

Anatomy of a New Member Announcement: How to Leverage the Power of Referral

By: Tiger Schmittendorf/First Arriving-Vice President of Strategic Services

When I served as public information officer for my volunteer fire department, I created a process for announcing new members that did more than just introduce the new kid on the block.

We know from experience that when it comes to building a volunteer force – there’s power in numbers; and when seeking to recruit more volunteers, there is *definitely* value in the power of referral.

So, let’s take this opportunity to break down the attached example of a press release I created some years ago to announce that we had recruited three new members that month:


GRAND OPENING:

Open the conversation with a positive statement and maybe even a teaser about your volunteering opportunities. [Keep the message positive](#) and frame the conversation away from desperation and need, to the want for volunteers and the openings available for more good folks to get involved.

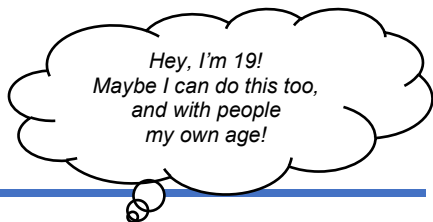
Evans Center Firefighters Welcome New Recruits

TOWN OF EVANS NY --- The ranks of the Evans Center Volunteer Fire Company are on the rise but there’s always room for more.

Next, introduce your new members and tell the reader a little bit about them.



Three new members at once? Not too shabby!



Hey, I'm 19!
Maybe I can do this too,
and with people
my own age!

The fire company welcomed three new volunteers at their general membership meeting on April 4. Joining their ranks were Michael K., a 19-year old Angola resident, Adam B. also 19-years old and from the Town of Evans, and Ken H., a past member rejoining the fire company. All three are joining under the Fire/Rescue membership classification.

GET TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER:

Dig a little deeper and share anything about your new recruits that they are willing to share, and that the reader might be able to associate with in their own life. Maybe they know your new volunteer by name or connect with their family situation, their background, their motivation for joining, what they do for a living, or maybe they live in the same neighborhood. I’ve redacted some of the names and details for the purpose of this article but be sure to highlight fire service family traditions and outline how else they’re involved in the community. A picture paints a thousand words, so adding photos to the story could strengthen the connection, motivating them to join too.

Family Tradition Runs Deep!

While Mike K. is new to the fire company, firefighting is in his blood, and family. His maternal grandfather and uncle were longtime firefighters with Evans Center back in the 1960s and 1970s. His paternal grandfather is a life member of the Lake Erie Beach Volunteer Fire Company in Evans and his father is member of Evans Center as well. Mike is a video store manager in Derby and lives in the Village of Angola with his father, mother and younger sister.

Started Early!

Adam B. is no stranger to the fire company. He was a member of the department's Fire Explorer Post 528 since he was 14, serving most recently as chief of the post. He lives in Evans with his parents and two brothers. Adam is employed as a supervisor with a group home provider in Derby.

Ken H. is rejoining the fire company with 10 years of firefighting experience after a yearlong sabbatical. He previously served the fire company as assistant fire chief and advisor to the fire company's explorer post. He lives less than a mile from the station with his wife and son. Ken is a product supervisor for a steel company in Lackawanna.

Timing Was Right
for All the Right
Reasons!

Once you've established rapport or at least familiarity, leverage the value of power in numbers by listing the names of all the other new members these recruits are joining in your growing organization. Help the reader draw the very logical conclusion: "Your department has recruited more than a dozen new members this year? Hmm. They must be doing something right. That must be an organization I need to belong to!" Whatever your magic number of new volunteers, name association may also reinforce the diversity of your membership and the welcoming, inclusive environment you're inviting them to join.

GOOD FOR RECRUITMENT. GREAT FOR RETENTION.

There's a significant secondary benefit of not only quantifying how many people you've recruited but listing their names too. That means that, if you bring in at least one new person every month, the name of each new recruit is going to appear in a press release every month for twelve straight months (or whatever timeframe best positions your story of success).

These three gentlemen join the 12 other volunteers who have entered or re-entered active membership in the Evans Center Volunteer Fire Company in the past year including Nicholas B., John D., Michelle F., Todd G., Brian M., Angelo R., David R., Brent R., Paul S., Wade T., and Stacey and Travis W.

They'll be proud to be introduced for the first time but equally proud every time their name is mentioned in that list every month over the next year. That name recognition is a force (and motivation) multiplier!

This simple but calculated gesture also says that "You're more than just a number to us! We're proud of you, and we're glad you joined our team." It sends the message: "We're thankful you stepped up to volunteer to serve (and we hope others follow your lead)."

SET EXPECTATIONS EARLY:

Now that you've got the reader hooked, introduce them to the training your new recruits will be taking as they start their legacy of service. Give enough detail to give them a taste of what to expect and help them make an informed decision as to whether they can meet those expectations.

Holy Cow! That sounds like a BIG time commitment...but somehow they manage to fit volunteering into their busy lifestyles. I wonder if it's the right fit for me too.

New recruits receive a brief fire department orientation that indoctrinates them with company history, response procedures, personal protective equipment and safety practices; preparing them to ride along as observers and assist with general duties. The orientation is followed by 15 hours of safety training to satisfy OSHA regulations and a 130-hour intensive Firefighter 1 course taught by state instructors. The final exam includes a comprehensive written test and hands-on skills evaluations to ensure that the new firefighters are "combat-ready" to work under the supervision of a more experienced firefighter.

Doing so shows the level of investment the recruits are willing to make to serve their community, and it demonstrates the investment your agency is making in their new members to ensure that they can serve safely, confidently and competently. It says “We’re going to make you the best you can be. You’re worth our investment but it means you must make a significant investment too. It’s all worth it.”

And if they determine from this information that it’s not right for them, well that’s ok too. You just saved everyone a whole bunch of valuable time.

CLOSE THE SALE:

You’ve told the reader that you’re successful at recruitment, but can you be successful at recruiting them too? Next up is your call to action. While we’ve given the reader a glimpse into the lives of our new volunteers, we likely know nothing about the person reading your announcement. Thus, we can make no assumptions.

They may or may not be the person ready to run into burning buildings as all the sane people are running out, but they may know and be able to strongly influence someone who is. And whether they are in a position of influence or not, by sharing all of the other great opportunities you offer to volunteer and serve, you may entice them to support your public safety agency in a variety of ways that better match their time, talents, interests and capabilities.

Lots of channels to connect on!

If you or anyone you know is interested in volunteering, please contact the fire department at 549-1221, via email to join@evanscentervfc.org or visit their web site: www.evanscentervfc.org to download a prospective member guide. Chance to Learn More

The fire department’s recruitment motto is “Firefighting isn’t for everyone, but volunteering can be...” and offers flexible memberships for Fire/Rescue, EMS Only, Fire Police and FireCorps members who perform non-emergency administrative and support functions for this busy emergency services agency. I like options!

The fire company is supported by an active Ladies Auxiliary and their Firefighter Explorer Post#528 for young adults age 14-21. Exploring offers a positive environment for the youth of our community to learn and have fun while focusing on public service. Team Effort!

Farm System for Future Firefighters!

FUEL FOR THE FIRE:

It looks like a press release, but crafted properly, this simple document has the potential to be a very effective recruitment marketing and retention motivation piece.

Robert C. Lee is credited with saying: “The sweetest sound to anyone’s ears is the sound of [their] own name.” I imagine seeing your name in print runs a close second. It’s more enduring.

From my experience sharing my “From the Xbox to the Box Alarm” generation-connecting conversations for the past eleven years, I’ve learned one thing for sure about today’s generation: No one is better at recruiting their peers than they are. They’ve mastered the power of referral.

I had a boss who said the exact same thing to me every single day for the twelve years I worked for his company, and I couldn’t stand it. But it sounds so much more brilliant coming out of my mouth now! Lol

He would remind me when I walked in the door every morning that, “Nothing breeds success like success itself.”

The power of referral fuels power in numbers. Empower your members to use your social media channels and offline platforms to share a new member announcement that brags about the most recent recruits added to your ranks. They will beam with pride to help you breed new success for your volunteer fire and emergency services organization.

Tiger Schmittendorf is vice president of strategic services for First Arriving, a full-service marketing team supporting the public safety community. He served the Erie County Department of Homeland Security & Emergency Services (Buffalo, NY) for more than 20 years before retiring as deputy fire coordinator in 2018. There he was responsible for the recruitment, training, and mutual aid operations of the county’s 97 fire departments and 6,000+ firefighters. He created a recruitment effort that doubled his own fire department’s membership and helped net thousands of new volunteers

countywide. A frequent presenter on leadership, incident management, connecting generations, and recruitment and retention, he is a nationally certified fire instructor and has been a firefighter since 1980. Connect with him at tiger@firstarriving.com or visit his websites: tigerschmittendorf.com, FireRECRUITER.com, RuntotheCurb.com and Soldierfirefighter.com.

Evans Center VOLUNTEER Fire Company

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Bitnun and Krajacic started their Firefighter 1 training course just a few days after being accepted into the fire department. Once basic training is completed, all firefighters complete a minimum of 36 hours of advanced training annually via fire department drills and other sources and an additional eight hours of required OSHA safety refresher training each year.

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