

Background Information

The Downs Fire Protection District currently has 3 Trustees. President – Mark Casada, Vice President – Jeff Misch, and Secretary/Treasurer, Janice Bettisch. Jeff Misch's Son Travis is the most senior Captain on the District. Janice Misch's Son John is the most senior full-time employed EMT on the District. Jeff Misch and Travis Misch own a business together, and are the employer of at least 2 members of the District. I have a high degree of concern that Jeff and Janice have a conflict of interest, as their immediate family members serve on and are employed by the Fire District. It is very clear that Jeff Misch and Janice Bettisch have formed an alliance, and are the two individuals who have pushed to remove Mike Manint as Fire & EMS Chief.

Approximately 8 months ago, when Jeff Misch became a Trustee, things drastically changed at the Downs Community Fire Protection District. Prior to Jeff being a Trustee, the morale and operations of the department were good. Things were not perfect, but definitely not broken. When Jeff became a Trustee, he maintained his position as the Assistant Chief, until mid-December 2017. It is speculated that when Chief Mike Manint refused Jeff Misch's request to promote his Son, Travis Misch, from Captain to Assistant Chief, Jeff and Travis took this personally. There were some grumblings from the EMS Staff regarding Chief Manint, but nothing that I was aware of beyond typical Employee / Supervisor frustrations.

Over the past 8 months, a palpable tension developed in the Firehouse. Nobody really knew what the issues were between Jeff and Mike. As rumors of allegations began to come out, everyone was walking on egg shells, and concerned about who was safe to talk to. It was very unclear to me, at least initially, where the alliances were and who was on whose side. This developed into a drastic reduction in meeting attendance, as well as the number of members who responded to calls. It seemed to dramatically, take the wind out of our sails, and member simply disengaged, and they were not interested in dealing with the drama.

This is not a privately owned business where the owner dictates to his employees. This is a Volunteer Organization where its Volunteer Members serve a tax paying body, residents of the district. The Volunteer Members of the Downs Community Fire Protection District contribute their time, away from their families and other responsibilities, to serve this community and even risk their own lives in doing so. I believe that it is inappropriate and irresponsible to operate this district in a manner where one or two individuals (Trustees) can making decisions that affect the leadership of this organization, and ultimately the level of service provided to the residents.

The Volunteer Members of the district should have confidence in their leadership. Removing a Fire Chief and appointing an Interim or new Fire Chief, without consulting its members does not equate to operating with the best interest of its members or perhaps even the residents of the Fire Protection District in mind. I believe that Jeff and Janice have handled this matter in an unprofessional and perhaps an illegal manner, as we now have Attorneys representing the District, and Mike Manint involved. This has exposed the District to unnecessary legal fees and an active wrongful termination law suit, filed by Mike Manint.

I understand that personnel issues must be handled with a confidential approach, to protect both the Member and the District. However, I personally am aware of one other neighboring department who seemed to have some awareness of the situation with Chief Manint, when there were Members of this District who are not aware of or privy to any details. However, returning the focus to the Members and residents, it is my concern that we conduct our business with transparency and integrity. Due process is critical for the protection of the District, and the health of the Membership. The Members of the district should be included in the process, as much as possible, to foster a culture of cohesiveness, trust, and ultimately the Brotherhood that we all so desperately desire.

Interim Chief John Day does not possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities to lead this Fire Protection District. In fact Trustee Jeff Misch and Captain Travis Misch fired John Day from their trucking company, allegedly because John could not complete his paperwork correctly... among other allegations. However, John Day was selected as the Interim Fire Chief because of his seniority. Travis Misch was unable to take the position of Chief Officer, due to the conflict of interest, with his Father Jeff Misch as a Trustee. Recently 2 Lieutenants were appointed, and those decisions were merit based, not seniority based. It is my opinion that John Day was appointed to Interim Fire Chief based on seniority, not merit. It is my opinion that this decision was made because it is convenient, and favors the Misch's desire to control this District...and in effect, they are able to manipulate and control John Day.

I am highly concerned with how the conflict of interest between Trustee Jeff Misch and Son, Captain Travis Misch, in concert with the conflict of interest between Trustee Janice Bettisch and Son, Full-Time Employee EMT, John Bettisch are going to impact the future of this Fire Protection District. It is apparent to me that the Misch's have some personal agenda to retain power and control of this District. Janice Bettisch appears to simply be going along with the Misch's, and Mark Casada appears to be an independent / neutral and objective Trustee, but simply out voted.

In conclusion, the issues of 2 conflicts of interest and obvious nepotism between Trustees and immediate family members, as well as the process and methodologies used to make personnel decisions have put the District at a high risk for litigation, de-stabilized the command structure, and established a culture where 2 individuals are able to effect changes that impact the safety and health of the members, as well as the level of service and community image of the Downs Community Fire Protection District.

My motivation and concern is the health and safety of the members, and the constituents of the Downs Fire Protection District.

Issues & Concerns

Wrongful termination of Fire Chief Mike Manint

Nepotism – Trustee Jeff Misch is the Father of Captain Travis Misch

Nepotism – Janice Bettisch is Mother of EMT Jon Bettisch

Timeline of Events

August 2017 - Jeff Misch was approved as a Trustee

December 2017 – Mike Manint was placed on Administrative Leave

January 2018 - John Day placed as Interim Fire Chief

February 2018 – Jeff Misch resigned as a member of the fire district, so he could vote of the termination of Mike Manint.

March 2018 – Illinois States Attorney and McLean County Board recommended that the Downs Community Fire Protection District, Board of Trustees vote on a resolution to transition from a 3 member board, to a 5 member board. The resolution failed, as Bettisch and Misch voted no, and Mark Casada voted yes.

April 8, 2018 – Trustee Casada relayed a message from McLean County Board Chairman McIntyre that he recommended the interviews and all future meeting be suspended.

Fire District Business & Operations

February 26, 2018 – Travis Misch responded to a fire call as Assistant Chief, wearing a white fire helmet. When questioned, John Day stated that he appointed Travis as Assistant Chief the previous week. Appointment to Assistant Fire Chief must be approved by the Board of Trustees, and was never even discussed at a Trustee meeting. Trustee Jeff Misch is fully aware of this, and has allowed it to occur.

February to Current – Jeff Misch responding to calls as 301 (Assistant Chief) on at least 3 occasions. This is documented in dispatch notes as 301 made radio communication with Metcom, responding in his personal vehicle to the scene of fire and EMS calls, which is a violation of department SOG's, as members are required to respond to the station, not directly to the scene. As previously noted, Jeff Misch resigned as a member of the district, so he could officially vote on the termination of Chief Mike Manint.

April 3, 2018 – A petition was circulated to select members of the district in an attempt to garner support for Jeff Misch, in preparation for a meeting with the County Board Chairman, where Jeff Misch as asked to resign as Trustee. This petition was not presented to all members of the district. It is unclear how the few members who signed the petition were approached. The petition was signed by Travis Misch, who signed as "Assistant Chief". Jeff Misch refused to resign as Trustee.

April 4, 2018 – Deadline for application for Fire Chief and Assistant Chief

April 8, 2018 – After submitting my application for Fire Chief or Assistant Chief, I was contacted by Trustee Janice Bettisch and notified of a request for interview at 11:54 am on April 9, 2018. I was called by Janice Bettisch again at 8:02pm, and notified that the interview had been cancelled.

April 9, 2018 – Interviews for the Fire Chief and Assistant Chief positions were conducted between 6pm and 7pm. I arrived at the station for our 7pm Fireman’s Association Meeting. After the meeting, at approximately 8pm, I was approached by Trustee Jeff Misch and asked if I would be willing to participate in an interview. I declined, as I had not prepared, because the last I knew, the interviews had been cancelled. Apparently, the interviews were conducted by Jeff Misch and Janice Bettisch in a public forum, Trustee Casada was not present. My resume cover letter was read aloud to the group, and I was not present to participate. Somehow, the other two candidates, John Day and Travis Misch were notified that the interviews were to be conducted, but the last contact I received from a Trustee was Janice Bettisch calling to notify me that the interviews were cancelled.

Also, Jeff Misch participated in the interview of his Son Travis Misch. When I was notified of the interview, I asked Janice Bettisch about the process. She stated that the interviews would be conducted individually, with one candidate present and the Trustees present. As it played out, not only were the other two candidates interviewed simultaneously, the interviews were video recorded, and members of the community were not only present, but able to participate by asking questions of the candidates.

At 9pm on April 9, 2018, I ask asked by Janice Bettisch if I would be willing to meet with the Trustees for my interview at 6pm on Wednesday, April 11th. How will my individual interview be compared to the public and panel interview that was previously conducted with the other candidates? Why was I not notified by a Trustee that the interviews were going to be conducted as originally scheduled? On a first round of interviews, why was a blogger allowed to video tape the interviews, and why were the public allowed to participate in the process?

These bizarre business decision are a prime example of why Jeff Misch and Janice Bettisch are not fit to be Trustees of the Downs Community Fire Protection District. I have composed this document as a means to illustrate the events that have played out in the recent months. My intention is to provide awareness to the members of the fire district, and to the Downs community about the fact surrounding the fire protection district. We deserve better, and I ask for your support in removing Jeff Misch and Janice Bettisch as trustees. Also, I propose that we urge the County Board and Illinois State’s Attorney to take the necessary action to require a 5 person Board of Trustees for the Downs Community Fire Protection District, so we can avoid any issue similar to this in the future.

I will be sharing this document with multiple members of the McLean County Board, and requesting a public meeting with Chairman McIntyre, to allow members of the fire protection district and members of the community an opportunity to voice our concerns with the present situation.

Respectfully,

Jeff Clarkson