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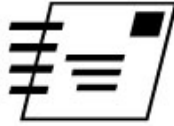


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## Regional Public Safety Beneficial

— yorkblog (March 4, 2008 10:12 AM)

When YorkCounts' volunteers first announced the Metro York recommendations, which include regionalizing public safety resources, I wrote to congratulate the group's leaders for recognizing that regionalization is the future of police and fire service. It was a smart move then, and it's a smart move now.

In the meanwhile, our own merger of the fire departments in Springettsbury and Spring Garden Townships has moved closer to reality. Although our municipalities have some distinct differences, the professional fire fighters, new fire chief and local elected officials are taking strides to resolve issues involving equipment, funding, training and pensions. There is more work to do, but I am confident that the new fire department will provide an improved level of service to the residents, community leaders, visitors and the fire fighters themselves.

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In my capacity as President of the 35 members of the Greater York Professional Fire Fighters and EMTs, I want to share some of the difficult "lessons learned" from our experience and encourage YorkCounts to consider the implications as they move forward with the police regionalization.

First, the business of negotiating a merger is hard

work and requires cooperation from all stakeholders. It's essential to include elected and appointed officials, as well as the people who provide the service, in the process. Check your egos at the door, and remember that we all work for the people of York County. Fire fighters, law enforcement officers or others who work directly with residents – particularly during crisis times – have a wealth of practical insights to contribute to the discussion.

Second, even if the consolidated department doesn't initially save money, it will definitely improve service – which benefits residents as it strengthens the area for economic growth. Just as a lightning strike doesn't care what it hits, crime does not distinguish one municipality from another. As President of the Pennsylvania Professional Fire Fighters Association, I hear from both urban and suburban departments about the growing need for flexibility, especially in an emergency.

Third, by providing a steady funding stream – rather than relying on bake sales and year-to-year contracts between municipalities – public safety professionals can plan for growth, evaluate trends and anticipate equipment and/or training needs, with a focus on prevention.

Fourth, a larger, regional department offers employees a greater opportunity for consistency, career growth, specialization and professionalism that most individual municipalities cannot offer on their own.

All of these factors combine to provide more effective service – public safety coverage that is more stable, secure and responsive to the changing needs and wants of our community. I look forward to hearing about the progress of the consolidated police department to serve York City and its neighboring communities.

***David Eckman is a resident and professional fire fighter in Springettsbury Township. He also serves as President of the Greater York Professional Fire Fighters & EMTs, as well as the President of the Pennsylvania Professional Fire Fighters Association.***

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