

Tina Cook
Munhall Volunteer Fire Company #4
Allegheny County

Good Morning, my name is Tina Cook, I am a member of Munhall Volunteer Fire Company #4 in Allegheny County. I am currently aligned with the training division. I am a 22 year student of the fire service and have been involved in EMS for 18 years. I am one of five female Suppression Instructors in the Commonwealth, and one of three female Adjuncts at the Pennsylvania State Fire Academy. In my "other" life, I am the Fire and Life Safety Manager for the US Steel Tower in downtown Pittsburgh.

Munhall is 2 1/2 square miles and there are four volunteer fire companies in our community. Company #4 serves approximately 11,000 residents. We ran 341 calls last year which is about average for us, ten years ago we ran half as many calls. This year we are on pace to beat our 2018 numbers. Our top five call types last year were vehicle accidents with injuries, building fire, unintentional alarm activations, gas leak, and smoke scare / smell of smoke.

Target hazards for us include nursing homes, schools, research facilities and an airport, as well as well as CSX and Norfolk Southern lines. These hazards are found both in our community and our mutual aid areas.

The biggest issues our department faces are recruitment/retention, and funding.

Our funding is about 75% municipality funded, we do get the state grant (\$15k), and the remainder we raise through fundraising.

Allegheny County does have the FireVest scholarship program through the Community College of Allegheny County. This is a two-year program and requires five years of service to a fire department. This program gives a full scholarship for an Associate's degree or certificate program.

I myself did benefit from the FireVest scholarship. I got my Bachelor's degree many years ago and often wondered about going back to school to kind of "catch up", but I didn't want to take away from someone who truly needed that scholarship for an education. When I heard through the Allegheny County Fire Academy that the FireVest program was in danger if ending because of a lack of interest, I jumped on the chance, and got an Associates in General Studies. It was actually fun to go back to school and challenge myself again!

In our fire department we have had some members take advantage of the FireVest, but in talking to most people, if given the option, they would rather do a four-year program at the same school than do two years to get credits and an Associates, and then have to go somewhere else and hope the credits / courses transfer. For us the FireVest seems to do better as a retention tool and less as recruitment.

We do a great job of involving the kids in the community, doors to the station open, fire fighters around to talk and help if needed. We love being able to support our schools! Sporting events, parades, events, pub ed, we are a visible presence as the kids grow up.

The opportunity for us to get young adults involved in the fire service through an offer of tuition assistance within the state system is fantastic! The department would have the student / fire fighter for four years, and if they stay in the area upon graduation, who knows how long the department would benefit.

For the tuition assistance (for anyone really), I feel there should be minimum requirements including the Entry Level Fire Training (or equivalent) and Fire Fighter I.

As an instructor, I teach around the Commonwealth and talk about the need for training any chance I get, and with anyone who will listen. I spend a lot of time speaking with fire fighters and officers about the different training tracks and opportunities available, as well as certification. There is a lot of interest, they are just looking for the support.

The tuition assistance would be a great chance to help with both recruitment and retention and I urge you to consider.

Thank you!