

OFFICER

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Fire officials won't get training officer

By Yvonne C.T. Vassel

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — Fire Chief Mike Molthop insists that his department needs a training officer to oversee and standardize the work of emergency medical personnel.

However, City Manager David Harden doesn't see it that way.

"I'm still not personally convinced we need a fire training officer," Harden said.

In his departmental budget request for 1984-85, Molthop asked the city to include the new position of fire training officer at a cost of \$26,458. He said the new position is necessary.

"Paramedics have to operate to specific standards," Molthop said. "We need someone who knows what those standards are to coordinate things and ensure our people have the most training they can get."

When the request was presented in a budget session, the city commission wanted to know why As-

sistant Fire Chief Larry Granger, a former paramedic, could not act as training officer.

Granger, who was one of the city's first firefighter-paramedics in 1976, said his certification has lapsed and it would take him about one year of schooling before he could seek certification. Paramedics have to be recertified every three years.

The department also uses a staffing system that requires firefighters and paramedics to work 24 hours straight and then get 48 hours off. If required to work those shifts, Granger said it would be impossible for him to fulfill his duties as assistant chief. Paramedics now report to the shift commander on duty and get their training through community college courses and with Orange County Emergency Medical Services.

When he started as a paramedic, Granger said, everything being done at the scene of a medical emergency had to be cleared with the hospital emergency room before a paramedic could proceed.

Now, firefighter-paramedic Louis Salado said,

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"We have certain narcotics we have to have okayed by a doctor but we can start an IV (administer intravenous medications) and administer about five different drugs before we call a doctor."

Fire Lt. Reed Devault said there are sometimes staffing problems when paramedics switch shifts because of vacations or other scheduling problems, or when new paramedics start. Each paramedic tends to work differently and to allocate more or less responsibility to the firefighter-emergency medical technician on the scene. An EMT is a person trained in advanced first aid treatment. EMTs cannot administer medication on their own authority.

Molthop said those staffing problems point out the need for a training officer. Each city's fire department has different work habits that are determined by factors such as individual training programs, manpower and equipment.

"Our goal in both fire and emergency medical services is to establish training manuals centered around our department," the chief said. "There is so much different equipment in the field we have to center our training around the type of calls we receive in our area."

The training officer also would train the emergency medical technicians (all Winter Park firefighters are trained as EMTs) because they are as responsible in the field as the paramedic for running a smooth operation, Molthop said.

"My big drive in this department is training. . . I want to give the people all they need to sharpen their skills," he said.

Of the 2,789 calls received by the department in 1983, 1,728 were rescue calls, he said.

A training officer also would act as a third paramedic per shift and increase the department's ability to remain fully staffed during vacations. Normally there are two paramedics per shift. The department has six paramedics.

Molthop said he appears to have lost the fight to get a full-time training officer, unless the commission has a change of heart this month. During budget sessions commission members indicated that they would not approve the training officer budget item this time around.

"I'm disappointed I didn't get that, but I have an alternative solution of using a shift person who would come in on some days off to do training," Molthop said.

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