



May 5, 2007

## Firefighters' union takes big notice of primary

For 1st time association takes active role to endorse candidates

By Chris Sikich

Chris.Sikich@TheNoblesvilleLedger.com

May 5, 2007

NOBLESVILLE -- The Hamilton County Professional Fire Fighters Association has had a growing influence since branching off from the Indianapolis union in 2004.

The association, which is the Local 4416 of International Association of Fire Fighters, represents 250 firefighters and paramedics in Fishers, Westfield, Noblesville and Cicero.

The association endorsed candidates from Cicero, Fishers, Noblesville and Westfield for Tuesday's primary -- the first time it's taken such an active role in an election, even including when the members were part of the Indianapolis union.

The union also is planning a firefighter training day later this year for elected officials.

It's been involved with the creation of merit boards in Noblesville and Westfield to make sure firefighters advance ranks by a measurable system, although both communities had been talking about such boards for years.

In Cicero, it's helped spearhead firefighters' inclusion into the state's police and fire pension program.

It's also funded geographical information studies in Cicero and Westfield to determine long-range planning.

Chiefs from the three northern Hamilton County communities say they have good relationships with the union.

Tony Murray, president of the union and a Noblesville paramedic/engineer, said the union separated from Indianapolis to have a local focus, saying Indianapolis and Hamilton County are different places with different local politics.

While it's not a collective-bargaining unit, Murray said the union has input with chiefs on many issues, including budgets.

"It's easier for the administrations to have one representative who collects ideas or concerns rather than a revolving door of individuals," Murray said. "No chief and no firefighter organization is ever going to agree on every point, but we understand the process and we understand that the chief is the chief and has the final decision."

Noblesville Chief Ken Gilliam uses the union to collect information, such as comparing pay scales to other communities. That came up in the 2007 budget cycle, when firefighters' pay was bumped up in the higher ranks.

In Westfield, Battalion Chief Tony Tracy is a vice president in the union. He said it's funding a geographical study that would have cost the town \$150,000, and expects to have it within a year. "We're studying where to place additional firehouses, future staffing levels and any special equipment we need."

In Cicero, Battalion Chief Darren Collar, a union vice president, said firefighters recently received permission from the town council to join the state's police and fire pension

program. He hopes that process is complete this summer. Firefighters there have been part of the public workers' pension program.

"The biggest benefit I've felt is to our survivors," he said. "If we're killed in the line of duty, there are a lot of benefits that still go toward our families."

The geographical information study being funded by the firefighter union would have cost Cicero about \$50,000, said Chief Steve Peachey, and it will provide the same information as Westfield's.

"The union has access to things I don't have the ability to get," Peachey said. "I don't have the administrative staff to seek things out, so they've been a good resource for our new pension program and they were able to educate us and instruct us in the direction we needed to go and what we needed to do."