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Water rescue may cut salaries

By Luke E. Saladin
Post staff reporter

Boone County Water Rescue chief Dale Appel has agreed to cut all staff salaries in order to ensure that the organization itself isn't the victim of cost-cutting moves by the Boone County Fiscal Court.

In a brief meeting with Boone County Administrator Jim Parsons on Wednesday, Appel proposed slashing his budget from \$217,132 this year to \$85,000 in the coming fiscal year, which runs July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004.

Parsons felt the request was reasonable and will recommend the Fiscal Court adopt the changes when it votes on the county budget this Tuesday.

Appel made the cuts by slashing his part-time salary of \$16,000 a year as well as eliminating a secretarial position, which paid \$11,000 a year. Appel said he would operate as a volunteer chief and try to find a volunteer to serve in the secretarial position, which is currently vacant.

He also removed the \$50 per shift stipend paid to emergency medical technicians who accompany crews on their regular patrols each weekend. Appel and Parsons both stressed that the funding reduction would not result in any loss of services; that will depend on whether the organization is able to continue attracting enough volunteers.

Appel started the squad after his best friend and his friend's father-in-law drowned in the Ohio River. He didn't want others to suffer through what he had -- days of waiting for the bodies to resurface before they could be recovered.

About 30 people volunteer with the unit.

"This was never about the money for me," Appel said. "It is not an easy job, but we all contribute to our community in different ways."

The 36-year-old rescue unit patrols on weekends from Big Bone Creek on the Ohio River to Locust Pike on the Licking River. The unit also rescues stranded boaters and helps recover the bodies of drowning victims.

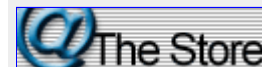
The squad has six vessels, including one that serves as a floating ambulance, and assorted rescue and diving gear.

Kenton County and Covington kick in about \$15,000 each to help pay for the service.

Complaining that Boone County pays the bulk of the service even though the service is often used in other counties, the Boone Fiscal Court has cut funds for the squad since 1999.

Parson said he would continue to negotiate to try and increase contributions from other governments, as well as look for other funding alternatives.

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With the proposed agreement, Parsons doesn't anticipate further cuts in Boone County's portion of the rescue unit's budget in the future.

"It is a reasonable expense and as long as we can keep the cost at this level I think we will be fine," Parsons said. "I think it was a good compromise."

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