

The Riverdale Fire Department, Inc.

*4714 Queensbury Road
Riverdale, Maryland 20737
Established 1923*

Member
Maryland State Volunteer
Firemans Association

Member
Prince Georges County
Volunteer Fire and
Rescue Association

December 25, 2009

Mr. David Statter
Digital Correspondent
W*USA 9
4100 Wisconsin Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20016

(sent via e-mail)

Dear Mr. Statter:

I have debated with myself the entire week as to whether or not to utilize my valuable time to respond to your "story" about sledding at The Riverdale Fire Department last Saturday. But since it is Christmas Day and I am at the station providing coverage since the station does not have career firefighters on holidays, I have time to place my thoughts on paper.

Just so you know, I have a great deal of respect for journalism that is fair, balanced, objective, fact checked, and newsworthy. I have served on the board of a local print news organization, with a national reputation, for 22 years and currently serve as president of that organization. In addition, I have a great uncle who was the equivalent of a bureau chief for UPI in Germany when the United States first entered World War II, who as a result of his experiences became a published author. And, mutual acquaintances tell me that you are a decent person and may take the time to read and respect the contents of this letter.

I'll concede that your stories about Riverdale's arson investigation generally fit what I consider to be the basic tenets of professional journalism as listed above. That being said, I think last Monday's story on www.statter911.com, and subsequently on Channel 9 news, fit none of those tenets. You posted a story prior to contacting Chief Ryan (and I know you have Chief Ryan's contact information). Contact with Chief Ryan did not occur until after Mr. Brady contacted us. You posted a story out of context. You posted a story that was originally meant to imply that a department vehicle was involved. You posted a story that has limited interest except to the hundreds of people that hide behind screen names on www.statter911.com. And most importantly, you posted a story that unnecessarily took the attention of Chief Ryan and myself away from the business of the department.

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I am going to present some additional factual information to you, that had it been used, maybe you would have had an accurate story, within an acceptable context. But, I have no expectation that you'll actually use this information as it would minimize the controversy that you often attempt to create (and are generally successful, I must admit).

- The volunteer members started covering this station at 1500 hours on Thursday as there were not any career personnel available for Friday.
- By the time the members participated in the sled ride:
 - the station answered 27 calls for service (a higher call volume than usual for an equivalent time period) in difficult weather conditions;
 - the members had cleared the front ramp of snow multiple times;
 - the members had cleaned the station multiple times;
 - the members had prepared several meals for themselves; and
 - the station had an engine crew, a truck crew, and an EMS crew during most of the snow event, far exceeding the County's established station staffing criteria.

Mr. Statter, I ask you how many employees of organizations, public or private, do you see shoveling their walkways and clearing parking lots, cleaning the facilities in which they work, cooking meals for themselves, and ensuring that their organization continues to operate in inclement weather? I guess you'll never give any consideration for these activities, volunteer or career.

So, why was the sledding controversial? Because it was implied that a department vehicle was involved (by your own admission)? Because the participants were wearing fire department personal protective gear? Because a department stretcher was being used? Chief Ryan determined that a department vehicle was not used. The wear and tear on personal protective gear is negligible. In fact the personal protective gear kept the participants safer, keeping inner clothing dry, and also if something did happen, the participant would have been better protected from injury. And finally the stretcher was broken and not repairable for continuing fire department service.

These members had been cooped up for 48 hours, doing their jobs (over and above), and took sometime out to have some clean, safe fun using a private vehicle, off the department's real estate, that allowed them to remain local so that they would be ready for response. I would submit that a sled being towed behind a vehicle, with a responsible driver, is as safe, if not safer, than going downhill sledding somewhere else in the community. I would also submit that this is not the first time that firefighters have had fun in a snow storm!

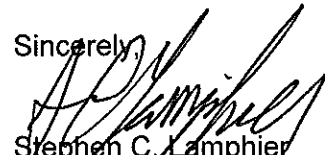
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I know that www.statter911.com was created as a forum to present and discuss controversial topics, some of which are worthy of discussion and many of which are not. I think if I tallied the stories posted on your website for the Washington, DC area over the past year, most would be volunteer or management related and few come to mind that would be positive.

I quote from www.wusa9.com, "Dave's blog "STATter 911" on the wusa9.com home page right now, which chronicles the lives and challenges facing firefighters and EMT's". So why do you not report any positive stories, especially positive stories about volunteer fire departments in Prince George's County or for that matter, positive stories about Prince George's County Fire and EMS Department, in general? Why do you not report that many volunteer fire departments in Prince George's County successfully provide volunteer staffing on weekdays because the county is unable to do so due to the fiscal climate? Without daytime volunteer staffing, some companies would fail to respond. In fact, our members covered FIVE weekdays in November 2009. That should be impressive, and newsworthy, considering few non-public employers recognize Veterans Day as a holiday and fewer than that consider the day after Thanksgiving a holiday. Why do you not report that The Riverdale Fire Department worked with the Town of Riverdale Park to gather and deliver food and presents to those less fortunate within the town's corporate limits? Why do you not report on the significantly improved relationship between Prince George's County Fire and EMS Department and its volunteer fire departments because of the leadership of Chief Jones? Each of these positive stories reflect the "lives and challenges facing firefighters and EMTs", but I guess stories like that would not bring you any readers and/or revenue!

I would be glad to have an off-the-record cup of coffee with you at a mutually convenient time to discuss this further. I hope you and you family have a safe and happy holiday season and best wishes for the New Year!

Sincerely,



Stephen C. Lamphier
President

cc: The Riverdale Fire Department Board of Directors
Mayor Vernon Archer, Town of Riverdale Park, Maryland
Mr. William Smith, President, Prince George's County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association
Mr. Mark Brady, Public Information Officer, Prince George's County Fire and EMS Department