


# STAFFORD *Virginia*



2010 VACo Achievement Awards

Stafford County  
Fire and Rescue Station 14

Recognizing the Best in County Government Programs!



Virginia Association of Counties

# 2010 Achievement Awards



## 2010 VACO Achievement Awards

Deadline: June 1, 2010

### Application Form

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. Deadline: June 1, 2010.

#### Program Information

Locality Stafford County

Program Title The opening of Fire Station #14

Program Category Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Population Category 5 - 100,000+

#### Contact Information

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Signature of county administrator or chief administrative officer

Name Anthony Romanello

Title County Administrator

Signature\* 

\*Entries without this signature will not be accepted.

ATTN: 2010 Achievement Awards Program  
 Virginia Association of Counties  
 1207 East Main Street, Suite 300  
 Richmond, Va. 23219-3627  
 address service requested

## Call for Entries

**Locality: Stafford County, Virginia**  
**Population: (5) 100,001 +**  
**Department: Stafford County Fire and Rescue Department**  
**Program Title: Fire and Rescue Station 14**  
**Category: Criminal Justice and Public Safety**

### **Summary**

Just south of our nation's capital sits a 1920's farm house in Stafford County, Virginia. But this dated country bungalow is not just another house whose time has passed — it is now a county fire station. At 1,064 square feet, the old house is one-eighth the size of a typical fire station and only holds enough space for four career fire fighters and one fire engine. Despite the unconventional appearance of Fire Station 14, its existence saved Stafford County residents thousands of dollars in homeowners insurance and required the cooperation of almost all county departments to become a reality. What is most amazing about this station, which is now one of the busiest in Stafford County, is that it was renovated and prepared for operations in just 60 days.

## **Stafford Fire and Rescue Station 14**

### **Introduction**

Just south of our nation's capital sits a 1920's farm house in Stafford County, Virginia. But this dated country bungalow is not just another house whose time has passed — it is now a county fire station. At 1,064 square feet, the old house is one-eighth the size of a typical fire station and only holds enough space for four career fire fighters and one fire engine. Despite the unconventional appearance of Fire Station 14, its existence saved Stafford County residents thousands of dollars in homeowners insurance and required the cooperation of almost all county departments to become a reality.

### **Problem**

A new fire and rescue station for north Stafford had been approved by the Stafford Board of Supervisors in January 2009 as part of Stafford's FY2010 – FY2015 Capital Improvement Program. However, the timeline for the station was rapidly moved up after the Insurance Services Office (ISO) completed a required review of the county's fire protection system, rating each fire station service area on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 meaning "unrecognized." The ISO is a company that provides risk assessments to help insurance companies decide policy rates. When the ISO visited the Rock Hill Fire Station, which serves Stafford's northwestern portion, the office rated the station a '10,' meaning that it did not recognize the site as a serviceable fire station.

Stafford is served by a county fire and rescue department that is made up of a combination of career and volunteer personnel. The Rock Hill Fire Station, Station 8, is a volunteer staffed station and did not meet minimum response and staffing standards. Thus, the assessment judged that homes in the county's northwest area were at high risk without an effectual fire station within five road miles. The ISO gave the county only 60 days to fix the problem or the homeowners' insurance costs to residents of north Stafford would increase. In addition, some homeowners would have had difficulty renewing or even signing up for an insurance policy.

The Stafford Board of Supervisors considered an insurance increase for residents unacceptable. The Board of Supervisors was concerned about a lack of equity if insurance rates in one portion of the county were to increase. They did not want a large group of citizens experiencing higher insurance rates than the rest of the citizens in the county.

Given the drastic budget cuts that the county had implemented over the last two years because of the ailing economy, real estate deflation, and falling revenues, funding the construction of an entirely new fire station was impossible. But the Board knew that staff needed at least a small budget to fix the problem. The Fire and Rescue Department had \$60,000 surplus from another project that could be allocated toward the creation of a new fire station. On November 5, the Board approved the Fire and Rescue Department's use of the \$60,000 to find a solution.

In addition to the short time frame and limited budget, the ISO deemed that the new fire station be placed within a specific area that covered a five-mile radius because a station that receives a rating of '10' can become recognized if another station that passes the assessment is within five miles.

### **Solution**

Initially, the Fire and Rescue Department considered converting a section of a new strip mall into a fire station. However, the ISO would not certify the strip mall location as a solution because it was located two-tenths of a mile outside of the designated five-mile radius. Fire and Rescue staff began scouting the area for a potential location. As the department's fire and rescue chief and his assistant chief stood in the parking lot of a local grocery store, they noticed a "For Sale" sign on a house across the street within the exact area that the additional station was needed. They immediately contacted the realtor's number on the "For Sale" sign and set up a meeting with the owners.

The house was clean, but extremely old. There were no doors in the bedrooms and it had a rickety ramp for wheelchair access. In addition, the property had many large trees in close proximity to the home, which could cause safety hazards, an antiquated electrical system and dilapidated sheds that needed to be removed. The two chiefs determined that creating a fire and rescue station in the house was doable, but maintain the house as a long-term solution was going to be extremely difficult and cost prohibitive.

The county negotiated for three weeks with the owners of the home and finally signed a contract to lease the property for two years. The contract allowed the possibility of extending the lease to three years, as well as the option of buying the property at any time.

Once a lease contract had been agreed upon, the hard work started. With less than 30 days to get the station up and running, almost every county department had to pitch in and take swift action. The County Attorney's Office contributed by creating legal contracts that would protect the County and homeowner. The Utilities Department already had accounts with suppliers and allowed materials to be purchased through their accounts which were used to create a driveway that could sustain the heavy weight of a fire engine. The Rappahannock Regional Solid Waste Management Board, which operates and maintains the regional landfill in Stafford, used heavy machinery to build the new driveway and remove old sheds and structures on the property and disposed of the materials. Planning and Zoning ensured that all the proper building policies and procedures were followed. The Public Works Department coordinated grass maintenance, completed work in the interior such as putting doors on the bedrooms, fixed the plumbing, and flushed out the septic tank. Public Works' building inspectors worked alongside the Fire and Rescue Department's own fire marshals to ensure building and fire code compliance.

In addition, a vehicle bay had to be built in rapid fashion, with the specifications to house a fire engine in all weather conditions. The economic recession turned out to be a crucial factor in preparing the station and building the vehicle bay within the short time span. In 2006, it would have been nearly impossible to find construction workers in the area on short notice because construction in the area was booming. Since then, the cost of construction had decreased, allowing the County to contract workers for a price that fell within the \$40,000 budget for construction work.

A day before Thanksgiving 2008, Station 14 opened its doors and Paramedic Engine 14 began serving a portion of northern Stafford County, just in time to keep the ISO from re-rating the area. The first emergency 911 call arrived at 11:42 a.m. that same day, with four more calls to follow. In the first week, Station 14 firefighters answered 45 calls and another 162 in the first month.

The Insurance Services Office visited the new fire station and examined the building along with its location in relation to the other fire stations and homes. Station 14 was certified as a fix, meaning that the insurance rating of northern Stafford County would remain unchanged and homeowners would not face higher insurance costs.

Since firefighters have moved in, working out the kinks in the home has not been easy. Exterminators found hordes of beehives in the attic and snakes have visited the firefighter's living room. The driveway requires constant maintenance.



## Success

Fire Station 14 serves a densely populated area of about 30,000 in the Garrisonville/Rock Hill area of the County adjacent to Marine Corp Base Quantico on the edge of north Stafford's booming business and residential area. Despite the small size of the station, it is now the fourth busiest in the county.

Residents in northern Stafford County have two reasons to get excited about the new station. For one, the station has saved them thousands of dollars in insurance costs. In addition, response times in the demand zone served by Station 14 have plummeted, drastically improving the Fire and Rescue services in the northern part of the county and bringing this area in compliance with the Department's "Standard of Cover". Standards of Cover are response time performance benchmarks set for each demand zone throughout the county. Before Fire Station 14 opened, response times in the immediate area of service were routinely over 14 minutes. Since the fire station opened, response times have dropped to 4-6 minutes.

Stafford County has applied for American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 funds to construct a state-of-the-art station on the property. Until then, Station 14 firefighters have what they need at the old farm house, and so do Stafford's citizens.

## Fire and Rescue Station 14



*The Station 14 sign sits in front of one of Stafford's "newest" fire and rescue stations.*



*Fire and Rescue Station 14 is housed in a bungalow that was built in the 1920s.*



*A view of the back of Fire and Rescue Station 14.*



*This bay had to be built on the property to house the station's fire apparatus.*