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Rattle Watch

Proudly informing South Carolina firefighters.



Legislative Day + Palmetto 800

Legislative Day is in less than 2 weeks and *we need you there* to talk to your legislators about issues impacting the fire service in your community.

One of the biggest talking points this year is a statewide issue: the future of **Palmetto 800**, the interoperability radio system that allows for public safety agencies to communicate across county lines.

The system is in *significant* need from the legislature.

In the years following 2001, 800-megahertz technology, which existed previously but never in the world of public safety, was introduced to first responders. Some states, like neighboring North Carolina, built their own radio system; South Carolina elected to contract the work to Motorola, and the Palmetto 800 system was formed.

Towers were built under parameters that 95% of the state would be covered through a *mobile* radio transmission. But things have changed since the mid-2000s, and the modern first responder must have the ability to communicate with a *portable* radio that is compatible with the Palmetto 800 system. The strength of transmission has weakened and includes a lot of dead space in counties throughout the state.

Over time, counties have built towers, meaning the local taxpayer has

taken the brunt of the cost. It was never intended for local taxpayers to shoulder the cost.

Towers, signal strength, and the type of radio aren't the only barriers agencies face with Palmetto 800; there's also a user fee per radio. Prior to the 2008 recession, the legislature agreed to pay 33% of the user fees; but when budgets were tightened, that percentage was slashed to roughly 5%.

Palmetto 800 hasn't had significant appropriation since.

Now we are at a crossroads. Agencies are being priced out of Palmetto 800, realizing they cannot afford to build more towers to increase signal strength and pay the user fees.

But without Palmetto 800, we risk reverting our public safety communications to pre-9/11 ineffectiveness.

To achieve the desired 95% portable coverage, 50 additional towers need to be built at a total cost of \$100M. Total user fee coverage equates to \$24,000,000 per year. It will cost \$124M to repair, modernize, and maintain Palmetto 800.

As more and more agencies seek alternative and cheaper communications systems, *the further away a fully functional interoperability radio system becomes.*

Please join us for [Legislative Day](#) on April 5 to talk to your legislator about the importance of funding Palmetto 800.

Association event



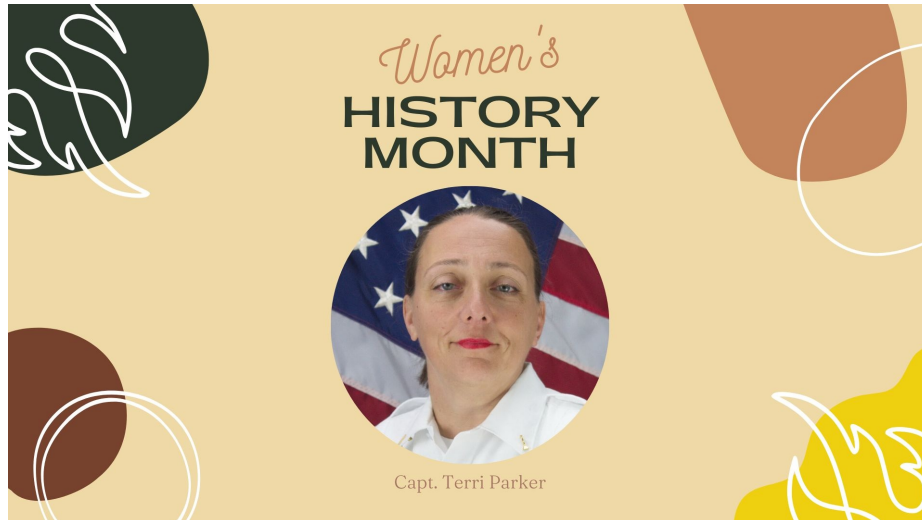
Explorer + Junior Firefighter Competition info

The annual [Explorer + Junior Firefighter Competition](#) is on Friday, June 16 at 1 p.m. during [Fire-Rescue](#). The competition is limited to active members of a BSA Explorer Post or Jr. Firefighter Program ages 14 to 18 sponsored by a fire department covered by proper insurance. Each team or individual must fill out a registration form and waiver.

The competition consists of 2 events: gear donning* and team hose deployment.

Registration forms and waivers must be received no later than **May 31, 2023** and emailed to ashley@scfirefighters.org, mailed to ASHLEY @ the SC State Firefighters' Association, PO Box 211725 Columbia, SC 29210, or faxed to 803-454-1895. Contact [Will Catoe](#) at 803-438-2553 with any questions or clarifications.

**No SCBA's will be provided for the gear donning event. Participants must bring their own SCBA for each participant and scheduling will allow for minimal SCBA to be needed for the gear donning event as competitors from the same department will be scattered in the line-up.*



Women's History Month spotlight: Terri Parker

Terri Parker sometimes doesn't believe she gets to be a firefighter for a living.

"I'll still sit in the rig and pinch myself, 'is this real?'... I'm getting paid to do this?" she said.

Terri is a captain at **Pine Ridge Fire Rescue**, a combination department in Summerville. She's recently joined the career side of the job, but her journey in the fire service started long before her tenure at Pine Ridge.

"To say I have gone a non-traditional route is not the least bit an exaggeration," Terri reminisced.

In 1993, Terri left her roots in Ohio, where her family had instilled in her a strong commitment to community service, for a small college in Florida. The fire department was a big part of the community where she grew up and she knew a captain at the local air force base, but firefighting wasn't a family tradition for her.

A few of her college classmates were volunteering at the local station and many of the department members were students. It was a demographic that lent itself to accepting people outside of the norm.

"When I first started volunteering in college, it just clicked," she said.

She was hooked.

Terri briefly returned to Ohio before moving to South Carolina. It was then that she took a 'mom hiatus' while still being loosely affiliated with a few

departments in the area. Like it always does, motherhood changed her life; her life would drastically change again when she became a single mom juggling multiple jobs, one of them being a part-time gig at Pine Ridge.

An avid proponent of self care, the fire service is where she turned to when she was searching for an identity outside of motherhood.

It would take some time before Pine Ridge added full-time employees, but when they did, Terri was among those hired. When they had their very first paid shift as a department, Terri worked her very first shift as a full-time firefighter as a captain.

“There’s a lot of pride in being part of a historical amount of growth for our department and this area,” Terri said. The learning curve—for both Terri, who’d been promoted to Lieutenant when she was part-time and was now taking on the responsibilities as captain for the first time, and the department—was steep.

When she reflects on that first shift, one thing sticks out to her.

“When I worked my first full-time shift at Pine Ridge, gender never came up. It just wasn’t a thing,” she said.

“I only know how to be a woman in the fire service,” Terri continued. “The reality is, I think that women in general have some latitude in general that men don’t when it comes to how we engage with the public, when it comes to how we engage with patients and people in our care, and how we engage with each other, and the softer stuff is much more acceptable for us.”

Many of her crew members are the same age as her kids, and she confessed in a laugh, “I’d be lying if I said I didn’t mother a lot of people at work.”

Terri knows how important it is for women and minorities to be celebrated when they accomplish a first. She’ll loudly cheer them on until firsts are a thing of the past.

“Those firsts are exciting,” she said, “but it’s just as exciting for you to get to that point where it’s not a topic.”



Finance & Audit report update

The **Finance and Audit Committee** and Association staff on Monday, March 6, met with **Ken Meadows** from **Greene Finney Cauley** regarding the Annual Financial Audit. Mr. Meadows presented a brief overview of findings of the annual audit of the Association, as well as the Insurance Services and Foundation financial documents. Based on their in-depth review of the expenditures and revenue transactions in all three accounts, their opinion is that all the transactions were conducted within the accepted accounting standards and that all three accounts are in very good financial condition. The Committee voted unanimously to accept the audit as presented and to refer to the Executive Committee for final review and approval.

Zorrina Harmon, Director of the South Carolina Firefighters Insurance Services, also discussed an independent audit that was recently completed on the SCFIS Trust Account. Based on their findings, the transactions related to this account were found to be in order and the account was in good financial standing as well.



Community events



Volunteers needed for Sound the Alarm

The **American Red Cross** is hosting its annual home fire safety "**Sound the Alarm**" signature event in **Spartanburg County**, April 17-24, and volunteers are needed. The organization is partnering with local fire departments and Fire Safe SC to target 1,500-1,700 homes with fire alarm installs and fire safety education. The primary event is on **Saturday, March 22 from 9 a.m.-5 p.m.** and will target roughly 900 homes across the county. The majority of volunteers are needed for the Saturday blitz.

Please contact Chief [Josh Fulbright](#) (803-728-5074) no later than April 12 if you would like to participate in the blitz on Saturday, April 22.



Apply for drinking water from Anheuser-Busch

The annual Anheuser-Busch Emergency Drinking Water for Wildland Firefighters Program is accepting applications through the end of the March.

The NVFC provided background on the program in its press release, stating:

“Anheuser-Busch has a longstanding tradition of providing emergency drinking water and supplies for disaster relief efforts. Every year, Anheuser-Busch periodically pauses beer production to can emergency drinking water to be ready to lend a helping hand during natural disasters and other crises. Building on this commitment, the brewer teamed up with the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) in 2019 to create the Emergency Drinking Water for Wildland Firefighters program.”

[Submit an application](#) by March 31.

News from the State House



Legislative Update

Each week when the legislature is in session, Association lobbyists Stewart, Konduros, and Associates provide an update on legislation that impacts the fire service. All Legislative Updates for current session are posted on our [website](#).

Today we're looking at Senate Bill 375 Emergency Scene Management.

S 375 (Emergency Scene Management) By Grooms, Verdin and Senn. Provides that a driver shall ensure that his vehicle is kept under control when approaching or passing a motor vehicle stopped on or near the right of way of a street or highway; to provide that a person driving a vehicle approaching a stationary vehicle displaying flashing hazard lights shall

slow down, yield the right of way, and maintain a safe speed if changing lanes is unsafe; and to provide penalties. This bill was passed by the Senate and sent to the House where it was referred to House Judiciary.

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- [March 31 - Humanistic Approaches to Fire Service Diversity Summit](#)
- [April 5 - Legislative Day](#)
- [April 20 - 1% Regional Training Class: Berkeley County](#)
- [May 16 + 17 - Cleveland School Fire Remembrance](#)
- [June 14 - Foundation Golf Tournament](#)
- [June 14-17 - Fire-Rescue](#)
- October 1-6 - Fire Officer Academy: The Company Officer class 23-02
- [October 17 - 1% Regional Training Class: York County](#)



South Carolina State Firefighters' Association

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