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Friday, June 20, 2003

## Boone Water Rescue throws self a lifeline

By **Brenna R. Kelly**  
The Cincinnati Enquirer

To save the water rescue team he founded 36 years ago and keep the only water ambulance floating on the Ohio River, Capt. Dale Appel decided to sacrifice himself.

After Boone County Fiscal Court considered cutting or eliminating Boone County Water Rescue earlier this month, Appel went to work trimming his \$205,000 budget request. The slimmed-down figure: \$85,000.

Appel eliminated his \$16,500 salary, an \$11,000 secretary position and the \$50-per-shift stipend for volunteers who patrol the Ohio River to achieve the 58 percent reduction.

"I did some pretty good cuts on it," Appel said. "But we will maintain pretty much the same services."

County Administrator Jim Parsons said he will submit the new budget request to Fiscal Court for approval with the 2003-2004 fiscal year budget Tuesday.

"I think it was a good compromise," Parsons said, "and it will allow us to maintain the unit."

Parsons said he was not surprised that Appel offered to forgo his salary in favor of the unit.

"It just shows Dale's commitment to the unit," Parsons said.

Appel, who is retired, said he will spend the same amount of time working for water rescue, but for free.

"It's not something I'd recommend for everyone," he said. "Sometimes you have to make some tough choices."

Cutting salaries was the best way to "maintain the level of services that taxpayers are getting right now," he said.

Boone Water Rescue has about 35 volunteers who patrol, respond to emergencies and retrieve evidence for law enforcement. The unit has three county-owned boats, including one water ambulance.

While other agencies have water rescue units, Boone's is the only rescue team that has emergency medical technicians patrolling Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

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Talk of eliminating the Boone Water Rescue surfaced earlier this month, when Parsons and Fiscal Court members questioned why Boone County was spending so much on a rescue unit that also serves Kenton County, which only pays Boone \$15,000. Covington also pays \$15,000.

Parsons said the county has asked Kenton and Covington each for \$5,000 more this year.

The water rescue team's budget had been slightly increasing from 1999 to 2002, but in 2003 it was cut almost \$10,000 to \$145,968. This year's proposed \$85,000 is a 42 percent reduction from last year.

The cuts will mean the unit, which started as all-volunteer, will return to its roots.

The volunteers had received \$50 per 12-hour shift worked, at the end of the boating season. Appel planned to explain the elimination of the stipends to the volunteers Thursday night. He said he doubts the lack of pay will keep anyone from patrolling.

"I don't know many people who work for 12 hours for \$50," Appel said. "That's not anything that anybody depended on."

Though the secretary position is being eliminated, no one will lose a job because it was vacant.

In addition to the salary cuts, the rescue team will replace equipment less often, use fuel-saving measures while patrolling and cut down on maintenance costs.

E-mail [bkelly@enquirer.com](mailto:bkelly@enquirer.com)

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