

Looking For Volunteers

By Roger Chatterton

Your volunteer fire departments are looking for a few good men and women. I say 'few' and 'good' because not everyone can do this job. Here are the qualities we look for in a potential fire/rescue/EMS responder:

1. Plays well with others, as grade school report cards used to say. Everything in fire/rescue/EMS is predicated on teamwork, not on individual heroics. The ability to get along with one's peers and work together as a unit is critical to accomplishing our mission, which is to save lives and property. Because this is often very dangerous work, the ability to function effectively as a team member is critical to survival.
2. A sense of commitment and loyalty. I am not going to understate the fact that being a fire/rescue/EMS responder is a major commitment. There are countless hours of training and drilling just to get someone to the point where they can go on an engine and be part of the team. Even after that the training and drills are on-going, both to learn new skills and to keep sharp what we have already learned. The first time you roll on a hot call and use the knowledge and skills you did not have a few months before, it all comes together.
3. Self-discipline. Are you going to respond to a page in the middle of the night in January, or in the middle of the afternoon on a hot July day? Are you going to attend trainings and drills even though you would rather stay home and watch TV? Are you going to refrain from a glass of wine with dinner that January evening or a beer on that hot July afternoon so you can respond? All of this takes discipline, and that discipline must come from within.
4. Challenge-oriented. Being a fire/rescue/EMS responder is extremely challenging, for many people the most challenging endeavor they have ever undertaken. You must learn the knowledge and skills to become a safe and productive team member. You must then be able to apply this knowledge and these skills in high-stress situations, and be able to maintain presence of mind when you are surrounded by chaos and danger.

Okay, that's the work but what are the rewards? The rewards are intangible, but they are significant. Let me cite an example. Every firefighter, paid and volunteer, who fought the Junction-LaGrange Fire in Weaverville, and the Oregon Fire before that, knows that they were part of a team that saved the downtown area of Weaverville. That is a wonderful feeling to have, but the only way to get it is to earn it. Once you have earned it, no one can ever take it away from you. Put these individual rewards over a career as a fire/rescue/EMS responder and there will be no doubt in your mind that you have derived something of immense value from your public service.

Look around at the members of the volunteer fire department in your community. As average as they may appear, they all embody the qualities I have listed above. If you have these qualities we need you and we want you. Getting started is simple, just contact any

volunteer fire department member and you will be invited to attend some training sessions as a spectator. Then you can decide if you want to take the next step and apply. One word of warning however, fire/rescue/EMS is addictive. You may just get hooked.

We are.