

# National search for fire chief not needed

**Michael L. Subin and  
Nancy M. Floreen**

Commentary

With its unanimous vote calling for a single countywide fire chief, the Montgomery County Council has sent a powerful message. This county will have a fire chief with the command authority to direct all of our fire and rescue services to benefit our citizens.

Bill 36-03 requires implementation of all of its provisions by Jan. 1, 2005. We believe the fire chief must be selected and approved by Sept. 1, 2004.

The county executive has indicated that he intends to conduct a national search for a chief. That's wrong. We do not need a national search; we have plenty of talent locally. In fact we have someone leading the career fire and rescue service right now who is internationally recognized.

Why do we believe this expedited appointment is necessary?

- The fire chief will need the time from September to January to complete the transition from the old to the new system. It must be ready to roll on Jan. 1.

- The fire chief must produce a fiscal 2006 budget in the fall of 2004. It should be the new chief's budget.

- The fire chief must initiate the critical collaboration and communication with public safety officials in and out of Montgomery County and within county government to plan homeland security strategies.

- The fire chief must be in place to prepare for possible disruptive activities taking place in the national capital region related to the presidential election in November and inauguration in January.

Earlier this year the county executive passed over talented and eminently qualified officers in the police department going outside instead for his selection of chief of police. Police Chief Thomas Manger is a dedicated professional and is doing a good job. But we have a deep public safety bench here in the county. We believe now, as then, that we need look no further than the top leadership in place now.

There is no more respected leader than Chief Tom Carr. Chief Carr put Montgomery County on the map nationally and internationally with the initiation of the Urban Search and Rescue Team. He is a respected leader not only for his expertise in the fire and

emergency medical services world but because of his talent to bring out the best and the most from his colleagues. He is a respected leader in this county, at the regional Council of Governments, nationally and internationally.

We want to make this new system work. Tom Carr is the man to ensure that it does.

This region's fire/rescue leadership is the most sophisticated and knowledgeable group anywhere. Their ability to lead, manage and operate is extraordinary. They are in demand as teachers, coaches and consultants worldwide. To a person, they appreciate being trained by Tom Carr.

Ask the Federal Emergency Management Agency why our search and rescue team is one of the first to be called. FEMA says Tom Carr has developed one of the best teams in the nation. We have a world-class leader among us. Another choice would send a damaging message to our rank-and-file. Other departments around the country regularly recruit our people to head departments in their communities. Montgomery County, however, all too often looks past our home-grown talent, figuring the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. It's not — not always and not even usually.

We are squandering valuable time and money. A national search would be a waste of both. Let's save time and the \$50,000 a national search could cost.

We need to signal our appreciation to those that protect us daily. The county's chief administrative officer should immediately terminate the search, make the right appointment, and let the Department of Fire and Rescue Service get on with the business of protecting our citizens — not prepping for job interviews.

*Michael L. Subin of Gaithersburg and Nancy M. Floreen of Garrett Park are at-large members of the Montgomery County Council.*