

# **AHS Student Council President Challenges Godfrey to Help Its Firefighters with Initial \$5K Donation**

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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**GODFREY** – The Godfrey Fire Protection District (GFPD) is \$5,000 closer to attaining ballistic protection, thanks to a rousing call from Alton High Student Council President Betsy Papin.

During Monday night's meeting of the GFPD Board of Trustees, Papin gave a presentation during the period allocated for public comment. She was one of the students who volunteered their time during spring break to participate in an active shooter preparedness drill hosted by the Southern Illinois Law Enforcement Commission (SILEC). Both the GFPD and Madison County Sheriff's Office participated in a series of drills last Friday at Alton High School simulating an active shooter situation involving a single shooter with a 12-gauge shotgun.

From that exercise and the media coverage following it, Papin learned about the requirement of firefighters to go into a “warm zone,” which is an area cleared of a known active shooter by police, but still potentially dangerous, as the situation could still be developing. Unlike larger fire departments – such as Alton – the GFPD does not have protective equipment potentially required in such a threatening situation. Often firefighters and paramedics will have to treat the wounded following a mass kill event before police give the “all clear.”

Following that drill, Godfrey Emergency Management Director Chris Sichra said such equipment would cost a couple of thousand dollars per vest, and as many as four vests would be needed for each of the GFPD's two stations. The overall cost of this measure could total more than \$10,000. Sichra also sent a “letter to the editor” to several local media outlets, including Riverbender.com.

“With firefighters' job descriptions constantly expanding, we should now consider ballistic vests as a critical item that needs to be added to their inventory,” he said in the letter. “We know that taxes are stretched as far as they can go, fire district's taxes are capped and local budgets even tighter, so I'm placing a 'call to action' to our community, in an attempt to reach out to its businesses, our residents, our churches, our schools (public and private) and our community college, who are all key stakeholders in this matter, to try to help us generate the funds necessary to purchase these key protective vests for the GFPD. I am personally pledging \$500 to the cause and I encourage everyone to join me.”



Papin not only answered Sichra's call to action with a whopping \$5,000 donation from the Alton High Student Council, she downright challenged those stakeholders Sichra mentioned in his letter.

“GFPD has three very large 'customers' in the area it serves; the Alton District Schools located in Godfrey, which include Alton High School, two locations for Early Childhood, North, Lewis and Clark and Gilson Brown Elementary Schools, Lewis and Clark Community College, which is constantly growing, adding to its buildings and its student body yearly, and Beverly Farm, a home to over 400 intellectually and developmentally challenged adults. All three of the largest 'customers' of the GFPD are tax-exempt. Of the three, only Beverly Farm has given generously in the past.

“As a 'customer' at one of the most prevalent places a mass casualty event could happen, I believe that it is time for Alton High School to step forward and help our fire department get the equipment they must have in order to protect themselves. Alton High School Student Council would like to donate \$5,000 to the GFPD Rescue Task Force. It is our hope that this will begin a new partnership between the Alton School District and our firefighters. The GFPD are responsible in countless ways for our safety, so we in turn should be responsible for helping them get the equipment they need.

“We at AHS Student Council challenge all volunteer organizations at Alton High School, all parent group organizations at Lewis and Clark, Gilson and North Elementary Schools, the private schools located within Godfrey, St. Ambrose and Evangelical, Lewis and Clark Community College, all Godfrey churches and our Godfrey businesses to raise the remaining \$5,000 it will take to outfit our Godfrey firefighters.”

Anyone wishing to meet the young woman's challenge is invited by Sichra to donate to the GFPD with “ballistic vest fund” written in the memo line of checks. Those donations can be delivered to the GFPD, Station #1, 6011 Godfrey Rd. in Godfrey.