

2021 SCAC Awards Program

This application is for:

J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award

Project Title

Merger of County Fire and Emergency Services

County/Counties

Clarendon

Staff Contact

Ted Felder

Job Title

Deputy Administrator

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Please provide a summary of your entry (no more than 100 words) to be used in a handout for the awards competition and included in press releases/publications. You may either type the summary in the text box or upload it as an attachment below.

It is our pleasure to present to you how Clarendon County used teamwork, cooperation, resources and hard work to merge its Fire and EMS Services under the County's umbrella. A huge success for our citizens, this merger has enhanced and improved the services to and quality of life of our citizens. Add in that this was done so during the COVID-19 pandemic, and you will agree that Clarendon County Fire and Rescue is now a model on which other counties will base future endeavors of this type. We are confident you will be impressed by the results.

Presentations may include more than one speaker; however, each speaker should be aware that the 10-minute time limit is strictly enforced. Please list the name, title, and e-mail address of each speaker:

Name	Title	Email
Jason Dennis	Deputy Chief of Fire Operations	jdennis@clarendonfire-rescue.com
Bobby Ridgeway, MD	Medical Control Physician	bridgeway@clarendonfire-rescue.com
Dwight L. Stewart, Jr.	Chairman, Clarendon County Council	dstewart@dwightstewart.com

To submit these attachments online, please upload Microsoft Word or PDF documents below.



CCFR Patch.docx



J. Mitchell Graham Award Project Descriptio...



Letter of Support from Council Chairman.pdf

Please check boxes for attachments you will submit as part of your application

A concise Project Description to explain the purpose and significance of the entry (up to eight pages). Please follow the prescribed naming convention for your Project Description file.

Any additional materials needed to support your application (up to five pages).

Submissions for The COVID-19 Response and Resiliency Showcase and the J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award must include a letter of support from the county council chairman or the county chief administrative officer.

CLARENDON COUNTY



EST. 2020

The Clarendon County Fire and Rescue Merger: A Story of Readiness meeting Opportunity (and COVID-19)

They say that “readiness” stems from proper preparation colliding with opportunity. Well, Clarendon County’s Fire and Rescue Team (CCFR) is living proof that this is true. Before 2019, Clarendon County’s EMS services were provided by McLeod Health Clarendon, while its Fire services were provided as a County Government function, combining full-time employees and volunteers. It was in 2019 that Chief Frances Richbourg was approached by Clarendon County Administrator David Epperson about a potential merger that would bring fire and EMS together. This triggered a host of planning sessions, meetings between fire and EMS, meetings with the County Administrator, and meetings with other agencies who had already combined to provide both Fire and Emergency Medical Services.

Before you enjoy more details about the merger, it needs to be noted that in late February and early March of 2020, while all these efforts to combine the services are going on, COVID-19 entered our lives. Who knew that we would be dealing with something that would change all our lives forever? Much like most of the country, our initial thought-processes may have centered on items like flattening the curve and temporary sacrifices causing mild inconveniences. Thankfully, when it turned out to be much bigger than that, we were ready! Immediately, CCFR was actively involved in addressing what would become the Pandemic locally and we will talk about that later.

We were still dealing with the merger, and it was coming on July 1, 2020. We knew that if it were to be a success, we would have to “walk and chew gum” in a big way. So, until then, Chief Michael Johnson, Chief Bobby Ridgeway, Chief Brad Gerfin, and Chief Jason Dennis had meetings on a regular basis to prepare for the merger while also dealing with the virus. Additional positions, job descriptions, and pay bands were created and put in place for each member under the new organization.

Existing Fire Department facilities and equipment had to be updated and renovated to accommodate the influx of EMS staff. As an example, Clarendon County Station 1 had to have an additional Maintenance Office built along with office and bunkroom space. To help prepare for this, Chiefs Johnson, Dennis, Gerfin and Ridgeway had attended the 2019 EMS

World Expo in New Orleans, LA. This is a National Level EMS Conference which afforded Clarendon County the opportunity to learn more about equipment, vendors, and education for combined agencies. This also gave us the opportunity to spend time together to discuss the roles and expectations of our administration.

Another critical component of this process was making sure the public bought into what we were doing. CCFR spent time with each of Clarendon County's municipal governments to keep them informed on what was happening. Whether it was Manning, Paxville, Summerton or Turbeville, we wanted the citizens in these locations to be just as excited as those in the unincorporated portion of the county. We are pleased to report that all our City Councils, Mayors, and the County Council all unanimously supported what we were trying to do.

All this preparation and hard advance labor yielded fruit. On June 1, 2020, we began bringing the medic units over from their existing stations to the fire stations to meet the crews, begin building relationships, and observe the routine of the shifts for the firefighters. This allowed the crews to learn from each other. Witnessing the bonding that occurred between the two groups was exciting. Before the end of the month, the EMS staff had begun to move their items over and were spending the night at the stations prior to the merger.

When the merger officially happened on July 1, 2020, the citizens and visitors of Clarendon County never knew that it had taken place. When calls came in, Clarendon County Fire Rescue responded as one. To date, not one issue has taken place between the agencies and we are still growing together and learning from each other every day. The organization has found a balance, that benefits this community in so many ways. All the hard work and planning certainly paid off and resulted in a smooth transition.

What about the results? Well, since the merger, our department has been running strong. Three new ambulances have been purchased and put into service, replacing the aging fleet that had been acquired while placing new reliable equipment on the street. We also sent our members to EMT school, which has yielded more employees in the community to serve. In fact, in the fall of 2021, we will have our very first in-house EMT class taught by our own Training Division! Twelve of our members will be

attending this class which will make our department more diverse and even stronger.

We can confidently say that nothing but good has come from the merger of both organizations. As mentioned before, our organization found a balance, and everything has fallen into place. We have all embraced each other and learned from each other. We believe because of the way this merger was approached, the beneficiaries are each and every person who needs our services. Our leadership is professional, our employees and volunteers are phenomenal, and our organization is one of the best in South Carolina. Other departments are asking how we did it successfully and want to come visit and find out. Not bad for “little old Clarendon County” right?

You can tell that we do and always did believe that the future was bright for CCFR. But even after COVID-19’s unwanted arrival in the spring, we had no idea how much our newly-merged department would be tested when the time came to deal with testing and later vaccinations. Just as we always do, we rolled up our sleeves and went to work. Initially, we utilized the outreach of our Community Paramedics, partnering with DHEC, to perform Covid testing at no cost for members of the community as well as those who were homebound. Also, we preformed regularly scheduled testing for clients of our local Disability and Special Needs unit until they were adequately vaccinated. To date we have performed over 540 Covid tests, and from January 1st through March of 2021, we devoted numerous hours to Covid testing while driving hundreds of miles.

In October of 2020, CCFR, in conjunction with the Clarendon County Emergency Operations Center (CCEOC), and with the support of Clarendon County Administration, began the application process to become a Closed Point of Distribution for the Covid Vaccine. We received our first shipment of 300 doses of the Moderna Vaccine on January 8th, 2021 and gave our first vaccination on January 14th. We received our second shipment of 300 additional doses on February 18th. As of today, we have administered approximately 660 vaccine doses (most of the ten dose vials have eleven doses) and completed the vaccination series for 325 residents of Clarendon County. Perhaps most exciting is that after all the vaccinations were given, we only had 4 doses for which we were unable to find a recipient!

We began with a main objective of vaccinating Emergency Fire and Rescue personnel, Law Enforcement, and other First Responders. However, as the vaccine phases progressed, we provided vaccinations for essential local government workers for Clarendon County and the local municipalities within our county. By partnering with McLeod Health Clarendon, an additional focus was put on the elderly and those who were homebound, all of which had the inability to access the internet or had difficulty navigating the registration website.

So far during this pandemic, as far as we know, we have had 25 members of Clarendon County Fire/Rescue who have tested positive for Covid. Over one half of these, have subsequently been fully vaccinated. Our total vaccines administered to our members is 69 (one received J&J). We are pleased to say that we are now phasing out vaccine administration due to other clinics and pharmacies becoming the vaccine providers, but CCFR will continue to use the flexibility of our Community Paramedic program to aid and assist those individuals (homebound, elderly, etc.) who have no means or who need assistance navigating the internet and system. We will accomplish this by providing, one on one if necessary, aid via phone or in person to guide individuals toward vaccine access.

In closing, Clarendon County has illustrated through this merger that when local government has a clear focus, appropriate resources, public buy-in, proper attention to detail and the right work ethic, the results are usually positive. Add in the circumstances that surrounded the merger from COVID-19 and we can say with full-throated surety that in this case, the results were not just positive. They were positively jaw-dropping. We would appreciate every consideration you can give to honoring the hundreds of individuals who put their heart and souls into making this one of the finest chapters in the Annals of Clarendon County's history. Thank you.



Clarendon County, South Carolina

**411 Sunset Drive
Manning, South Carolina 29102
(803) 435.0135**

April 29, 2021

Re: Clarendon County J. Mitchell Graham Award Application

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to contact you today on behalf of Clarendon County's 2021 application for the J. Mitchell Graham Award. As a former Chairman of the S. C. Association of Counties (SCAC) Board of Directors, I am very familiar with the process. Knowing that the J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award recognizes counties that address community challenges, implement operational improvements, or enhance their citizens' quality of life in a unique way makes me smile when thinking about our County's application. When you hear the story of how the merger of the Clarendon County Fire Service and the McLeod Health Clarendon's Emergency Management Services happened, it will be enough to get your attention. When you add in that it happened largely during the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020, I am confident that you will consider our County's application one of the finest you have ever seen for meeting that definition.

We appreciate everything SCAC does to bring positive attention to local governments throughout the Palmetto State, and we hope that our submission shows that your efforts to improve and enhance local government is a big success.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time if you need any further information or documentation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. Stewart", is written over a circular stamp or seal.

Dwight L. Stewart, Jr.
Clarendon County Council Chairman