

## June 26, 2023 Comments

Thank you to all who have had a part in the events of the night- especially our City Clerk, Mrs. Sherri McBride, who had the vision and spearheaded this event, and on behalf of our firefighters we are humbled by the love and appreciation shown us. I'm about the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> speaker of the night, so I will keep it brief.

My involvement with the Cottdale Volunteer Fire Department began officially in June of 2015- I previously had a very good relationship with former Chief Andy Anderson due to our mutual involvement in the Jackson County Association of Volunteer Fire Departments. Kaitlyn and I got married on Saturday, May 30, returned from our honeymoon on the following Friday evening, and at 8:00 Saturday morning I was at the Cottdale Fire Department at my first official meeting, and it's been a great 8 years since. Andy quickly appointed me as the Asst. Chief, and we worked closely together until his health began failing and he had to step down from his duties. The city council then appointed me to the Chief position in April of 2017.

The joke is often told, there are only 2 things firefighters hate- change, and the way things are! My mindset as the chief is one of continual improvement. Thank you to the city council for empowering me to seek continual improvement, and for your support when we look to update and improve our equipment. I often brag about how well you treat us when in conversation with other people from different departments. I did some rough estimates earlier, and through various grants that you have allowed us to pursue and helped fund the required matches on some of them, we have received over \$300,000 to update various equipment since 2017- some of the highlights include-

- New SCBAs in 2017 and 2019
- New Rescue truck and set of Jaws of Life in 2018
- New bunker gear in 2019- proud to say the first department in the state of Florida with this line of gear
- New Quick Response truck, medical safety equipment, and a gear washer/dryer in 2020
- Updated the attack package of hoses and nozzles in 2021

- Second round of new bunker gear in 2022
- Second set of eDraulic Jaws of Life equipment provide by the Firehouse subs Public Safety Foundation

However, all the equipment in the world is 100% useless without the personnel to use it. The firefighters of this department continually make me proud of their efforts to help make bad situations in our communities better by showing up. In 2015, the average yearly call volume was approximately 60 calls for service annually. In 2022, Cottondale Fire Dept. was called for service 203 times, and we had a response on over 95% of those calls. Let's face it, people don't usually just call 911 because everything is going just peachy. I firmly believe you either get better each day, or you regress a little bit, and I have tried to instill that same mindset in our other firefighters. I beam with pride when they tell me they have seen something new and ask about trying it or ask about a certain class. I went to my first Water on the Fire Conference on Pensacola Beach in 2022- over 600 other firefighters from all over the United States joined for 3 days of intense class lectures and hands on training, and it lit a fire for further learning that has permeated our department. Multiple other members since then have sought outside training and made the effort to grow from it.

One of the biggest compliments I have heard was earlier this year, a couple of us attended a VMR Operations class- a 4 day class of vehicle extrication training, mind you- and firefighter from another department said "I thought Cottondale was just volunteer"- My response was that we are, but our citizens deserve a professional mindset, and that when they called for help, they didn't ask if we were paid or not. By the way, we held our own with the members from the paid departments from all over the Florida panhandle- Marianna, Tallahassee, Walton County, South Walton Fire District, Holley Navarre, and Escambia County.

In conclusion, thank you to the members of this department for your effort, dedication, and commitment, and at this time we have a small token of appreciation for each of you.