

Durham Fire Department Wants More Women

05/04/10 160 W - + 10 - 8

That's the [headline from WRAL](#), on a story about a female fire captain who has received national recognition, as well as the city's plans at recruiting more women and minorities. Captain Angelica Greene, a 13 year veteran in the Bull City, is being recognized nationally by Firehouse Subs, for a fire safety program that she developed for elderly and disabled citizens.

She's also only one of 10 women in a department of 280 people. As the story notes, the city has approved a recruitment program planned for September. That's when they'll launch a major hiring effort. [Read and watch the story.](#)

Could be a good discussion topic. Here's [good seed material](#) on the topic of diversity on the fire service, as we blogged about before. Panel at FDIC. We'll cheat and include this photo of Captain Greene taken in town, at a brush fire in Cary/Morrisville a couple weeks ago.

[Missing photo]

Mike Legeros photo

Here's an idea, hire the best people for the job regardless of color or gender...I mean seriously, who cares if you are male, female, blue, green, as long as you are the best person for the job...

Seriously - 05/04/10 - 11:09

First off, kudos to Capt. Greene. She came up with what was obviously a good idea. We do need more thinkers like that in the fire service.

@Seriously: (it's the truth and I won't hide behind a pseudonym for saying it) Because everybody wants to look "progressive" and not racist or sexist. In our overly-litigious society, no employer wants to be sued because they didn't give this race or that gender a job. I've seen the proof of it in my jobs and in my sister's job. Then add in the different associations that work for "equality" in the workplace. They just add fuel to the fire. Affirmative action has cost "the right person" many a job under the guise of having more minority or female employees. Then you get to the point that the person who got the job fails at it, but the employer won't fire them for fear of repercussions and accusations that they fired that person in violation of civil rights laws. While it was a case of the person being unfit for the job, it becomes a matter of "you fired me because I'm (insert race/gender)." It's always someone else's fault. Fair? No. How it is? Yes. Comment at will, folks. It's the truth, which is what we need more of.

Duda - 05/04/10 - 14:26

The short interaction I had with her in Durham, Angelica was very cool and I could only imagine her coolness got stronger as she got promoted.

I agree with "Seriously" though, as far as hiring goes, hire those that want to make a career out of the fire service. Don't seek out certain folks to fill a quota. The ones' that truly want to be here, will seek out the information on how to get hired. Not everyone has a computer, but, they do have some way to contact H.R. (or their local firehouse) to find out when we're taking apps, even if it means using their two feet to walk there.

Silver - 05/04/10 - 15:52

Hire the best person. What I see in action here is reverse racism. If a 30 person academy comes along, and the top 30 is 28 white males and 2 black males, why are you going to lower your standards to up the number of minorities (both race/gender). You lower the quality of the person on the truck as well as the service you provide to your district by hiring for quota instead of skill, effort desire and passion for the job. If a minority wants the job they should work harder for it. Why punish a person who earned the spot simply because they aren't a minority. For all those fighting for minorities to get more positions, how is this fair to non minorities? Earn it, don't take hand outs

agreed - 05/04/10 - 16:25

Okay, we're hearing everyone doesn't like. Conceive a system that produces the desired outcome, but in a manner to everyone's (or most people's) liking. Solve the problem of making homogenous fire departments more representative of heterogeneous communities.

What's in your tool box for that task? Go pie in the sky on this one, if you need to.

Legeros - 05/04/10 - 16:37

The best option? Hmm, how about a TV announcement on the big three (CBS, ABC and NBC), a posting on a fire department related recruitment site (which are open to the general public), an ad in the News and Observer and on the City web site. Keep it neutral. Sorry to step on toes folks, but this is how I feel. Don't go after certain demographics, go broad. Don't just have a recruitment drive at a minority college. Have it at every college or no college at all. When you start going to great lengths just to attract a demographic, that's where you open yourselves up to the people who just want a paycheck.

Silver - 05/04/10 - 19:54

And here's a bit more about Captain Greene, from the Firehouse subs site, <http://www.firehousesubs.com/heroes/Hero..>

Legeros - 05/04/10 - 21:09

And Google finds these DFD recruitment process slides, <http://www.ci.durham.nc.us/departments/f..>

Nice bright color scheme!

Legeros - 05/04/10 - 21:12

There is no such thing as "reverse" racism or discrimination. Its just plain racism, or just plain discrimination. I understand the point, but the situation is not as simple as to just "hire the best people." That is the goal but access to information about hiring opportunities, standards, etc., etc., etc., is not equal. The up shot is that even though casting a wide net should take care of the diversity in theory, that net is full of holes in practice and will wind up skewing the catch (to continue the metaphor..). The people who just want a paycheck should be sloughed off through the hiring process if the powers-that-be have gonads (be they testes or ovaries....couldn't resist that one). Oh, and ummm, minorities shouldn't have to work harder than anybody else of the process is truly done equitably. This, however, can't ever truly be realized since personal prejudices can't truly be removed, even in the best of people. The evidence? Count how many people believe that "stereotypes exist for a reason." The other reality, contentious as it is, is that affirmative action (which is about maintaining equal opportunity, not setting up quotas) is still needed in the 21st century, which is a sad statement. It absolutely hurts as many as it helps since it is often misapplied, but we would probably still be living with "Jim Crow" without it. The term "reverse" discrimination is as ridiculous as the "word" irregardless.

Bob - 05/04/10 - 22:53

And just to be clear, I do not advocate giving handouts by any means. If only life could be as simple as musings on a blog....

Bob - 05/04/10 - 22:57

It is indeed a complicated set of situations that simple musings won't solve. But perhaps we gain perspective and awareness of the challenges in the present system by conversation and discussion.

Everybody wins, I believe, when a fire department both (a.) can perform the tasks they are tasked to perform and (b.) has a membership that reasonably represents the community they serve. Heck, just basic "different people" (in a loose sense) can help any organization expand its thinking, by widening the box that contains the collective thoughts, experiences, backgrounds, perspectives, values, opinions, cultures, etc.

Where "different" can be inner or outer traits of any kind.

Legeros - 05/05/10 - 07:15

Absolutely.

Bob - 05/05/10 - 09:10

I think DFD should pay close attention to what's going on with the Wake Co. Schools "diversity" policy. A group (especially one that employs people to save lives and property) should NEVER have to succumb to "diversity" just to appease special-interest groups (Rainbow Coalition, NAACP, NOW, etc.). It shouldn't be representative of it's community in race or gender. It should be representative of it's community in members of that community that want to be there for the purposes of the specific job, not just to get a paycheck. If black man or Asian woman or transsexual person want to be firefighters to be firefighters, not just to have a job and get a check, then it doesn't matter to me, as long as the hiring process doesn't get "dumbed-down" to allow people of a lower education level (regardless of race or gender) or lower desire level to succeed in the process. Like GSgt. Hartman said in "Full Metal Jacket": "It's my job to weed out the non-hackers who do not pack the

gear to serve in my beloved Corps!" The same thought should apply to hiring standards, especially where public safety and public trust is placed in such high regard and importance.

Duda - 05/05/10 - 16:16

@ Duda- AMEN, my friend, AMEN. I have been a part of "targeted employment drives" in other locales. They don't work. Ever. If you WANT to be a firefighter, paramedic, police officer, Marine, etc., you will move HEAVEN and EARTH to make it happen. THOSE are the folks that you want "manning the line". Those are the people you want behind you on the attack line, helping you in the back of the 'balance while you deliver pre-mature twins, watching your back as you pursue a 'perp' down an alley, or sharing space with you in a deserted street as you look for snipers.

Those that wait for you to come to them, beg them to apply, that you have to constantly 'coach' them through training, 'change' the standards and tests to accommodate them, etc., well, no thank you.

And don't get me wrong, if you are trying, if you have that desire, I'll move Heaven and earth to help you make it. And believe me, just like the proverbial GSgt Hartman, I can tell the difference.

DJ - 05/05/10 - 18:32

Good points, good opinions.

The best members want to be the best members.

Next question, can that "want" be instilled, compelled, modeled, taught, etc.? If yes, can that be done at a community-wide level? And what might that look like? Say, aggressive Explorer programs, that seed career information at very early ages. Plant and let grow, and cultivate years later. But that's just an off-the-cuff example.

Legeros - 05/05/10 - 19:16

How much does it really matter anyways? I have come to find that in the Fire Service it's not so much what you know, but who you know. So regardless of your "status" nothing will get you a job faster in the fire service if you have good family connections. I would like to see how much better your chances are if you are a second or third generation fire fighter....

Nepotism: (n) favoritism shown to relatives or close friends by those in power (as by giving them jobs)

nepotism - 05/05/10 - 20:20

Nepotism? Hmm. I don't know if I would go that far. But I have found that it helps to be known. I guess the modern term is "networking". Aside from my first job at Hardee's back in 1974, every job I have ever gotten, and every promotion, came about at least in part because of friends and "connections" I have established over time. Did I go out of my way to make the "right" friends? No. But I did learn early that it helps to develop contacts.

DJ - 05/06/10 - 16:40

One might mistaken nepotism for family connections. If you're raised around the fire service, or related to members therein, it perhaps becomes more compelling (or simply evident) as a career path, than those farther removed from the profession.

Legeros - 05/06/10 - 17:07

Back to the diversity point. Here is a video from Fire Engineering that seems to explain some of our chronic "inability" to get over some of our diversity issues: <http://www.fireengineering.com/index/vid..> . Cheryl is someone I shared a class with at the NFA this year and was one of the speakers on the diversity panel offered at the 2010 FDIC. She is a very rational person with significant insight.

A.C. Rich - 05/07/10 - 15:06

Just to play devil's advocate for a minute, those who would move heaven and earth to be a firefighter, could also be incompetent rocks. I mean, if you have to move heaven and earth to get them through training, do we really want them on our backup line, or at the pump panel. Desire can only go so far. Don't get me wrong, I can totally understand that part of training people to a standard will involve finding how each candidate best learns the material, etc. But as was mentioned, that's the job of the training cadre...separate the wheat from the chaff.

I'm just saying that there are plenty of fully capable people in "demographics" that will be under-served (and thus become underrepresented) by a laissez-fair recruitment strategy. The rationale that "those who really want it will make it happen" is weak and parochial. As much as I'd like that to really be the case, it's not as simple as that. The firefighting profession should be populated by those who want it and are qualified.

If done equitably, diversity will be a result. I agree that diversity as an initial and controlling goal is putting the cart before the horse and performance standards should not be compromised one iota for anybody, however, if you think you have what it takes, you should get the chance to prove it.

Bob - 05/07/10 - 23:48

Great video, AC! That's a heck of a landscape that she discusses.

Key quote at the start: "I say we agree on some common issues we all face. For example, many departments are facing significant budget cuts, which often put us in public safety in a defensive and reactionary posture. We all agree that we are not fighting as much fire as we did 20 to 25 years ago. Some departments are losing experience through retirements, and some departments, like my own, are dealing with a young and inexperienced work force due to population growth. Many departments are dealing with multiple generations in the firehouse, which seems to still create personnel management issues for some officers. And unfortunately, we still have many departments that are being pressured to hire a more diverse work force, because they do not adequately reflect the community that they serve. In short, we are faced with many new challenges as fire service officers, and, hence, many opportunities."

Legeros - 05/09/10 - 08:09

I heard this morning that former Raleigh Firefighter Trey Mayo has been named the Rocky Mount Fire Chief.

great - 05/13/10 - 10:29

Name: (real name
preferred)

E-mail: (optional)

Web Site: (optional)

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Comment moderation is enabled on this site. This means that your comment will not be visible on this site until it has been approved by an editor.

To prevent spam we require you to answer this silly question

What are the FIRST TWO LETTERS of the word 'fire'?

[\(Register your username / Log in\)](#)

Notify: Yes, send me email when someone replies.

Hide email: Yes, hide my email address.

Small print: All html tags except and <i> will be removed from your comment. You can make links by just typing the url or mail-address.