

New hybrid fire trucks popular

Chief: Rescue/pumper units efficient, cheaper

By Yvonne C.T. Vassel

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — The fire department's unique hybrid rescue/pumper units have saved the city an estimated \$72,661 in the first 30 months of operation, according to Fire Chief Mike Molthop.

The two units went into operation in January 1982 and were specially built by Emergency One fire apparatus builders in Ocala after other companies rejected the idea, Molthop said.

The two replaced two old pumper units and a rescue unit and also gave the city increased coverage and capability at rescue calls, the fire chief said.

"We were in a pinch. We had two fire engines that needed replacing and we needed to replace the rescue truck. But we were getting so many rescue calls we really needed to buy a second rescue unit," Molthop said.

Between October 1983 and Sept. 30, 1984, of the 2,836 calls received by the fire department 1,767 calls were rescue calls, Molthop said. Under the old system, the rescue unit operated by two paramedics and a pumper unit operated by two firefighter/emergency medical technicians would usually respond to a rescue call.

"When we are working a situation where someone has no vital signs, a minimum of three people is preferable in order to administer drugs, ventilate the patient and do the compression," Molthop said. "So we would have two units and four people tied up on a call."

In accident cases a pumper is often required in case of a fire or spilled

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fuel and, under the old system, the pumper carried the type of equipment needed to free trapped victims.

"The rescue/pumpers created a tremendous change in our manning assignments to where we now require three people minimum per engine. When we eliminated the rescue trucks we picked up two people per shift and we were able to place one rescue unit at our Canton Avenue station and the other at Lakemont Avenue," Molthop said.

To estimate the savings caused by the new units, Molthop said the operational cost of the last year the two pumpers and rescue truck were in service was compared to that of the new units.

For example, between January 1982 and January 1983, the rescue/pumpers cost a total of \$5,878.84 to maintain the vehicles

with parts and fuel. By comparison, the three old units had cost a total of \$36,127.84 to maintain in 1981. Although operational savings usually go hand in hand with the purchase of a new, more efficient vehicle, Molthop said he's very pleased at the results.

"The cost effectiveness had proven itself," Molthop said. "The versatility of our operation and what it has done to increase our effectiveness in emergencies is tremendous."

The department estimated between January 1982 and July 1, 1984, it would have cost \$90,319.60 to maintain the old equipment. The new system cost \$17,658.52. The actual savings are probably greater, assistant fire chief Larry Grainger wrote in a memo, because inflation costs were not figured in the estimates.

There are some disadvantages to the new units, Molthop said, but not enough to decrease their effectiveness. For example, gurneys, or wheeled stretchers, have to be lifted a little higher to make it into the rescue/pumper and the

seating of the paramedics around the patient is different than that of a conventional rescue vehicle.

If he had to get another unit made now, he would incorporate some design changes to increase the visibility outside from the rear of the cab, he said, and make it a little more roomy inside.

Many cities across the country — such as West Haven, Conn., and Ankeny, Iowa, have expressed interest in the rescue/pumpers and in obtaining similar units for their departments. There have also been articles written in various fire service publications, including one in New South Wales, Australia.

The savings is good news for Winter Park and for other departments seeking ways to decrease costs while maintaining an optimum level of service, Molthop said.

"Many cities are facing financial pinches and they need to reduce costs while increasing services. I feel this is one answer," Molthop said.

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