

Statement from Chief Snowgren Snowgren, via attorneys Jennifer Zupp and Michael Carroll

Fire Chief Cory Snowgren has been a pillar of this community since he came here in 2010. Since then, he has led fundraising efforts to help secure over one million dollars for Denison and other Crawford County communities. Among other things, his efforts, with help from his team of volunteers and city officials over the years, have resulted in the birth of a Fire 1 and Fire 2 program for juniors and seniors at Denison Community High School. This program not only teaches valuable life skills to the students about the importance of serving others, but it ensures our community's safety because these students become our future protectors. Chief Snowgren is immensely proud of this accomplishment.

Chief Snowgren won grants to purchase \$135,000.00 worth of self-contained breathing apparatuses – the type firefighters need to use when they encounter fires. He then won another \$41,289.00 for a new fill tank to fill the air tanks on the breathing apparatuses. \$146,540.00 was won for the purchase of twenty new portable radios, six new mobile truck radios as well as repeaters. Our community needs these tools to keep the volunteers safe and Chief Snowgren's vision and hard work helped make this happen for us.

Chief Snowgren has overseen the acquisition of a new aerial truck (the kind with the tall, extension ladders), a command vehicle, a quick attack apparatus (for smaller fires), a medium-duty truck and thousands of feet of fire hose and nozzle upgrades which themselves can be more important than the amount of water put on a fire.

Not quitting there, Chief Snowgren has instituted a Spring and Fall, annual training program which is attended by firefighters from all over the United States. This last year saw 70 participants registered. They bring business to our community and it puts us proudly on the map. The program gives our own firefighters, and others, invaluable, real-life training experiences. As Chief Snowgren explains, there are things about firefighting that simply cannot be taught in the classroom. Firefighters need to practice wall breaches, they need to practice pulling hose, or running to their designated position for a fire. Every move is critical and if there is one avoidable mistake, lives can be lost. Chief Snowgren takes this risk very seriously. For this reason, he has also overseen the acquisition of the red, three-story fire training building South of Hwy. 30, as well as a flat roof building and this year, a slanted roof building. All of the structures are used to train individuals in the various "physical" aspects of fire science. They are a huge benefit to our community as a whole.

For the last eight years, city government has, understandably, largely stood by and watched Chief Snowgren get results that are good for the whole community. Accordingly, Chief Snowgren was shocked to learn that he was being placed on administrative leave, with pay, on 12/18/18 and not provided any notice about what it was that he had done wrong. The city's failure and refusal to give him even a hint about what it was researching put the Chief in a very difficult position – unable to explain anything to family and friends. Because information vacuums invite speculation and gossip, that is exactly what happened in this tight-knit community. In order to protect his rights and reputation, Chief Snowgren believed his only

prudent course of action was to secure counsel and hope that whatever the issue was, it could be easily explained once folks sat down to talk about it – something that should have happened before the city took the ill-advised step of placing him on leave without giving him any chance to answer whatever question the city had in advance.

The Chief and we have been assured by the city's investigator, attorney James Gilliam, hired by the Brown Winick firm, that there is no evidence of any criminal wrongdoing. Instead, the investigation seems to boil down to an unfortunate history of miscommunication and lack of a mutual understanding about a lot of things between city council, city employees, and department heads about what the other is doing and when consent is needed and when authority is implied or inherent. No one individual is to blame. Denison has lacked clear policies for a long time and our complacency may have finally caught up to us.

One basis of the investigation, as we understand it, is that some city councilmembers were upset because at the end of fiscal year 2017 (so June, 2018) and in early fiscal year 2018, some city funds were used to fund the construction of the slanted roof prop mentioned above and the funds did not come specifically out of the fire department's allocated budget. Some on the council reportedly believed that this acquisition should have been discussed more beforehand and specifically voted on, while Chief Snowgren feels that it was specifically discussed with the city manager and clerk, and the clerk authorized the payments, and therefore no other permission was required. In other words, a miscommunication with no ill-intent on the part of anyone.

Chief Snowgren believes that clear communication and cooperation are important to good management and good government. This is a skill he learned when he served in the Marines and throughout his professional career in public safety. It is also a skill easily improved upon if given the opportunity.

The other issue raised by the investigator was that in June, 2018, Chief Snowgren received three days of "vacation pay" on his June, 2018 paystub. The vacation days were given to him by Lisa Koch, the city clerk, and her own paystub was deducted for three days. Since she earns more than Chief Snowgren, it technically is a financial savings for the city for her to have gifted him days in this manner. Whether this was specifically allowed by policy or simply not prohibited by policy we do not yet know as we have yet to see the city's policy or department's policy regarding the gifting of vacation days from one employee to another. We requested this information from the city on 12/21/18. What we do know is that the police department allows employees to gift vacation days to others so it makes some sense that other city employees can, too. In this case, Lisa Koch, the city clerk, donated three of her vacation days to Chief Snowgren because Chief Snowgren's oldest son, Jake Snowgren, was leaving for the Army, and Chief Snowgren did not personally have any vacation days left. Chief Snowgren is not allowed to use "sick time," which he did have left, because he was not "sick".

We hope all citizens who support Chief Snowgren's ongoing employment with the city will contact city officials and request that he be put back to work immediately because any issues

are minor and can be easily addressed through other, more-appropriate channels, better communication, and increased teamwork.