

Recruiting efforts yield results

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A recruiting push to expand lagging numbers of minority candidates for the job of Greenwich firefighter has yielded more than 50 applications from blacks, Hispanics and other non-whites for an employment test.

The total number of candidates identifying themselves as minorities tops the approximately 40 applicants who did so during Greenwich's last recruitment drive in 2005, Mary Jo Iannuccilli, assistant director of human resources for the town said.

In the recruiting period which ended June 6, 437 applicants applied for the job, including 54 minorities comprised of 29 African-Americans, 21 Hispanics, three American Indians and one Asian, Iannuccilli said. Eleven female candidates filled out applications this spring, she said.

The number of white candidates this spring was 352, compared to 477 during the 2005 application period, Iannuccilli said.

During the 2005 recruitment period 18 African Americans, 16 Hispanics, and two Asians sought the job, Iannuccilli said. Information about female applicants during the 2005 drive was not available, Iannuccilli said.

Greenwich's first black firefighter, Ron Thomas, said that he was pleased with the results of the minority recruitment effort that he helped spearhead.

This spring Thomas and Guy Fortt, another African-American firefighter, traveled to college campuses to distribute application packets and pitch the job of Greenwich firefighter to minorities and women.

"I think we did what we set out to accomplish and I'm so glad that we got at least 11 women," Thomas said. "It worked out but if we had more time to get the word out I think we'd have seen even better numbers."

The 437 applicants have thus far filled out an application packet, and will take a written exam sometime in the late summer or early fall, Deputy Greenwich Fire Chief Robert Kick said.

Kick said the numbers reflected an enhanced effort on minority and female recruitment, including an advertising blitz in regional newspapers and distributing applications at the University of Connecticut in Stamford, the University of New Haven and Norwalk Community College.

"I do think it was successful in that we didn't make that kind of effort before and now we have," Kick said. "Our effort was to reach everyone and spread the word."

Iannuccilli said the town advertised the job in weekly Spanish language newspapers based in New York including El Diario and La Voz Hispana, as well as the Amsterdam News, a weekly newspaper geared to New York City's black residents.

"We reached far and wide and I think we're doing better," Iannuccilli said.

The candidates will now compete to reach a shorter eligibility list of firefighters to be hired, Kick said.

Kick said the evaluation process will begin with a written exam in the late summer or early fall, followed by a physical agility test, an oral exam, and in the final stage background checks and a psychiatric evaluation.

"We then hire the person who we feel best suits the needs of the department," Kick said.

The town currently has 106 career firefighters, including six African-Americans and one female, according to town statistics.

The ethnic makeup of firefighters hired since 2005, and numbers of current firefighters identifying themselves as Hispanic or other ethnicities were not available yesterday.

Thomas said that typically African-Americans, Latinos, and other minorities in urban areas are not likely to consider professional

firefighting because of a lack of opportunity to gain firefighting experience through a volunteer fire department.

Thomas said he and Fortt will continue to push the current minority prospects for the job, coaching their study for the upcoming written exam and helping them get in shape.

Thomas said he will also be driving several candidates to a required Candidate Physical Agility Test, a prerequisite to taking the written exam that is administered by Connecticut State Police in Meriden.

Domus House, a nonprofit group home in Stamford has put up half of the \$150 cost of the test for each applicant, Thomas said, helping clear another obstacle for cash-strapped young minorities.

"Part of it is showing them what it means to be a firefighter," Thomas said. "It is not just taking a test and bada boom. It is a lifetime commitment."

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