**Indian Creek VFD Needs Help**

Do you know that your Indian Creek Volunteer Fire Department operates primarily on donations? And, despite community growth the number of residents donating has decreased?

We are considering the formation of an Emergency Service District (ESD) that would provide a steady income stream that allows for expected equipment and manpower requirements. Our estimated date for ESD completion is at least two years from now.

In the interim we are asking residents of our 62 mile district to please consider contributing. All Fire District residents have the option of direct giving, and Kiowa residents can use monthly billing through the POA.

Mail your check to: Indian Creek VFD

 550 Kiowa Drive West

 Lake Kiowa, TX 76240

2/11/2020

Indian Creek Volunteer Fire Department UPDATE

STARK ORIGINS

Starting with absolutely nothing in late 2012, your Indian Creek Volunteer Fire Department quickly evolved into a highly successful first line provider of medical service, fire suppression, and community/district service. At the start, local support was highly substantial. With this strong local support, ICVFD recruited outstanding personnel and quickly obtained used but suitable vehicles and equipment, safeguarding our most precious assets: PEOPLE, HOMES, and OTHER BUILDINGS.

 External evaluation of ICVFD’s readiness is documented in the evolution of its ISO Fire Protection Classification from a level of 10 to a 4 inside Lake Kiowa and an 8B outside Lake Kiowa, a rare level of achievement for VFDs. Beyond the assurance of fire safety and emergency medical response, ICVFD also affords our fire district considerable financial savings accruing from these ISO ratings. District residents report insurance savings of $450/yr. inside Lake Kiowa and $300 outside.

SHORT TERM PROJECTIONS:

ICVFD continues to provide outstanding protections. As your ICVFD looks to 2021 and beyond, however, sustainability becomes a major concern in a number of areas. Maintaining our high level of readiness (ISO 4/8b) requires yet higher levels of readiness, continuing education, training and planning for the future. To these ends, we have started looking strategically at near and long term matters vital to continuous improvement.

LONG TERM PROJECTIONS

While ICVFD remains an outstanding medical response and firefighting force, with the second highest call volume in Cooke County (440 calls in 2019) and a documented record of saving lives and property, future concerns loom large. . Five key elements of ICVFD are Personnel, Financial Support, Facilities, Equipment and Finances:

Personnel: ICVFD currently has 19 highly qualified personnel, 10 of whom reside outside Lake Kiowa. All our volunteers are fully employed elsewhere, necessitating major scheduling challenges to insure readiness to respond to calls at all hours. Currently, four volunteers handle 80% of all calls. Obviously, such heavy dependence on so few constitutes a long term concern.

Vehicles: are the most costly elements of any fire department, due to use, aging and normal deterioration. Our current vehicular replacement schedule, calling for much newer, less maintenance-intensive vehicles, indicates major concerns for long term sustainability, especially in view of fire engine and emergency vehicle costs.

Firefighter Equipment: remains adequate but, because of aging and usage, routinely needs replacement. Regular safety equipment updates also add to replacement requirements. While equipment costs are far less than vehicle costs; safety equipment for vehicles and firefighters is expensive.

Facilities: Our current facility, a large garage with an office and day room and an adjacent small garage, is marginally adequate for our current fleet and force. However, short term and long term maintenance and upgrades as well as additional space needed to best serve the entire district, point to major sustainability issues.

Financial Support: ICVFD currently depends on contributions and grants, both of which vary widely, with support from less than 15% of district property owners. Ironically, as call volume has increased, donor frequency has declined, to a point where almost no money is available for projected asset replacement or asset acquisition. Your fire district needs all residents to step up.

LOCAL AND NATIONAL PICTURE:

Seen in light of the five key elements described above, short and long-term sustainability requires strategic planning and preparation in all categories of readiness. With ICVFD’s population growth rate, ICVFD’s call volume could double in five years. Within a few years, we likely will need to hire personnel for key call times and possible 24/ 7 staffing of the station for round the clock protection, mandating living quarters at the station. Dealing with these long term concerns requires a current focus on predictable and sustainable resources, specifically, enhanced and predictable financial support. ICVFD will also need a new engine within the next two years at a cost of approximately $600,000, financed over 10 years.

In the face of these very real and typical concerns, volunteer fire departments throughout Texas and across the United states are becoming Emergency Services Districts (ESD). Indeed, ESD status is likely inevitable for ICVFD, as it is for most VFDs.

EMERGENCY SERVICES DISTRICTS:

An Emergency Service District (ESD) is a county taxing authority responsible for providing fire, rescue and emergency medical services to ALL its residents. An ESD’s dedicated funding from ALL District property owners can be a dependable path to sustainability. While your ICVFD currently depends on the 5 to15% who support via donations, grants and limited other sources; in an ESD, everyone will pay a fair share, and ISO ratings could be improved due to regular financial resources.

An ESD would answer each of the sustainability issues cited above. When ESDs employ professionals; it becomes imperative to afford modest incentives for volunteers, as well, such as per call stipends and participation in the state sponsored program for VFD pensions.

CURRENT PROGRESS:

Initial Efforts are underway, with our ICVFD Board, chief, and assistant chief working closely with an ESD committee to explore paths to becoming an ESD. Moving to an ESD will require at least 16 months. In the meantime, it seems prudent to ask our Lake Kiowa POA Board and all district residents to revisit the interdependence of all our residents and ICVFD. How can we best support ICVFD prior to passage of an ESD?

COST EFFECTIVENESS

Each of us needs the fire and emergency medical/health protections that our ICVFD provides by standing ready to respond every hour of every day, 365 days of every year. Suffice it to say, if we had to pay for our ICVFD, the cost would be extremely high.

SUSTAINABILITY

Short and long term sustainability of ICVFD personnel, facilities, vehicles and other equipment requires considerable planning and preparation in all categories of readiness. Sustainability becomes the crucial concern for any VFD, and ICVFD is no exception. Throughout Texas and across the U.S., VFD’s facing sustainability issues find Emergency Services Districts are the most common means of helping rural VFDs survive, primarily through funding based on every property owner paying a fair share of VFD costs. It is worth noting that Oak Ridge VFD, here in Cooke County, recently ceased its ability to continue, and its emergency VFD responsibilities had to be picked up by ICVFD and other nearby districts.

In many respects, ICVFD is uniquely positioned to serve Lake Kiowa and the entire District; however we cannot sustain our current status without dedicated long term resources. While ICVFD maintains its high level of readiness near term, too many factors militate against long term sustainability. As one sees the seeming inevitability of moving to a more dedicated funding means, an ESD makes sense.

IN CONCLUSION

Sustainability considerations mandate moving to an Emergency Services District, with: additional and enhanced facilities; part time employees; modest financial incentives for volunteers; and long term commitment required to justify major facility improvements. Lake Kiowa and our entire district have the opportunity to consider how best to work with our ICVFD to facilitate and support ICVFD into the future. This opportunity is timely in that we have sixteen months prior to achieving ESD status. To this end, we seek LKPOA’s and all district residents’ enhanced assistance for ICVFD as a vital part of our community as well as a resource for the entire district. Specifically, we request a 99 year facility lease; support for upgrading current facilities; 3 to 5 acres of land for training, a storage and maintenance facility, and help in purchasing a new fire engine; as well as support for ICVFD’s current pursuit of ESD status, targeting the May, 2021, general election.