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## Boosting volunteer rosters

Rensselaer County is trying to recruit firefighters and EMTs, reward those who serve

By **KENNETH C. CROWE II**, Staff writer

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TROY -- Rensselaer County is employing a range of new tactics to recruit volunteer firefighters and emergency medical technicians.



"Like many counties, we have seen a decline in the number of volunteers," County Executive Kathleen Jimino said last week at the county Public Safety Building.

That's why the county is offering incentives and new ways to sign up in an effort to help fill out the ranks of its volunteer fire departments and ambulance squads.

The county has launched a Volunteer Incentive Program to recruit local businesses to provide discounts to active volunteers.

"It allows our vendors to give kudos to our volunteers," Jimino said.

County Legislator Michael Stammel, R-Rensselaer, who also is an assistant fire chief in the Rensselaer Fire

Department, said the new program provides a venue for volunteers to reap some benefits.

Al Patanian, owner of Rainbow Cleaners, 10 Ford Ave., Troy, has offered a 20 percent discount to volunteers using his business. He will continue to do so under the new program.

"It's a way to give back to the community," Patanian said.

The Volunteer Incentive Program is one of several measures recommended by the county Emergency Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Committee.

The county will issue volunteer photo identification cards to firefighters and EMTs so they can identify themselves and their skills to other agencies when they are working outside their normal area. The cards also will be used in the Volunteer Incentive Program. The county is investing \$18,000 in this program.

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The county will conduct an ongoing marketing campaign to recruit volunteers; fire departments and ambulance squads are provided with information about new homeowners to contact to see if they wish to join; volunteers receive an income tax credit; scholarship lists for volunteers are being compiled; and the county is considering what educational opportunities can be offered to volunteers.

The county also has a telephone number and a Web site for people to seek out information about volunteering and to sign up: 270-1047 and <http://www.ren.sco.com/joinfireandems.htm>.

County officials said they are not certain how many volunteers are involved in the fire departments and ambulance squads around the county. They said they will have a better idea after the photo ID program begins in January.

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