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For immediate release

OC fire/EMS technology programs' lack of updated training facilities making it difficult to meet national standards going into effect 2013

ODESSA (Oct. 7, 2010) – Employment of fire fighters is expected to grow by 19 percent between now and 2018, which is faster than the average for all occupations, according to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"Although employment is expected to grow faster than the average for all jobs, candidates for these positions are expected to face keen competition because these positions are highly attractive and sought after," according to the Bureau's Occupational Outlook Handbook. "Those who have completed some fire fighter education at a community college and have EMT or paramedic certification will have an additional advantage."

That is where Odessa College comes in. The Fire/EMS Technology programs at OC offer students the opportunity to be trained for careers in the fire service and paramedicine fields and many of OC's fire/EMS graduates can be found working here in our community, according to David Parker, OC fire/EMS chair.

"We train the first-line responders for a service district that is the size of the state of Maine," Parker said. "Many of the people that have graduated from OC's fire academy are the ones who are saving lives and property in our community today. When there is a crisis in someone's life, they dial 9-1-1 and it's very likely that the fire fighters on the trucks and ambulances that show up to help are OC graduates."

Over the last 15 years the OC fire/EMS technology programs have grown because the needs of the community have grown, Parker said. "As a result we need more room to provide the kind of training that we must provide for our students in order to meet the more stringent national standards for Fire and EMS education going into effect in 2013," he said.

OC doesn't own a training facility and currently uses the city of Odessa's burn building and drill field tower south of Odessa. "We schedule our students in between the regular training sessions of the Odessa Fire Department and other community groups like volunteer fire departments who also use the facility," Parker said.

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The building that currently houses the OC fire technology/EMS programs was built in 1975 for an auto body repair program. The area that once was auto bays are now used as lab space; and the facility lacks the necessary conditions required to store EMS/firefighting equipment correctly and to train properly, according to Dr. Tanya Hughes, OC chief of staff.

“Currently, there is not room for a computer lab in the building, which hinders students from engaging in online or hybrid classes. Plus, there isn’t adequate office space for faculty to use in meeting with students or preparing their class materials,” she said. “There are only two classrooms to handle all the fire and EMS classes, and enrollment has grown to the point that classes are now ‘piggybacked’ in the facility. Students have to take turns, rotating from activity to activity in the teaching of basic skills. This greatly limits how instructors can teach.”

“I know I have said this many times, but it still rings true. Students need to train in modern facilities that match the real world. That means labs and classrooms must be updated,” she said.

Phase one of the Odessa College Facilities Master Plan, which would be funded by the bond measure, addresses the lack of space and adequate training facilities required for the OC fire/EMS technology programs.

“A new Fire Training Facility and Training Tower, and renovations to the Composite Technology building would provide current and future fire/EMS technology students with real-world training and help meet the more rigorous national fire and EMS education standards going into effect in three years. It also will allow for continued training of our community fire fighters and paramedics,” Hughes said.

“This isn’t just about the lack of adequate training and classroom facilities at Odessa College. It’s not just about the workforce OC provides to the Odessa Fire Department,” Parker added. “It’s about how we impact the community as it’s college and the difference we make realistically in the lives of people.”