

EDITOR'S NOTES

BY JON CARTER, 25/A

And The Pot Called The Kettle...

That the city doesn't agree with our vigorous pursuit of the EMS lawsuit isn't at all that surprising; they're losing money, losing credibility, and losing face in the public arena. But for the upper echelon at City Hall to say it's wrong is a contradiction in and of itself. If the proverbial shoe were on the other foot you could bank on the city dumping tons of money into their legal coffers to right the wrong. Once again we are looking at a leadership that would rather worry about something it really had nothing to do with than right a wrong and move on into the future.

A simple background of the lawsuit goes a little something like this - a state law was created years ago that allowed municipalities to work their Fire Fighters more than 40 hours a week without having to pay them overtime for the extra hours. In exchange for the forfeiture of the overtime the Fire Fighters were given great schedules and permitted to eat and sleep while on duty. It was kind of a good-faith type of agreement that mutually benefited both sides. However, wording in the original law made the mandate pertain

strictly to Fire Fighters, and when EMS reared its head the law needed to be changed. It wasn't, and EMS personnel were not covered by the law and therefore were entitled to time-and-a-half for hours worked over 40, which was never paid. The law has since been changed, but the fact remains that work was performed and the people who performed the work were not paid what they were owed. So instead of making things right, the city decides to fight with us to keep what it owes us. A financial audit would probably reveal the city has spent more money fighting this lawsuit than they would have paid in the first place.

Rumors are plentiful to the effect that if we drop the lawsuit the city will bargain with us again and a contract agreement can be reached. If you believe that I've got a bridge to sell you. I said in last month's paper that maybe we should adopt a give and take philosophy when it comes to getting something done with the city concerning a contract. Perhaps I was-

n't clear, because what I meant was we'll take what the city gives us, but we ain't giving up anything. We've given up enough over the years to more than account for our fair share of the pie. It's the city's turn to do the giving. As one Fire Fighter put it at a recent union meeting, there's a list of names on the wall at the retirement center of Fire Fighter who gave their lives to the city and the people we serve, that should be enough giving on our behalf.

If the city says we're in the wrong by taking a legal stance when it comes to money, perhaps they need to examine their recent history. After all, that's what the whole break in parity issue centered on, wasn't it?

And while we're on the matter of re-examining recent history, it's come to my attention that I'm being labeled anti-EMS. Nothing could be further from the truth. I have no problems with performing my duties as an EMT, but what I do have a problem with is the lack of equality amongst our EMS system when it comes to work distribution. I'm not talking about how some stations make more EMS runs than other stations, I'm talking about how those who are supposed to be in charge of the administrative end of things continue to let certain groups avoid EMS

altogether while a small minority does a majority of the work. When a second ambulance arrives at your station without any manpower, perhaps you'll understand where I'm coming from. Remember, no debit day or fill-in personnel can ride your box, so guess who gets that duty a majority of the time. If it sounds like unfair labor practices to you, then you see what I'm talking about. Transfer, you say? When was the last time you saw a Fire Fighter posting? For the record, the posting that our rules and regulations say will be conducted every other month have been void of Fire Fighter positions for well over a year now. But that's another issue that we'll talk about later.

In closing, let me plead with you to speak up and let our union leadership know that we should surrender nothing for the sake of a contract. If this administration cannot change its thinking to do something right by us for a change, then the heck with them. Let's walk away from the negotiations altogether and quit wasting everyone's time. There's other issues out there that we can better spend our time on, like legislative matters and the upcoming elections.

As always stay safe.

REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN FIRE FIGHTERS

Having written this column last month, I became very enthusiastic. I feel this is a great way to make all of us acutely aware of our Fallen Fire Fighters.

Sure all of us know what happened on Feb 14, 2000 or September 11, 2001, but we all need to pause for a moment and think about our other fallen Fire Fighters. By listing the anniversary date each month, we can reflect on those Fire Fighters who died during that month. When you look at the dates at the end of this column please look at the Memorial Section in the 2000 HFD Millennium Yearbook or in my memorial web site: www.houstonfirememorial.org, so that you will be able to gain more information on the Houston's Fallen Fire Fighters.

Last month I had the honor of attending an opening ceremony of an exhibit called "Texans: Footprints and Imprints". This exhibit includes the work boots of our beloved Kim Smith. The exhibit is located in San Antonio, Texas at the Institute of Texan Culture. Refer to the Institute's web site for more details, <http://www.texancultures.utsa.edu>. The web page with information about the exhibit is <http://www.texancultures.utsa.edu/events/footprints/index.htm>. If you travel to San Antonio this summer on vacation, please take time to go by to see this great display of famous Texans.

Here is the list of the Fallen Fire Fighters for the months of April and May.

April 14, 1949
Milburn, Robert W. "Bobby"
Chauffeur Station 7

April 27, 1899
Thompson, Emil "Ed"
Firefighter Station 5

May 01, 1924
Denny Harold A.
Firefighter Station 9

May 03, 1971
Walls, James Louis
Firefighter Station 5

May 21, 1962
Contorno, Don J.
Firefighter Station 37

May 25, 1912
Wagner, Herman "Dutch"
Captain Station 8

COLE VISION REMINDER

Kelsey-Seybold clinics are no longer providing eye care to city employees.

Members should go to Cole Vision providers for eye care. Contact

Cole Vision
at

1-800-228-2020

for a list of providers near your home or office.

