

ACTION NO. _____

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AT A REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF ROANOKE COUNTY, VIRGINIA HELD AT THE ROANOKE COUNTY ADMINISTRATION CENTER

MEETING DATE: September 25, 2012

AGENDA ITEM: Recognizing Fire & Rescue for receiving VACo Award

SUBMITTED BY: Richard E. Burch Jr.
Fire/Rescue Chief

APPROVED BY: B. Clayton Goodman III
County Administrator

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR'S COMMENTS:

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION:

On August 1, 2012 the Virginia Association of Counties (VACo) announced that Roanoke County Fire & Rescue Department had been selected as one of 11 winners in the VACo 2012 Achievement Awards Program. Jim Campbell, VACo Executive Director, will be present at this Board meeting to officially present Roanoke County with its Achievement Award.

The Fire & Rescue Department received the Public Safety award for their entry entitled "Public Safety on the Appalachian Trail". Over the last five years, Roanoke County Fire & Rescue witnessed a dramatic increase in rescue calls for lost or injured hikers on or near the Roanoke County portion of the Appalachian Trail (AT). Most of these rescues were for minor injuries or lost day-hikers that were ill prepared. It was not uncommon for day-hikers to have little or no water, inappropriate clothes, and no flashlight as well as being in poor physical condition for an entire day of hiking.

To effectively manage these types of rescues the Fire & Rescue Department realized that additional training needed to be completed to help mitigate these types of incidents, and moreover to ensure the safety of Fire & Rescue Department personnel responding. During this training, it was realized that a vast majority of hikers becoming lost stated that there were very few signs or trail markings to keep them on the correct path.

A public-private partnership was developed with all the stakeholders to identify solutions to the problem of people becoming lost or injured. The group consisted of Roanoke County Fire & Rescue representing local government, the ATC representing the U.S. Park Police and U.S. Park Service, USFS and RATC. This group moved the meetings from the office to the trail with two stakeholder hikes to actually identify where lost hikers and injuries

occurred through detailed GIS mapping. During the hikes the representatives of each group developed strategies on what type of signage would work best, where additional information kiosks should be placed and improvement of public documents of the trail such as brochures and maps.

This Appalachian Trail Partnership took over three years and required multiple organizations that had very different missions to work together for a common goal. The outcome has been a tremendous success in reducing the responses to lost or injured hikers but more importantly has made hiking in Roanoke County a more enjoyable and safer destination for all citizens who want to experience some of Virginia's most breath taking natural venues.

VACo processed 37 entries for the competitive statewide contest. The judges were very impressed by the quality of every program submitted. The competition was extremely fierce.

"It always amazes me the level of competition for Achievement Awards," said James Campbell, VACo executive director. "This year is no exception. Competition is fierce. All 37 entries were deserving but only the best received an award. I'm grateful we have outstanding judges because the task to pick winners is not an easy one."

This was the eighth consecutive year Povar has served as judge. "This year the entries were particularly strong in community/economic development and regional collaboration," Povar said. "This tells me that counties are working together to improve their service delivery systems. Regional collaboration works, and counties are proud to show examples of it."

Blake, who served as judge in 2010, also raved about the quality of the entries. "As judges, we appreciate the time counties invest to prepare and submit award nominations," Blake said. "Many of these submissions required hours of detailed preparation to fully describe the project and its surrounding context. Counties understand it's important to be recognized for superior work, but it's even more vital to share innovative ideas and programs with each other. The Achievement Awards program allows counties and the public to view the creative work that's happening today in local government."

The VACo Achievement Awards is a competitive program open to local government members of the association.