



AAVFD President Johnny Alberson accepts Wildland Fire Prevention Grant check from State Forester Linda Casey. Looking on are: L-R Chauncey Wood, District 6 Director; Sgt/Engineer Bryant Wisdom, Clio VFD, Barbour County; Captain Ronnie Danner, Ariton VFD, Dale County; and Chief Robbie Davidson, McIntosh VFD, Washington County.

Working Together for Your Protection: AFC & AAVFD

By *Elishia Ballentine*, Editor

In the state of Alabama, there are over 1,000 volunteer fire departments and approximately 25,000 volunteer firefighters.

The organization that works behind the scenes for these departments and individuals is the Alabama Association of Volunteer Fire Departments (AAVFD), celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. Established on May 20, 1977, the AAVFD coordinates grants, scholarships, insurance and other benefits for its 881 member departments and firefighter families. The AAVFD also drafts and introduces legislation to benefit the volunteer fire service.

According to Chauncey D. Wood, Public Relations Director for the AAVFD, "Serving as a volunteer firefighter is a tough job, not just physically, but also in keeping pace with the professional and educational requirements. The guidelines have become stricter. To qualify and be certified is time consuming – individuals must attend classes, study, and pass tests – then keep up with continuing education. In recent years, it seems that volunteerism is slipping away. Therefore, one of the missions of the AAVFD is the recruiting and retention of volunteers."

Johnny Alberson has served as AAVFD's president since 2005, but according to Wood, the backbone of the organization is Executive Assistant, Sandra Mott. In addition to keeping this large group organized, she edits the association's newsletter.

Another facet of the AAVFD is its partnership with the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC). Each year, the Commission implements several beneficial programs for the 998 volunteer fire departments which are "certified" with the Commission. (To achieve AFC certification, a fire department must have 12 or more firefighters.) The Commission assists the departments in the purchase of new equipment and firefighter clothing, and they also assist in forming new departments in areas where fire protection is needed.

The relationship between the two organizations is actually three-fold: The AFC provides financial support, equipment donation, and firefighting reinforcement. The Commission provides financial support by administering wildland fire prevention grants to the state's qualifying volunteer fire departments for the development of prevention programs in their coverage areas. Funded by the Alabama legislature and channeled through the Commission's budget, these grants have totaled approximately \$100,000 annually since 2000. The Rural Community Fire Protection Steering (RCFP) Committee, created under Alabama law, is composed of 25 volunteer firefighters from the four Commission regions who monitor all appropriations for the volunteer fire service and provide recommendations to the State Forester for the distribution of these funds.

The AFC provides surplus equipment and radios to the AAVFD as well. This equipment can be as large as brush trucks, or as small as chainsaws, rakes, shovels, flaps, or axes.

The Firefighter Property Program (FPP) allows the AFC to obtain property and transfer it directly to a volunteer fire department. The Commission also obtains Federal Excess Personal Property (FEPP) wildland fire suppression equipment through the USDA Forest Service and the General Service Administration (GSA), then inspects and makes repairs as needed to ensure that it is in safe operating condition before being issued to volunteer fire departments.

As for firefighting, Wood stated, "The Commission and the volunteer units work 'hand in glove' as a team . . . they go on fire calls together . . . AFC firefighters provide backup to the volunteer firefighters, and the volunteers back up the AFC firefighters. The VFDs arrive with pumper trucks or brush trucks on wildland and grass fires, then the AFC personnel comes in with dozers and plows, and they work elbow to elbow."

Wood went on to say, "The AAVFD could not function without the AFC." As population growth continues to spread into the wildland urban interface all across the state, the Alabama Forestry Commission relies as well on the cooperation of the Alabama Association of Volunteer Fire Departments and the efforts of its volunteer firefighters. 🏠