

# NOTES FROM THE FIRE BARN

## What Does Fire Service Mean to You?

Lt Rob Dixon

Welcome to the first of a series of columns that I hope will provide a foundation of support for the future of fire service in our region. My overall goal for this column is to break down communication barriers, challenge traditional mindsets, and design and implement a course of action. There is a need to engage both the public and the fire service in evaluating what we do and how we do it. The topics discussed in this column are not from the viewpoint of a Rumford, Andover, Peru, or Mexico firefighter but from the perspective of a lieutenant in the fire service.

Motivation for creating this column began about a month ago at Rumford's Central Fire Station. I came across a news clip from 1994. It showed a three story Washington Street home in Rumford with fire raging across the entire third floor. The article mentions forty Rumford firefighters were able to suppress the fire, and the Mexico Fire Department was put on "standby". Forty firefighters! Where did they come from? Nowadays Mexico, Dixfield, Peru, and Andover are often called to help us out right from the start. What was so different ten years ago? Looking back on my twenty years of experience and more than a thousand hours of formal fire service training, I think I have some answers. But would the public we serve, with no experience, and no training have the same answers? Nagging at the back of my mind was what conclusions the general public might arrive at. These knowledge and communication problems are an issue for almost every department and municipality in the country. This begs the question: How do we address them and how do we get started?

We can all agree that fire departments should deliver the highest level of service possible. What does the highest level of service possible mean to you? Let's make this formal and write down your thoughts. Do you think everyone has the same expectation? How can the fire service expect to be supported to the highest level possible, if the public doesn't have the same expectation? Divisions between the public sector and the fire service usually begin when expectations exceed fiscal support. This is our dilemma. We need to start working towards a solution by defining various levels of service, and then analyzing and evaluating what it takes to provide those levels of service. It is much like buying insurance: do you want minimum liability or a comprehensive program that will provide and take care of you under the worst of circumstances? In many cases we want the best, but simply cannot afford it.

As a starting point, let's propose five levels of service.

- I. Minimum Exposure Protection
- II. Maximum Exposure Protection
- III. Industrial Protection
- IV. Residential / Life Safety Protection
- V. Progressive & Proactive

Think about what these levels might mean to you. In next weeks column we'll define what they mean for the fire service. This will provide a foundation for us to build on and discuss in future columns.

Rob Dixon is a 20-year veteran of the fire service. He is a Certified Municipal Instructor with Maine Fire Training & Education, and a career Lieutenant with the Rumford Fire Department. Rob is also a Volunteer Captain with Andover Fire Department, and a 2005 graduate of the State of Maine Fire Officer I Academy.