

Board approves extension of fire chief's contract

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SHELBY TOWNSHIP — On Jan. 19, the Shelby Township Board of Trustees unanimously approved a three-year extension of Fire Chief Jim Swinkowski's contract, effective Feb. 1.

Swinkowski's contract includes a \$2,000 salary increase to \$107,610, effective Feb. 1, and another \$2,000 salary increase to \$109,610 for the remainder of the term, effective Feb. 1, 2017.

Swinkowski formally has led the Fire Department since Jan. 19, 2013, but he also served as "acting" fire chief after former Fire Chief Gene Shepherd passed away in May 2012.

Prior to becoming the township's top fire administrator, Swinkowski was a firefighter for 22 years. He started working for the Shelby Township Fire Department in 1991.

Supervisor Rick Stathakis said

See **CONTRACT** on page 9A

Contract

from page 1A

Swinkowski and his department have produced approximately \$3 million in cost savings in the last five years.

"We obviously are elated that he has done that because, in times like these, you have to be creative," Stathakis said. "It's not just about cutting costs, but delivering a product people expect, and not only meeting their needs, but exceeding them as often as possible."

He said the township relies on Swinkowski for his managerial and financial skills, and the township is at a critical juncture with the process underway of building and staffing a fifth fire station.

"(Swinkowski) piloted the capital improvement fund (in the Fire Department) and, of course, we copied that," Stathakis said. "He paved the way and did an excellent job. Today, we use it for the entire township."

Swinkowski said that as a firefighter, he never imagined himself as a fire chief.

After being appointed to the acting fire chief position, he said the prospect became more favorable when he understood what the job entailed. He said he was excited when he was named the leading candidate following testing by the Shelby Township Police and Fire Civil Service Commission.

"I don't care about gold badges or my name in the paper," Swinkowski said. "I just enjoy working here, doing the job."

He said establishing open communication and running the department like a family business helped personnel become more invested in finding the best solutions and becoming goal-oriented.

"I threw out the playbook and started talking to the guys, making them aware why the board wants this done," Swinkowski said. "It was contagious. I think morale has never been higher."

In 2008, he said, the Fire De-

partment's operating budget was \$16 million. Last year, he said, it was \$12.6 million, with the same manpower, better equipment and a more developed township.

"We are now in a position where we can talk about what's in the best interest of our residents and increasing our staff size to meet the response needs of the township," Swinkowski said. "We are looking at another fire station in the southeast."

At its Jan. 19 meeting, the board approved the hire of six entry-level firefighter medics — including three replacement hires — to bring the Fire Department's total personnel up to 64. Swinkowski said it was the first time the department had increased its staff since 2005.

"Adding one body per shift is a step in the right direction," he said. "We have to start making adjustments because of the projected growth of the township."

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