part-time position. Our roster is approximately 90 personnel. Part time personnel must work 4-12 hour shifts per month and log 8 hours of training per month.

1. Our average term of employment is about 3 years. If you think about it that is out how long it takes to become a FF, EMI-8, Paramedic. They then move on to a traditional FF Job. I would say about 70% of our personnel have 3 years' experience or less.
2. We have seen an increase in our recruitment. While it took 2 years, the word got out that we will hire with no experience, EMS only certs or fire certs only. It is rare we see a fully cross trained Fire/EMS application. We receive approximately 15-20 applications per month. As the leader of the Antioch organization I have written off retention. This is due to our losses in the past. They have come, get trained and then move on to full time positions in the fire service, I can not compete with that due to budgetary constraints. My staff and I do it best to try to manage our loss with a robust replacement plan. Don't worry about retention worry about replacements. Secondary to losing personnel to Full time Jobs is the inability to meet our minimum required shifts and training.
3. Our staffing model has changed over the past years. While the total number of staffed positions (12) has remained constant for the most part. We have had to increase the number of contract positions to ensure we would have enough paramedics and FF's to run our 3300 calls plus/year. In 2013 we had 2 contract positions and 10 Part Time and has changed over time. Our current staffing model (7/5) has been steady for approximately 1 year now and I would forecast it to remain steady for the near future. We continually are monitoring how many leave as to how many are available for hire.

I hope this helps, please let me know if you need clarification on any of the Issues or have any other questions.

Respectfully,  
 Jon

**Jon Cokefair**  
**Fire Chief**  
 Antioch Fire Department  
 First Fire Protection District  
 835 Halbek Drive  
 Antioch, Illinois 60002  
 Work 847-395-5511  
 Cell 847-[REDACTED]



February 8, 2019

Chief Justin,

I suspect that many of us have the same issues. I have provided some of our issues with my thoughts regarding your questions. We have been talking for years about sharing Paid On Premises (POP) personnel but have never seemed to get it off the ground. I see the shared POP option as one solution to addressing the staffing issues we all encounter.

1. *Approximately what percentage of part-time personnel you hire are retained more than 2-3 years?*

This is difficult to really determine with any actual reliability. Our POP personnel are usually retained for 3-6 years before they move to a full time department. With that said however we have a number of people that are gone within 6 months to a year. Overall I guess I would say around 45%.

2. *Do you identify any specific challenges related to recruiting and retaining part-time personnel?*

Yes, we are finding the field of personnel that meet our criteria and or interested in a fire service career is extremely limited. Several years ago the field of people desiring to be a firefighter/paramedic was fairly deep. In current times the number of millennials desiring to be a firefighter/paramedic is sparse.

3. *Have you had to change staffing, or the way your department operates, due to the challenge of retaining part-time employees?*

We have had to make many modifications in our staffing model that includes offering health insurance and other benefits to retain people. We have also had to drop our daily staffing from five to four because of the personnel shortfall.

I hope this helps a little. Good luck with your paper. I would really be interested in the results of your paper.

Paul Tierney

**Stried, Justin**

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**From:** Mark Kirschhoffer <[REDACTED]>  
**Sent:** Monday, February 11, 2019 7:46 AM  
**To:** Stried, Justin  
**Subject:** RE: Brief survey for EFO project

Good morning,

1. Between January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2018 34 personnel hired and 20 retained. This broke down to 3 moved to Metro Paramedics employee positions still at Newport, 2 accepting career jobs out of state, 2 on leave of absence after having been hired by local career departments and currently on probation not being able to work part time and 1 terminated. The balance are still with us at Newport.
2. The need to reach out beyond our community to young find people looking for the stepping stone to a career firefighter/paramedic job. We no longer have people in our community interested in spending the time commitment to become certified firefighter/LMT either B or P to assist the community protection. Another issue in our area have quite a significant part time pay difference that has available qualified personnel searching for the best pay scale rather than working at their home town department.
3. Staffing and funding are the two big concerns. The need to employ contract personnel became necessary to retain minimum levels of competency for nights, weekends and holidays. Utilizing contract personnel has given our department acceptable minimum level staffing with the backfill problem for those sick or vacation the responsibility of the contact company. Unfortunately as time goes on our department model must increasingly rely on the contract model as funds allow for stability and required minimums. Finding and retaining paid part time employees becomes more of a struggle especially in the form of competent skilled personnel. The firefighter job market is good currently which creates a revolving door of personnel.

See if this helps and if you need additional or clarification please ask. I would be interested in your results.

Thank you,

Mark

Chief -

I'm currently working on my project for EFO year 3; I would be very appreciative of a couple minutes of your time to answer a couple questions that will help the data and discussion sections of my research. I'm writing on the current problem we are experiencing recruiting and retaining part-time personnel (as well as most departments with volunteer/part-time folks around us and nationwide). I'm not looking for you to dig around for exact data - just get your thoughts and a few additional talking points related to the issue:

1. Approximately what percentage of part-time personnel you hire are retained more than 2-3 years?
2. Do you identify any specific challenges related to recruiting and retaining part-time personnel?
3. Have you had to change staffing, or the way your department operates, due to the challenge of retaining part-time employees?

I realize a couple of these questions are a little open-ended, which isn't really the sign of a good survey. However, I'm mainly just looking for some backup data, talking points and quotes to further prove that the service really is struggling these days.

**Stried, Justin**

**From:** Craig Ruepke <[redacted]>  
**Sent:** Friday, February 08, 2019 9:12 AM  
**To:** Stried, Justin  
**Subject:** RE: Brief survey for EFO project

Justin – hope this helps .

1. 100%. Caveat is that we have not brought on anyone new in that time frame due to #2
2. Yes. Scheduling is key. More importantly, the on-boarding process including training in an academy style is hampered by their availability over time. Example; doing Monday – Friday vs. Saturdays & Sundays for longer periods, which increases the time commitment. Additionally, having more part-time staff that does not work a “regular” 24hr shift increases equipment costs as it relates to PPE as that cannot be shared. The regional demographics has changed creating a significant deficit to attract part-time individuals that want to make that commitment. Required training and documentation needed in today's society prevents the volunteering concept of “I'll just work a couple of days a month and drive the ambulance”
3. We have left the historical staffing of one person in the engine as this in the past was an acceptable response to car accidents and sometimes even fires when they were “stand-bys” at a station. This has resulted in increased (non-MABAS) mutual-aid as resources are quick to be exhausted by a simple car accident. In today's environment are use of part-time is generally to supplement existing crew (ie: having 2 PT come in to make a crew of 6 3:3 at one station) or fill-in for vacations when PT is available.

[Craig Ruepke]

**From:** Stried, Justin <[redacted]>  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 7, 2019 19:56  
**To:** Stried, Justin <[redacted]>  
**Subject:** Brief survey for EFO project

Chief -

I'm currently working on my project for EFO year 3; I would be very appreciative of a couple minutes of your time to answer a couple questions that will help the data and discussion sections of my research. I'm writing on the current problem we are experiencing recruiting and retaining part-time personnel (as well as most departments with volunteer/part-time folks around us and nationwide). I'm not looking for you to dig around for exact data - just get your thoughts and a few additional talking points related to the issue:

1. Approximately what percentage of part-time personnel you hire are retained more than 2-3 years?
2. Do you identify any specific challenges related to recruiting and retaining part-time personnel?
3. Have you had to change staffing, or the way your department operates, due to the challenge of retaining part-time employees?

I realize a couple of these questions are a little open-ended, which isn't really the sign of a good survey. However, I'm mainly just looking for some backup data, talking points and quotes to further prove that the service really is struggling these days.

Thanks again for your time, it is appreciated and helpful.