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Article for *Minnesota Fire Chief*

Firefighter Fundraising Activities

By Rebecca Otto, State Auditor

As I have been driving around the State this summer I have seen many signs advertising street dances or Booyas being hosted by the local firefighters. Many organizations hold these types of fundraising events to raise money for new fire department equipment or for relief association general fund activities, such as annual holiday parties or retirement gifts. Sometimes it is not clear whether a fire department or the separate volunteer fire relief association is hosting the event, or which entity will receive the funds being raised.

Cities and towns have no express authority to hold fundraisers. As part of a city or town government, the same is true for municipal fire departments.

In contrast, a relief association is a separate nonprofit entity, and may solicit donations or conduct fundraisers through its general fund if permitted by the relief association's bylaws. The relief association should identify itself as the entity conducting the solicitation or fundraiser and state the intended purpose for the funds being raised in advertisements and solicitations. A relief association may donate general fund money or equipment purchased with general fund money to a city council or town board.

The city or town governing body must formally accept any donations, including any funds designated for a fire department. The resolution accepting the donation should identify all limitations on how the funds may be used, including whether the donation is limited to fire department expenditures.

After a piece of equipment is donated to a city or town, it becomes that municipality's property. The municipality will have to maintain the equipment and may need to insure the equipment and add it to the city or town asset list. If a relief association is considering hosting a fundraising event to raise funds for new fire department equipment, the relief association should work in advance with the city or town to make sure any donation is one the municipality wants to accept.

Firefighters soliciting donations or hosting a fundraising event should be sure that donation checks are made out to the relief association. Donation checks should not be made out to the fire department.

Additional Information

Helpful information about fundraisers and donations for fire departments and relief associations is provided in a Statements of Position on the Office of the State Auditor website. Go to www.auditor.state.mn.us. Choose the “For Local Officials” menu option, and then select “Statements of Position.” A Statement of Position entitled “Fundraisers and Donations for Fire Departments and Fire Relief Associations” is posted under the “Pensions” heading.