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## Milton Fire Department faces issues

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By Carla McCann ■ Advertisement  
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MILTON-New volunteers for the Milton Fire Department have helped fill the ranks, but the fire chief still is concerned about the department's future.

Only two of the eight new recruits live within city limits, and being on call means they have to stay at the fire department. The problem is that the station isn't designed to house people, said Chief Loren Lippincott.

The department's living quarters need to be redesigned, he said.

"That's something we'll have to address in the next budget," Lippincott said.

And that's not the only concern.

The community's growth offers no guarantee the department will continue to be adequately staffed in the future, Lippincott said.

He recently recommended to a 10-member task force that the department hire full-time firefighters. But his idea wasn't supported by the Milton Joint Fire Commission or by the task force.

The commission and task force believe the solution to a staffing shortage is to recruit and retain volunteers.

Many of the department's more than 50 members also are cross-trained as emergency medical technicians. The EMT service is operated out of the Madison Avenue department.

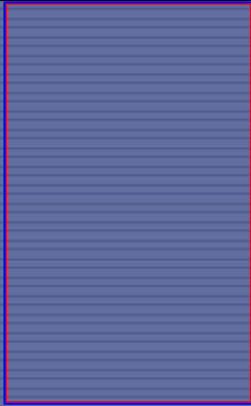
Milton's plight is no different than what many other volunteer departments are experiencing statewide, wrote Don Hunjadi, executive director of the Wisconsin Emergency Medical Service Association, in an e-mail to The Janesville Gazette. He has followed the news stories about the Milton department and is confident the state organization can help remedy the problem.

Discussions on whether departments should become full-time services are becoming more common across the state, Hunjadi said.

But seldom does a department with fewer than 1,000 calls a year hire full-time employees, Hunjadi said.

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The Milton department annually responds to about 650 calls, including about 400 for emergency medical services, according to the task force report.

Hunjadi believes the Milton department can recruit and keep volunteers.

"This is something that the Wisconsin EMS Association has become somewhat of an expert on throughout the United States," Hunjadi said. "We have created and administered a recruitment program that has seen success throughout many areas of Wisconsin."

Lippincott said he doesn't dispute Hunjadi's assessment, but he said it's going to be a problem when calls outnumber available staff.

The Milton department fell short in its recent effort to recruit volunteers, and it still needs to design an incentive package to retain staff, Lippincott said.


"I've talked to a number of people who said they weren't interested in doing the training or being on call," he said. "There are a lot of ideas for retention of volunteers ... But there are a lot of different needs to meet. One catch-all for the group isn't going to work."

The new hires are in training.

"I know making a jump to a full-time department is a huge move," Lippincott said. "It's not something that is going to be a first choice."

But Lippincott said he views his job as keeping all avenues open for the commission and serving as a seer.

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