

# U.S. firefighter grant still eludes Orange and goes to Trenton

By Chris Sykes  
Staff Writer

When 60 firefighters in Trenton received word recently that they would be able to keep their jobs thanks to a federal grant, it raised concerns with some officials of Orange firefighters union who believe the city has not followed through on previous grant opportunities.

While the city was not among the recipients this time, its officials feel Orange is eligible for a future round of funding.

Just like their 10 counterparts in the Orange Fire Department that were laid off last week, the Trenton firefighters had been facing layoffs before Rep. Chris Smith announced the city was one of three in New Jersey to receive a grant.

The \$13.6 million windfall for Trenton came through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Assistance to Firefighters Grants Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response, known by the acronym SAFER.

According to federal officials the SAFER program allows needy departments to do a variety of things, including rehiring laid-off firefighters, retaining firefighters facing layoffs, hiring new firefighters and recruiting volunteer firefighters.

The grants are used to pay the salaries and benefits of firefighters hired during a two-year period.

Elvin Padilla, president of FMBA Local 10 in Orange, said Orange had a chance to apply for a grant but nothing came of it.

"They told us that they reapplied, but we're still waiting to hear from the feds," said Padilla.

"I'm not holding my breath."

Those same sentiments were shared by city Firefighter Derrick Brown.

"They turned it down I think two years ago," said Brown. "The city reapplied and we were denied this last time."

City spokesman Frank Baraff said Monday city officials received letters of support for Orange's application from Rep. Donald Payne and Sen. Frank Lautenberg. In addition, city Chief of Staff Stephanie Gidigbi met with FEMA staff in September to discuss the city's request.

While Orange was not successful in this third round of awards, said Baraff, the city remains eligible for an upcoming fourth round.

In 2009, the city applied for funds that were available through President Barack Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, or "stimulus package," that included requests for a variety of programs and projects in the city, including the police and fire departments. At that time, the late Fire Chief Martin "Marty" DeMarzo put in a request for a new fire engine or pumper truck, but it was not funded.

The Police Department applied for \$800,000 to improve its information technology, computer-aided dispatch and records maintenance system infrastructure.

The city also received \$1.5 million of the economic-stimulus money from the Neighborhood Stabilization Program. That money was used to acquire and rehabilitate eight to 10 homes.

*Managing Editor John Zucal contributed to this story.*