

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

Little Gasparilla Island Fire and Rescue, Inc. is the only island service tax funded through a special assessment by Charlotte County. Historically, the creation and maintaining of a dedicated fire and rescue service, in addition to services provided by Charlotte County, has been a contentious and polarizing issue. 2016 represented an opportunity for substantial changes to the composition of the Board of Directors due to required elections. Three candidates (Andy Hagelin, Paul Holmes and Bob Weronik) ran for Board seats to represent their respective districts. All three won their seats and a fourth of five total Board positions was filled by Leigh Olson due to a resignation as the new Board took office. Conrad Coolidge, Board Treasurer, remained in his role.

At the time the new Board took office, Fire Chief Stephen Demeter was out of work on a work-related injury. Firefighter Paramedic Don Adams was appointed by the Board as the Acting Fire Chief in Demeter's absence.

The new Board quickly established a set of written strategies and priorities. In summary, the Board committed to transparency in all decision making, engaging in dialogue with islanders before decisions are made, fair and respectful treatment of every stakeholder, paid professional staff accountability and workforce stabilization, a risk management approach to resourcing and investments, and building a strong relationship with Charlotte County Fire and Rescue. The full document is available on lgifr.com.

Acting Chief Adams quickly addressed one of the Board's concerns when he conducted an island-wide strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis. In summary, his report found that funding, accessibility of fire apparatus throughout the island, limited responders, and poorly maintained vegetation and exotic plant life created unique risks. Adams also conducted a comprehensive review of historical calls for service by call type, hour of day and day of week, and response time. In summary, Adams found that we average about 50 calls for service per year and the majority of calls were medical emergencies. Adams proposed a number of strategies and goals to address these issues, which were endorsed by the Board. This assessment was also a critical activity required of any future grant applications. The full document is available on lgifr.com.

During the previous Board's tenure, a two wheel drive fire engine was purchased for the island. This purchase was to complement the six wheel Polaris response vehicle. Some Board members were concerned about the limitations of this fire truck due to the lack of any paved roads, the numerous sharp turns in trails, and the narrow pathways due to dense vegetation. Acting Chief Adams conducted an island-wide accessibility study for this fire engine. In summary, the study found the accessibility of the engine throughout the island is very limited and was primarily useful around the condos on the southern end of the island and along some main artery trails. The results of this study were important because it will drive an evidence-based decision making process for capital spending on acceptable island response vehicles in the future. The full document along with island-wide maps of accessible areas is on lgifr.com.

Acting Chief Adams conducted a lifecycle study of all critical fire equipment to determine what will need to be replaced and when to assist the Board with future capital planning. Adams completed the study which included fire apparatus, water pumps, air tanks and other critical equipment. The full document can be found on lgifr.com.

The lease for the fire house was set to renew in January 2016; however, the Board learned that certain building repairs and maintenance which had been agreed upon during the previous lease renewal negotiation had not been completed. The landlord would not enter into a long-term agreement until all of the previously agreed repairs had been made. A call out for volunteers to help with fire house repairs was amazing. Islander Mike Anderson led the repairs and acquisition of materials. Over 20 islanders converged on the fire house one weekend and helped clear overgrown vegetation, repair torn porch screens, repair ceiling fans, and other repairs. To date, the only repairs left to be made are

exterior painting of the house and rebuilding a deck, which is being managed by Tarpon Realty as permits may need to be secured.

In February, the Board was notified by Fire Chief Stephen Demeter and Firefighter Paul Coblentz, through their attorney, demanding additional wage compensation for hours worked over 40 hours per week in 2014 and 2015 under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). The Board hired an attorney specializing in labor law and FLSA. The Board denied their demand and they later filed suit in federal court. The lawsuit is ongoing. A motion for dismissal of the lawsuit has been filed and we await that outcome.

In April, the LGIFR was contacted by the Florida State Fire Marshal's Office (SFM) inquiring about our progress addressing deficiencies identified during their October 2015 onsite audit visit as a result of an islander complaint. The SFM Office had not been contacted by anyone from LGIFR since the audit. Acting Chief Adams obtained a copy of the audit report which detailed a number of deficiencies of State Code and firefighter safety standards. It was learned that the report was sent only to the fire chief's email and the previous and current Board had not been advised of the audit or deficiencies found. The Board discussed the matter with their attorney and terminated the contract for services with Fire Chief Stephen Demeter for cause immediately. Acting Chief Adams immediately began working with the SFM to address the audit deficiencies and was granted a one year extension to addressing the concerns due to no one on the Board being informed of the audit.

In April, Don Adams was appointed as LGIFR's permanent administrative fire chief. Don agreed to a monthly stipend and would only receive additional pay if he worked shifts when coverage could not be fulfilled by staff firefighter paramedics.

Throughout the year, the Board met with Charlotte County Fire and Rescue Chief Marianne Taylor to find ways to collaborate and leverage an improved relationship to address island risks. During those meetings, clarity was gained on fire and rescue training requirements for volunteer assistants, fire house building requirements, equipment sharing and acquisition guidelines, and specific programs the county could share with LGIFR.

Islanders identified a need through conversations with Fire Chief Adams during his occasional "coffee with the Chief" events. Due to the fact LGIFR has only one response vehicle, Chief Adams does not have transportation when he is on the island meeting with the community. Several islanders (Pede and Bo Fraser, and Rhonda Olson) took it upon themselves to host an island fundraising event to raise money to purchase a golf cart for Chief Adams. They organized a dinner event with door and raffle prizes for attendees. In the end, they raised more than \$4,000 to purchase a golf cart.

We did not go without challenges in 2016. The LGIFR website was set to expire in September and was built on a platform set to sunset in September. Fortunately, islander Caroline Doran stepped forward and took on the task as webmaster and rebuilt the entire website on the new platform. The new website is live today at lgifr.com.

LGI suffered a rather frightening brush fire in May. A large area of vegetation was destroyed as well as a portion of a boardwalk. A number of islanders rushed to the scene and assisted the on duty firefighter with pulling hose and using rakes and shovels to extinguish the fire. This was a great example of island spirit. However, a complaint was filed by former Fire Chief Demeter with the State Fire Marshal's Office that non-certified volunteers assisted LGIFR. The State Fire Marshal's Office conducted an investigation and the complaint was closed as unsubstantiated since these good Samaritans were not affiliated with LGIFR as volunteers and their assistance had not been requested.

In September, Fire Chief Adams presented the Board with twenty one policies and procedures he developed in response to the State Fire Marshal's audit deficiencies of October 2015. The Board unanimously approved all of the documents. Fire Chief Adams submitted the documents to the State

Fire Marshal and was shortly thereafter notified that LGIFR was in full compliance with all State regulations and codes and the audit issues were closed. This was an exhaustive and great effort by Chief Adams to meet the original deadlines set by the State and did not exercise the granted extension despite losing 6 months of time due to the failure to notify the Board of the audit or deficiencies found.

Throughout the year, the Board worked with Fire Chief Adams to be prepared for the annual FEMA Assistance for Firefighters Grant. Prior to the grant being announced, we had conducted the required documented risk assessments, conducted supporting lifecycle and accessibility analyzes, and developed a prioritized list of needs the grant could fulfill. The grant open in October and a new 6x6 Polaris firefighting response vehicle equipped with a Compressed Air Foam system was requested. The vehicle costs \$47,000, but after grant funding would cost LGIFR around \$3,000. We await the announcement of grant recipients which is expected in early 2017.

The Board working with Fire Chief Adams to apply to become an approved entity to received surplus state and federal equipment. We were notified in October that we have been accepted into the program and provided our list of requested items, if any should come available. We have requested firefighting equipment, 4x4 brush fire response apparatus, and a 25' US Coast Guard SAFE boat.

In collaboration with the Charlotte County Fire and Rescue, a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program was developed by Fire Chief Don Adams and endorsed by Charlotte County Fire and Rescue. The program, which would train community volunteers to assist with fire and rescue tasks outside of the "hot zone", is set to begin December 10th. The training would occur over 4 or 5 Saturdays and would include a number of exercises with our firefighter paramedics and Charlotte County mainland responders. The program is specifically designed to allow participants to participate at their comfort level and physical capabilities, and is open to anyone who frequents or lives on the island.

The Board of Directors and Fire Chief Adams hope islanders will see that we are committed to maintaining a professional, well equipped, and community-focused fire and emergency medical service. We have stayed true to our stated strategies and goals of inclusiveness and transparency. Our future success can only be truly measured by the support and involvement of our island community. We cannot do this alone.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Weronik, Chairman
Andrew Hagelin, Vice Chairman
Conrad Coolidge, Treasurer
Leigh Olson, Secretary
Paul Holmes, Director