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Online Employee Scheduling & Workforce Management Solutions

Oakdale (MN) Fire Dept.

Deputy Chief Kevin Wold remembers when Oakdale was a patchwork of small subdivisions, isolated from one another by tracts of farmland and linked by two-lane roads. The first-tier St. Paul suburb is now mostly built-out with dense residential planned for the few available remaining tracts.

When Wold joined the department at age 20, Oakdale Fire -- staffed entirely by volunteers -- responded to about 200 calls per year.

"Over 27 years, it's completely exploded. It was in the late '70s and into the '80s when we experienced a big housing boom here. Now we're pretty much built out, and we're in the redevelopment phase, so developers are buying up old stuff, tearing down and redeveloping," said Wold, who also serves as Fire Marshal.

In 1997, Oakdale Fire doubled its coverage area and call volume when it took over territory formerly protected by the East County Line Fire Dept.

The August 2017 completion of a new St. Croix River bridge has also brought an increased wave of Wisconsin commuters through Oakdale. Two of Wold's full-time members live at Somerset, Wis., now just 20 minutes away.
"It's changed out here quite a bit," he said.

As the department transitioned from all-volunteer to 24/7 full-time coverage at two stations, Wold realized his old method of communicating schedules, using email, wasn't going to cut it anymore. He learned about Aladtec from Butch Gervais, his counterpart at the neighboring Maplewood Fire Dept.

"I did it all through Microsoft Outlook. If I had a sick call or an open shift, I would send an e-mail out to the department saying I've got this opening on this date, this time-frame. 'Send me an e-mail back if you're interested in working.' When I gave someone the shift, I would plug it in on the calendar."

Department Info:

Roster: 14 FT firefighter-paramedics, 25 pd on-call volunteers.

Calls: About 3,100 in 2018.

Service area: 11 sq. miles, approx. 30,000 people.

Apparatus: 3 engines, 2 ladders, 2 ALS ambulances, brush truck, and two command vehicles at two stations.

Challenges: Five-mile stretch of I-694 Twin Cities bypass that carries 88,000-plus vehicles with heavy commercial traffic, rapid population growth, and expanding senior-living facilities.

Special skills: Vehicle extrication and ice-rescue.

Aladtec users since early 2017.

Neighboring agencies also using Aladtec:

Animal Emergency & Referral Center of MN, St. Paul; Oakdale Police Dept.; North St. Paul Fire; Regions Hospital - Education, Oakdale; Maplewood Fire Dept., Maplewood; Woodbury Public Safety, Woodbury; East Metro Medical Resource Control Center, St. Paul; Vadnais Heights Fire Dept., St. Paul; White Bear Lake Fire Dept., White Bear Lake; Allina Health Emergency Medical Services, St. Paul; Washington Co. Sheriff's Office, Stillwater; Lakeview Hospital EMS, Stillwater; and the Roseville Fire Dept., Roseville.

Full-time firefighters carry smartphones while paid-on-call members carry pagers and use the "I Am Responding" application to verify they're en route to the station.

Overseeing schedules is a regular piece of Wold's daily routine. Aladtec is regularly displayed on one of two screens at his stand-up computer station.

"It's big. It occupies the majority of my time. So there's 12 firefighter-medics, two at each station, so that's four on, and they work 24-hour rotating shifts ten days a month.

"People call in sick. They take time off. They take vacation. I've got one guy that's out on paternity -- it's 12 or 15 shifts I have to fill. I just had a gentleman come back who's on a work-comp injury, so that's six- or eight weeks. So that's some time if you look at our calendar. Just about every day this month, I've had someone I've had to fill in for," said Wold.

Wold is moving gradually to take advantage of more Aladtec features.

He's begun using shift labels and "we just added PR events, so we have that on here with spots for people to sign up based on how many people I need to do the PR event, station tour or whatever. Everything was done by e-mail before. Now they can do it from their phone. They don't have to come (into the station.)"

He's working to implement shift-trades.

"Our full-time staff is allowed to do shift-trades with one another, in lieu of just taking the day off. So we allow that within a 28-day pay period. It saves them from taking vacation, and it saves us from paying someone to work, so they'll shift-trade for a guy who'll work today, for the other guy who'll work next week."

The Oakdale Police Dept. also uses Aladtec, so there's synergy with the city's Public Works mechanics who service both fire apparatus and police squads. Maintenance personnel receive electronic notifications when Oakdale Fire staff report something in need of repair on an electronic form.

Both agencies would also like to implement Aladtec's time-clock functionality, but the City's accounting staff still prefers to receive documentation on paper. Wold does pull reports from Aladtec to document when he extends a member's shift or requires they work overtime.

Wold appreciates the fact he can stay on top of what's happening with personnel and apparatus, using only his smartphone.

"If a vehicle has an issue over a weekend, they fill out a form so I see it … I get a heads-up saying this is broke or something like that. That's nice. Before having the system, I'd have to come into the office to send out (an open shift notification) for someone who called in sick, or to change the schedule. Now I can do it from home. I was in Indianapolis for FDIC, and I had to fill a few shifts, and it was super-easy. I did it from there." "If the FT staff is off or calls in sick, I send it out to everyone, and they can come in and fill a shift at an hourly rate. They do their timesheet right on (Aladtec). The volunteers do it on here, and I can track it."

Wold is still learning Aladtec. Although he's created at least 16 different forms within the system, it's currently still more comfortable to have members print out completed paperwork than file as electronic records.

He expects Aladtec to continue helping Oakdale Fire find efficiencies, and the agency will most likely continue to add full-time members to meet public expectations for protection.

Kevin Wold

Deputy Chief and Fire Marshal Kevin Wold is a 27-year veteran of the Oakdale (MN) Fire Dept., joining as a volunteer at age 20. He's a graduate of St. Paul's Hill-Murray High School and studied Public Safety Leadership at Century College. He was named DC in 2003.

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