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Southern Pines Receives Grant to Hire Six Additional Firefighters

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) announced on February 15 that the Southern Pines Fire Department (SPFD) has been awarded a SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) Grant. The grant totals \$1,101,559.20 and will be distributed to the Town over three years in order to help pay for the expenses to hire six additional firefighters.

The SAFER Grants are administered by FEMA to help local governments increase the number of firefighters available in their communities. Southern Pines received its last SAFER Grant in 2018, which totaled \$543,668 and helped to fund the compensation for six additional firefighters.

The SPFD currently has an authorized strength of 27 full-time firefighters, who are assigned to three separate shifts. They are assisted by 15 part-time and 8 volunteer firefighters. Under the leadership of Fire Chief and Assistant Town Manager Mike Cameron, the SPFD serves and protects a fire district totaling 40.3 square miles across Southern Pines and Moore County. Nearly 20,000 residents live in the Southern Pines fire district.

“The SPFD responded to 2,871 emergency calls in 2022, which was the highest number of calls we have ever received in one year and represents an average of 7 calls per day,” shares Chief Cameron. “Beyond the traditional emergency calls, our team also successfully managed several unique and complex situations such as staffing the U.S. Women’s Open for seven days in June, planning and providing coverage for two protests, and assisting our community during the extended power outage that resulted from the December attack on our power grid.”

While the SPFD’s calls in 2022 were nearly 20% higher from the previous 12 months, that number represented an increase of almost 40% compared to the 1,816 calls in 2020. SPFD closely monitors overlapping calls, which are defined as those that come in when the department is already committed to a different emergency. In 2022, 31% of calls overlapped with another call, which decreases the availability of the primary response units and firefighters. In order to respond to an overlapping call, the department may have to dispatch SPFD volunteers, another fire department, or call back SPFD personnel who are off duty. Overlapping calls not only present logistical and staffing challenges, but in most cases, the response times are higher than normal or desired.

“These six additional firefighters will immediately impact our deployment capabilities and provide a more effective response,” adds Cameron. “The increase in emergency call volume directly correlates with the growth Southern Pines is experiencing, not only from new residents and businesses, but also from the high number of visitors traveling to or through our area. We must be properly staffed and equipped to handle incidents when the number of people in Southern Pines reaches far beyond those 20,000 who reside in our district. Whether a citizen or

a visitor, each emergency situation needs and deserves the same level of rapid response and compassionate care.”

“Call volumes are just one indicator of the work we do and the impact we’re able to have,” states Cameron. “Despite this historically high level of calls in 2022, we were able to lead 140 public education events and install 214 smoke alarms and change 210 batteries. Our firefighters received nearly 10,000 hours of training and our fire marshals completed 1,641 field inspections and reviewed 277 plans to ensure code compliance. All of this work and effort makes Southern Pines a safer place for all of us, which can be seen in the Class 2 Insurance Rating we received from the State Fire Marshal in April. This directly impacts property insurance premiums that our residents and business owners pay and is an exceptional grade for a department of our size. By adding more firefighters, we can continue adjusting to the changing needs of our community.”

It is anticipated that these six firefighters will begin work around July 2023. To apply for these or other positions in the SPFD, please visit bit.ly/tospjobs.