

## **County's Fire Department Cuts Costs Not Service - 12/8/2008**

### **By Chief Dennis Didio**

Well it has been about four years and Charlotte County Fire / EMS has completed rebuilding its final station from the devastating storm of 2004. The department has moved into its new Public Safety Complex and has consolidated two other Public Safety Departments, Animal Control and Emergency Management. This has placed all of the public safety operations at one location within the County. By this consolidation, the County was able to save about \$51,000 on a position whose duties were spread amongst the existing personnel. By doing this, the department has benefited economically. Therefore, this brings me to the main topic of my article this month. What has Charlotte County Fire/EMS done to help save money within its department during these tough budgetary times?

Fire/EMS is funded out of two separate budgets, the first is Fire Rescue, which is funded from fire assessments and the second is EMS, which is funded out of the ad-valorem property taxes. This year we cut the EMS budget by 3%. We cut \$744,000 in ad-valorem funds in our capital project for our new fire training facility and replaced it with funding from Fire /EMS impact fees. In 2007, we cut back one replacement fire engine at a cost of \$450,000. We upgraded all fire department breathing apparatus instead of a total replacement to meet the new National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards with cost savings of \$915,305.

The Fire/EMS Department also benefited from other efficiencies that were carried out county-wide. The County started a new program to save on electricity costs by installing lock boxes on AC thermostats with set temperatures within the stations. The County also installed motion sensors throughout the stations to shut off lighting whenever the trucks go out on a call and set times for outside lighting to come on and go off.

The department also addressed fuel conservation. After reviewing multiple responses to non-life threatening emergencies, we lowered responses to these types of calls to one unit, which helped save about 2,500 miles within a two-month period. In addition, we reduced the number of rounds Battalion Chief's make to each station to just twice a week, this saved the department around 5,600 miles a month. We also stopped units coming into headquarters for training and now take training out to the individual stations. We have also reduced the number of take home vehicles to just four command officers. All of these cut backs will save on fuel costs and maintenance costs on County vehicles and help to prolong their life span.

The department is also exploring ways to bring in additional revenue. Our training division has started to teach 40 hour college fire courses at our new Public Safety Complex and has earned about \$10,000 dollars within a three-month period. Therefore, Charlotte County Fire/EMS will continue to efficiently manage the Department and control costs in these trying times of budget restraints, while still providing the quality of service that our citizens expect of their Fire / EMS services.