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To my community

22 years ago, 5 persons, myself included, met around a kitchen table to draw up some bylaws for a Volunteer Fire Department in the LaMadera area. Since then, we have literally built our fire station from the ground up (it was a vacant lot). This occurred over time because of dozens of dedicated volunteers and years of training (much of it on our own dime).

The result has been multiple IFSAC certified Firefighter 2s (full-up run-into-burning-building firefighters), EMS personnel up to Advanced EMT (one step below paramedic), and nationally certified wildland firefighters up to Engine Boss. As a result of the single minded determination of Chief Joe Gober and Assistant Chief "Pete" Peterson, La Madera had at the time the only qualified Engine Bosses in the County. Out of that effort grew the County's Wildland Team, with many of our current Engine Bosses, and several other firefighters, trained in our Brush 28. La Madera Wildland personnel have deployed on actual fires across the state (including the Thompson Ridge and Dog Head fires), served with the Cibola National Forest in both the Sandia and Mt Taylor Districts, as well as out of state deployments to fires and National Forests in California and Oregon, living in tents and working 16-hour days. In short, we are as qualified and experienced as anyone in the county.

In return, Chief Masterson promises what we already have. We already have an active and mutually beneficial mutual aid agreement with Bernalillo County. They already respond to our medical calls, providing paramedic support as necessary. Even though we are volunteers responding from home, we routinely arrive on scene before them. On our most recent structure fire we received mutual aid from BCFD and multiple other agencies. The reverse is also true, with La Madera frequently providing tender support for their fires.

Our current ISO rating of 5 is the best in the county. It was the result of a phenomenal effort by Chief Gober through firefighter training and exhaustive documentation. Are we to believe that Chief Masterson will commit to repeat such a performance to achieve the 4 rating in a district he doesn't even plan to staff?

Chief Masterson will move on to other opportunities in a few years, as did his predecessor. He will have a fine resume, extolling how he brought a backwater New Mexico County Fire Department into the 21st Century. What will be missing is the part about how he kneecapped a proficient and professional volunteer organization in the process.

At the heart of a volunteer fire department is the idea that this is our home too! We respond to the homes of our neighbor and friends. If we send you to the hospital, we make sure your doors are locked and someone takes care of the cat. We follow up on how you are doing, and if need be, we will go get you and bring you back home.

In those years to come, when Chief Masterson is advancing in his professional career, we, the residents of the far southeast corner of Sandoval County, will still be living here. And when one of us wakes up in a cold sweat at 4AM with chest pains, it won't be friends and neighbors who are first on scene to help manage the worst day of your life. It will be two strangers from a contract vendor in another county, responding to "just another cardiac call".

Jerry Carroll
Captain, La Madera VFD