

Volunteer firemen resign in protest of fire chief

FIREMEN, from Page 1

ignore it once it was brought to our attention.

"We followed city policy and took the action called for under that policy."

Hill said the policy calls for disciplinary action if the alcohol level is higher than .02 percent. The state level for someone to be driving under the influence is .08 percent.

Hill said he did not see the report of a breath test done on Gilmer at the sheriff's office, but was told it was higher than the .02 percent in the city policy and below the .08 for driving under the influence. Hill said Gilmer was not driving the city fire-rescue truck that night.

There were several rescue calls that night for slide offs and stuck cars because of blowing snow and icy conditions.

It was the second time since being named fire chief on May 1 that Gilmer faced disciplinary action. He was suspended with pay in July when charges were filed for attempted theft at a wreck scene.

A jury found Gilmer not guilty Dec. 4 for the incident in July when he and a volunteer fireman were accused of stealing cigarettes from a wrecked semi.

A post on the Kansas State Firefighters Association web site, placed Saturday by an unidentified "nwkfirefighter," said: "Goodland Fire Chief embarrassed and humiliated his firefighters in July, being accused of attempted theft on a rescue run

"... on Jan. 21 while working rescue calls on I-70, the highway patrol and an EMT sensed alcohol on him (Gilmer). The rescue unit was stopped responding to another scene (Gilmer was not driving the unit), and he was removed and taken to the sheriff's department to be tested.

"He was put on 30 days suspension, again embarrassing and humiliating his firefighters. He is to

Firefighters send letter to city manager about fire chief

The 12 volunteer city firefighters wrote to City Manager Wayne Hill in January asking that Fire Chief Scott Gilmer be reassigned to another job.

The letter was sent to Hill and copies to each city commissioner. On Wednesday, fire fighter Stan Duell mentioned the letter during an interview, but said to ask Hill for a copy.

When asked Wednesday afternoon, Hill provided *The Goodland Star-News* a copy of the letter signed by the 12 firefighters:

For the past 18 years that Scott has been a firefighter, he has done a great job. Our group of firefighters has always been a very close, respected group of professionals who take pride in everything we do and represent for the city. This can be seen in the lack of turnover in the firefighters. We have 151 years of combined experience.

In the past seven months under Scott's leadership, we have had some things happen that had tarnished our pride and respect. It has become painful apparent that Scott has a problem; we feel that this has impaired his ability to perform in a professional manner, and Scott the exemplary firefighter has been replaced by a man who is obviously in need of help. While we bear no personal grudge

against Scott, we feel that he is no longer a capable leader, and is not longer a functional firefighter.

On Jan. 23, the Goodland Volunteer Firefighters met at the fire station. Each firefighter was given the chance to express his feelings and concerns about what has been happening with the fire department. Each firefighter expressed concern about past event, and what the future may hold if Scott remains the leader of the department. Concerns were expressed by each member of the department regarding the potential for the city's liability in light of Scott's past actions, and fear regarding what the future may hold. It was unanimously expressed by the department that Scott's actions have sullied the good name and reputation of the Goodland Fire Department, which is an organization of which we all are proud to belong. However, if Scott is permitted to remain the Fire Chief, that pride will vanish. Frankly, it was universally stated that none of the members retain any respect for Scott as a leader or firefighter.

Each firefighter is willing to give 110 percent to rebuild the respect and integrity that the Goodland fire department once enjoyed, but that effort cannot, and will not, be afforded under the leadership of Scott Gilmer.

All the volunteer firefighters have decided that if Scott Gilmer is reinstated as fire chief, we may have to reconsider our position as firefighters. This is not a personal grudge against Scott, but a universal concern within the department to do what is best for the service we provide to the City of Goodland. We would respectfully ask that Scott be given a chance to move to another position with the city, as none of us want him fired. Further, we would ask that the city afford whatever resources available to help Scott, if he is willing, to address this problem which has so impaired his judgment and fire fighting skills.

This has not been an easy decision for any of the members of the department, but we have made this decision as we feel it is best for the fire department, and more importantly, it is best for the citizens of Goodland.

We know we do not have the final say with regard to Scott's position, but we respectfully request that you carefully consider our thoughts and input in making your decision.

Signed: *Terry Baker, Stan Duell, Troy Mannis, Don Leiker, Mike Rubio, Kenny Studer, Ryan Weis, Sam Zelfer, David Avila, Ponch Avelar, Lance Goodman and Greg Unger.*

"I think it is a sad situation where the city administration seems more concerned about the liability of keeping this person than the loss of the 151 years of combined experience of the 12 firefighters," Duell said.

The fire fighters Duell, Weis, Studer, Terry Baker, 26 years, owner of Terry Baker Construction; Troy Mannis, 19 years, serviceman for Aquila gas company; Mike Rubio, 16 years, employee at ADM Grain; David Avila, four years, supervisor at Northern Sun; Don Leiker, 17 years, contractor; Sam Zelfer, 10 years, employed by Sherman County; Ponch Avelar, four years, a driver for Western Distributing; and Lance Goodman and Greg Unger, new firemen. Unger is a new diesel instructor at the Northwest Kansas Technical College.

Gilmer said Thursday the last thing he wanted was to embarrass the firemen. He said as of Thursday he had recruited eight firemen.

"I respect all the firemen," Gilmer said. "I am sorry they have turned in their letters. It was certainly not my intention to embarrass anyone. I have taken steps to address my personal situation, and believe I have done the right thing."

City Commissioner John Garcia said he knew about the letter from the firemen, and had received a copy of the resignations.

He said he had talked with Hill about the situation, but did not feel he was in a position to comment because he did not have all the facts.

City Commissioner Annette Fairbanks said she had no comment on the situation right now.

"I think there are facts that need to be looked into and I am not ready to comment," she said.

"I can only say the city is taking steps to protect the public," said City Commissioner Dave Daniels on Thursday morning. "We want the public to know they should not be worried and the city is doing what needs to be done to protect public safety."

return to work on Feb. 20. The firefighters have asked for his resignation, to no avail."

The posting was e-mailed to a number of people in Goodland on Saturday, and Stan Duell, owner of NAPA Auto Parts and a volunteer fireman for over 26 years, said his cell phone started ringing while he was at the basketball game that night.

"I said in my letter I would like to come back if the city would take care of the problem," Duell said Wednesday afternoon.

Ryan Weis, owner of Weis Oil and a firefighter for 14 years, said he would like to go back to the fire department if there was a change in the chief.

Weis said he was riding in the rescue truck the night of the incident

in January, and that a Sherman County dispatcher asked the rescue truck to stop at the intersection of K-27 and Business U.S. 24 so the sheriff could talk to Gilmer. Weis said Kenny Studer, school maintenance supervisor and a 15-year fire veteran, was driving.

Weis said when the rescue truck stopped, Gilmer got out and told the others to proceed to the rescue scene, and said he would wait for the sheriff. Weis said as they drove away he saw a sheriff's pickup drive up, and thought it was Sheriff Kevin Butts.

Trooper Joe Greene told Butts he wanted to talk to the fire chief that night in January, the Sheriff said Thursday. Butts said he called dispatch and asked to have the rescue

truck stop. He said he was in the pickup that Weis saw, and that Trooper Greene was behind him.

Butts said Gilmer got into the car with Trooper Greene and was taken to the sheriff's office for the breathalyzer test. Butts said there was not an incident report done by the sheriff, but that a report was done by Trooper Greene and he thought it was given to the city clerk or city manager.

At a meeting with the firemen and Gilmer on Tuesday, Weis said the men asked Gilmer to resign, but that Gilmer said he thought they could work through this.

Duell said he had talked to Bruce Gleason, ambulance director for Goodland Regional Medical Center, and that Gleason said the web

site was wrong about it being an emergency medical technician at the scene, but that there was a trainee observing that night.

Duell said he thinks the volunteer firemen are paying the price for what he called the chief's bad reputation.

"Scott says he is sorry," Duell said, "but he said this is a small town, and it will all go away."

"It is a sad day."

Duell said the firefighters had written a letter to Hill on Jan. 25, expressing their concerns and asking that Gilmer be moved to a different job. Duell said a copy of the letter was delivered to each city commissioner.

Duell said he had talked to Hill later, and to each of the city commissioners.

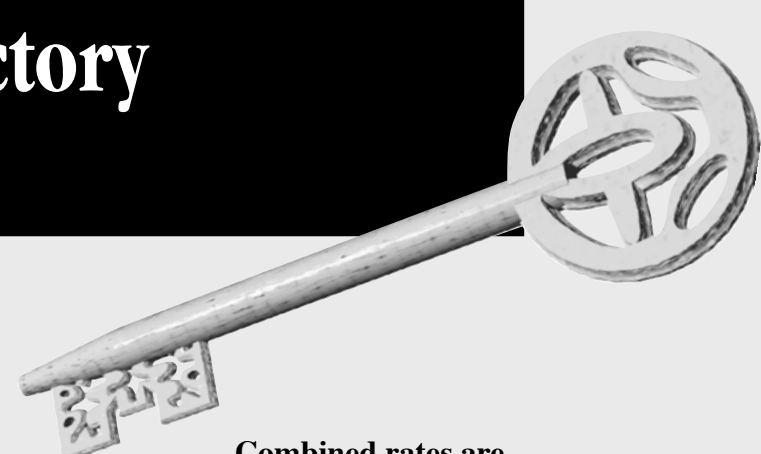
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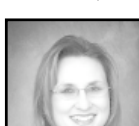
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