WILKESBORO FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIREFIGHTER IN RESIDENCY PROGRAM
PROGRAM GUIDELINES

March 31, 2010
Lee C. Sudia
Fire Chief
PURPOSE:

The purpose of this program is two-fold: 1) to provide the Town of Wilkesboro Fire Department with additional 24 hour staffing and ; to provide 6 college students from Appalachian State University and or Wilkes Community College a way to reduce the cost of receiving a college education in return for service provided to the citizens of Wilkesboro and Wilkes County. This program would allow the Town of Wilkesboro to house up to six students who are attending a local institution of higher learning a place to stay for free, while providing the department with two additional firefighters per shift to supplement the Engineers and other part-time and volunteer staff. This program if accepted by the Town would provide a staffed engine company for immediate response to any emergency on a 24 hour a day basis, 7 days a week, thereby reducing the stress of answering calls on our volunteer staff during their normal work hours of 8-5 Monday through Friday. It would also allow for additional staffing during the 24 hour periods of Saturday and Sunday to supplement available volunteer and part-time personnel. It would automatically increase our staffing on a 1 per 1 basis as far as credit with the North Carolina Office of the State Fire Marshal for insurance reduction points instead of our current .33 per 1 or .25 per 1 rating currently given to us by the State for staffing.

This program has been used with great success by several other entities in the State of North Carolina including Wrightsville Beach Fire Department, Boone Fire Department, Wake County Fire Departments and several volunteer and combination career-volunteer fire departments across the State of North Carolina to boost on-shift response at minimal to no-cost, while reducing the stress to volunteers during normal working hours.

GUIDELINES:

The following guidelines would be established for applicants for the program:

1) 18 Years of Age
2) Able to maintain a “2.75” grade average or better.
3) NC Firefighter I or IFSAC Firefighter I or better.
4) NC Medical Responder or better.
5) Hepatitis A, B, and C Vaccinations, current Tetanus
6) Valid NC Driver’s License
7) Complete a standard Fire Department Physical successfully.
8) Able to work their assigned shifts for the hours of 17:00-07:00 Monday through Friday.
9) Able to work their assigned shifts of 08:00Saturday through 08:00 Sunday and 08:00 Sunday through 07:00 Monday.
10) Maintains their living quarters in a neat, orderly condition.

APPLICATION PROCESS:

Applicants for the Firefighter in Residency Program will have to be recommended by their college advisor. They will then have to submit the attached application package with copies of their certifications for verification. The applications shall be reviewed by the Fire Department
Command Staff and approved applicants shall come before the Command Staff for a formal interview. Approved applicants reviewed by the Command Staff shall be forwarded to the Police Chief for background investigation and fingerprinting. Once the background investigation is successfully completed the applicant shall be recommended to the Town Manager by the Fire Chief for approval for the program.

**COST OF PROGRAM:**

This program is known as a “Low to No-Cost” program in that the program itself is based on existing funds and budget. The only actual additional cost for the program will be the uniforms and turn-out gear for the resident firefighters and some additional bedding for the bunk room. Current Firefighter salaries for career staff run between 30-32 thousand dollars a year starting out in most career and combination Fire Departments, so the addition of 6 resident firefighters for the cost of turn-out gear and uniforms and a pager and some bedding equates to basically the same amount we spend on each individual volunteer firefighter. A significant amount of this cost may be absorbed through additional SAFER grants used for the recruitment and retention of volunteer personnel, along with State grants that may be used to offset the cost of turn-out gear. Another possible funding source may be the college or university that the students come from.

**BENEFIT OF THE PROGRAM:**

There are several benefits to this program, from the taxpayer standpoint, it increases on-duty staffing at the fire station on a 24-hour a day basis, which is a significant part of the Fire Department grading schedule used to reduce insurance ratings in a town. This increased staffing with residents (in conjunction with the two part-time firefighters requested in the budget from 8-5 Monday through Friday) gives us an Engine Company of a minimum of 4 personnel which may respond to the scene of an incident as soon as the alarm is received. This program would also move us closer to complying with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 1710; which deals with deployment and staffing of career and combination fire departments. This standard states that an Engine Company should be staffed with a minimum of 4 personnel and should be able to reach its first due area within 5 minutes of dispatch 90% of the time. The State of North Carolina Office of the State Fire Marshal (NCOSFM), also requires an Engine Company to be staffed with a minimum of 4 personnel for any fire response. If at least 4 people are not on the Engine or respond with that engine arriving at the same time, the department receives no credit for that response. Numerous no-credit responses during an evaluation period could result in the loss of insurance rating and the significant increase of insurance premiums to residential and commercial and business properties.

A second and equally important feature of this increased staffing program would be the reduction of stress on volunteer personnel dealing with responding to emergency calls during normal working hours. Of our call volume, a single properly equipped and staffed Engine Company should be able to handle approximately 90% of our emergency responses, with minimal volunteer response necessary. This would reduce the stress to volunteers caused by employers becoming increasingly less likely to release volunteers to answer fire and first-
responder calls while they are at work. With a tightening economy, the probability that employers will allow volunteers to leave work to answer calls is reducing. Additionally, most volunteers on a department do not work in the district they respond with. Even if their employer allows them to leave for calls, there is the problem of a delayed response time to the scene of the incident by the volunteer due to the travel distance involved.

A third benefit of this program is its ability to expand as our number of stations increases, allowing for adequate 24 hour coverage at all stations for a fraction of the cost of a totally career staff. It also allows us to place stations where the call volume indicates whether or not there are sufficient volunteer resources in that specific area.

A fourth benefit is the interaction between the Town, the Community and the Universities and Colleges in our area and the positive public appearance the Town is placed in by being part of this internship program. The Students who are resident firefighters will be able to experience first-hand the friendly attitudes of the people of Wilkesboro and the residents of the greater Wilkes County area. Many of them if they decide to leave the area after graduation, will leave with the positive opinion built by fond memories of their service to this community and her people.

**SHIFT SCHEDULE:**

Our department operates on a modified 24 on 48 off schedule, where each shift receives a four day weekend break of Fri-Mon, every third week.

**IN SUMMATION:**

This resident Firefighter program proposal is just another way of providing "More Bang for the Emergency Services Buck". The program has a world of different benefits associated with it for very little to no-cost. It may, if approved be a significant assistance in helping us to lower our insurance rating within the Town, saving businesses and industries within the Town large amounts (an average of a 12% reduction on insurance premiums) for each grade we are able to lower our rating, assisting business and industry in economic terms during these tough fiscal times. This program will also be of benefit to the students who participate, by providing them with critical practical experience in their chosen field, while developing an attitude of service within them, from the service they render to the department and the citizens of Wilkesboro and Wilkes County.