



**Town of Canaan**  
*Office of the Selectmen*  
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September 6, 2016

North Country Public Safety Foundation  
Allan Clark, President  
PO Box 239  
Franconia, NH 03580

Re: Public Safety Officer of the Year

Dear President Clark:

I am nominating Chief Bill Bellion for the position of Public Safety Officer of the Year. I make this nomination with the full support of the Canaan Board of Selectmen. Bill's recent indication that he really plans on retiring within the next three years prompted us to evaluate what he has done and is still doing for the Town of Canaan, its people and neighboring communities.

William Bellion joined the Canaan Fire Department in 1985. Within the next five years, he was promoted to Lieutenant and became the Department Chaplain. By the early 1990's he was promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant Chief, and in March of 1995 became Chief of Department. **He has been Chief for the past 21 years** and has recently been re-elected by his firefighters to another term. The Canaan Department also serves as the Fire Department for the Towns of Dorchester and Orange. The roster in the Canaan Fire Department numbers 36 firefighters. There are 25 Level I Firefighters, and 15 Level II Firefighters. Nearly all have further advanced certifications and training. The Department is an on call Department.

Bill has also served for many years as the **Emergency Management Director** for Canaan. He assumed this position in 2004 and has managed all emergency response activities for the past 12 years.

In addition Bill is an **EMT with the Canaan Ambulance** and has been for many years. Canaan Ambulance has 2 Emergency Medical Responders (EMR), 15 Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT), 2 Advanced Emergency Medical Technicians (AEMT), and 1 Paramedics (P). By combining his health care skills with the Fire Department resources, he has created an extremely effective **search and rescue program**.

Bill serves as one of the key participants in the **Town of Canaan Management Team** integrating his talent throughout 10 departments.

Since 1987, Bill has been involved in **wildland firefighting operations** with the State of New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands, and frequently is assigned to a crew that will travel wherever requested. Bill has fought fires in more than 15 states and provinces including Alaska, California, Texas, and most recently, Idaho. He also has fought wildfires across the border in Canada where his command of French has been a major asset. Bill has a very important job when the state crew is assigned to Canada since he serves as the French interpreter for his crew as well as translator and liaison to management staff.

Through Bill's experience in serving with the Canaan Fire Department and as a wildland firefighter, he has gained quite a bit of knowledge in incident management. Bill is an **instructor** through the state fire academy and teaches wildland fire courses and incident command courses. There is no doubt that many firefighters throughout the state have been impacted by Bill's teaching. The fact that the Canaan Fire Department has been able to keep their 1967 Jeep Kaiser brush truck up-to-date and functioning, is a testament to his support for wildland fire management using every resource available.

While the list of credits above shows years of service, it doesn't begin to explore the importance of the service. I came to Canaan, New Hampshire about seven years ago as Town Administrator and soon realized how important Bill Bellion was to the Town.

**Bill is a professional.** During the past seven years that I have worked with Bill, he has been a consummate professional. While he serves in a very part-time position, you wouldn't know it from the hundreds and hundreds of hours that he puts in during a normal year. He has taken training at every opportunity and has led the way in encouraging his crew to train for emergencies. He also has fought for enhanced training in the rescue squad and training for all associated with emergency management. He has trained Town employees and members of the public and students. He expects the best of himself and all that serve under him. As an administrator, I have the highest respect for his abilities, experience and training.

Perhaps one indication of his professionalism is evidenced by what happens when Canaan is called out for mutual aid. Any major fire within the neighboring towns will find that Chief Bellion has been called on to be the incident manager. When a major

hazardous waste or explosive gas event is called in, it is the Canaan Department under Bill's leadership that is asked to take the lead. When search and rescue occurs at Mount Cardigan in treacherous weather, it is Chief Bellion that organizes the rescue and is usually first on the scene. When a very complicated automobile crash occurs in a neighboring town requiring multiple departments, it is Bill Bellion who is put in charge. The experience and training in the Canaan Department has resulted in numerous requests for their assistance at wildland fire events throughout all of New Hampshire.

Recognition of Bill's leadership go back more than 20 years. In October of 1995, after a rescue of a young child in Canaan, then Lieutenant David Hewitt of the NH Fish and Game Department wrote, "I deal with a number of Departments and varied public service agencies. I must tell you with all sincerity that it was an absolute pleasure to work with a fire department which was as dedicated and professional as the Canaan Fire Department was."

In 1998 he was part of a wildland fire team that received the Florida Distinguished Service Award. The commendations haven't stopped. On March 8<sup>th</sup> of 2012 a two car accident in Grafton left a seriously injured woman trapped in her vehicle. The Towns of Canaan and Grafton responded as did a good Samaritan who serves as Assistant Chief for Massport Fire-Rescue at Logan International Airport. A total of 22 part-time firefighters, police officers, Canaan Ambulance and Grafton Ambulance members, under the leadership of Chief Bellion, worked for nearly an hour to complete a very complicated extrication and rescue. The patient was transported by DHART to Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center for treatment of her extensive injuries. Assistant Chief James Collins of Massport – Logan with 28 years of experience as Assistant Chief, Shift Commander, EMT and Paramedic, was so impressed with the professionalism and sense of public service that he wrote a letter to the Towns of Canaan and Grafton to request the opportunity of presenting a commendation to the two departments. Certificates of commendation were presented to 15 fire fighters, 5 Canaan Ambulance and Grafton Ambulance workers, and 2 police officers from the two towns. Assistant Chief James Collins commended the team with the following, "The compassion and professionalism exhibited by Canaan public safety personnel... was unparalleled. The mutual aid system worked as designed and was seamless. The citizens of Canaan can be proud of their public safety team, as they dropped what they were doing, and answered the call without hesitation, and performed with the utmost professionalism." That is the hallmark of Chief Bellion's Department.

**Bill is a leader.** As Chief, Bill has developed and works with a very talented group of officers. During his tenure he has had to struggle with all of the problems of an employer working with 36 individuals to form a cohesive team that not only can work together but rely on each other with their lives. That means he has to manage all of the personnel issues of an employer. He has to motivate people to work for the joy of service - even though there is little compensation and the crew must manage real jobs and families.

They must be fueled by the passion of pride in excellence. The motivation comes from leadership, fellow officers that are able and willing to take delegated responsibility, and the ability to work side by side with the rest of the crew. As a town administrator with years of experience in several towns and a county, I am used to managing, and usually take the primary responsibility when there is a crisis. After more than 40 years of serving in this role, I found that I could actually stand aside and let Bill manage any crisis more effectively than I could.

Hurricane Irene was the second of two large natural crises in our area during 2011. It was preceded closely by a tornado and also followed a couple of ice storms earlier in the year and Bill's emergency operations response was spectacular. This was due to his leadership, training, and experience. His crew worked long and hard. Through coordinated management in which Bill was a key player, the Town of Canaan repaired all Hurricane Irene road damage before the end of 2011 and used no overtime of personnel to accomplish the task. Even during normal times, it is easy to see Bill's leadership. The Fire Fighters' Association undertakes annual volunteer fundraising. This has raised more than \$150,000 that has been invested back into community public safety.

**Bill is an administrator.** The last twenty years have had moments of great challenge. Ours is a community that has struggled to provide services because residents can't afford higher taxes. This has stressed the community greatly as it tries to make sure that it receives quality service at bargain prices. Bill has had a strong role in helping to create a strong inter-department management team to more efficiently solve problems. There is significant cross training between departments. Three highway workers are trained as firefighters. One police officer is on the Fire Department. Twenty percent of the Town's full time employees are on the Department. Ten percent of the Fire Department crew are full-time Town employees. Several firefighters are cross trained as EMTs. Two department managers are trained in hazardous waste. Police are also cross trained as rescue personnel. This assures personnel are always available, even during traditional business hours and using on-call firefighters. The cross training also assures that all departments are available to assist in a natural or man-made disaster under common leadership.

This cooperation minimizes competition between departments when it comes time to prepare budgets. While there will always be wants and needs, the various departments always pull together on financial planning (even when they jokingly submitted a shared request for a town helicopter submitted by four departments). In 2008, his Department had a budget of \$94,000 for three towns. Today it has a budget of \$103,000 for the three towns; for an increase of 9% over 8 years. The Department has a capital budget totaling \$1,777,000 in value, annual investments in capital reserves of more than \$90,000 per year and 40 separate equipment accounts. Capital reserve funding increased from about \$50,000 in 2008 to about \$90,000 in 2016.

Despite budgets held to a minimum, safety training is a hallmark of the Department and rivals that of full-time departments. The Department works diligently to keep injuries to a very low level. Training has increased to 265 hours a year. Injuries are down over the past six years as well.

Overall the Department has been exceptionally well run. Communications have dramatically improved. Personnel accounting is carefully managed internally to assure appropriate staffing at a reasonable cost. Bill's management means that I do not have to worry about or attempt to micromanage the Department.

**Bill has worked to increase service across all of the departments and agencies in Canaan.** Even as a part time employee, Bill has worked to forge a close relationship between Fire, Police, Highway, Water & Sewer, the Regional School, and Rescue. He has accomplished this by being the presence and voice across all groups. He has been involved closely in a consolidated budget process where all Town departments work collaboratively to forge a balanced budget. He has worked with the non-profit rescue squad and the area schools. He has been instrumental in management of nuisances and has worked with the building inspector on significant parts of local code enforcement. His crew and the rescue squad crew have been actively involved in managing life safety and potential abuse issues in homes through reporting and intervention in cooperation with other agencies.

**Chief Bellion has a true commitment to rules of safety.** During my first year in Canaan, there was a major disagreement between the Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds and Chief Bellion regarding a life safety issue in the Town Hall and the Town Library. While Chief Bellion tries to always work proactively with other departments as well as the general public to assure safety in a way that is not cumbersome, that failed in this case. Despite every effort to work collaboratively with Buildings and Grounds, the Supervisor just laughed at him and refused to complete a repair job in compliance with state code. At an interdepartmental manager meeting, after asking for compliance and being laughed at and ignored, Bill shut down the Town finance office and library until the repair was done correctly. The Board and I backed him up. Less than 6 months later, the B&G Supervisor had moved on to other employment and Bill was still Chief.

**Bill Bellion and his Department are looking forward to finding solutions to future problems.** Bill has sponsored technology improvements throughout the town departments. Air packs and turnout gear are regularly swapped out. A multimode communications system that uses reverse 911, hard-line phones, cell phones, internet based phones, and multi-tier communications switchovers allows for flexible communications. The radio system is interconnected between Fire, Highway, Rescue, Police and Administration. The Town currently uses mobile based radio relay for dead spots and is working to create a tower based relay system to assure system wide connection to the state and regional communication system. Hazard Mitigation and

Emergency Operations planning is up-to date and being implemented. There is a flash email system that links 60% of all households in Canaan. Bill has been instrumental in developing the engineering for flood proofing the Village of Canaan that has regularly flooded over the last one hundred years. The Department has worked to serve people who are impacted by drought and will soon start a community education program designed to explain to the public strategies that can be used to restore private water supplies or at least maximize the usefulness of available water. He is currently exploring a new rescue system designed by his crew to speed up recovery of victims from Mount Cardigan with an accompanying reduction in injuries to rescue crew.

When Bill Bellion retired from Mascoma Valley Regional School District as a French teacher in 2007, he simply moved over to being a full time public safety officer and manager working at part time wages that are less per hour than the fellow that mows the grass part time in the summer. Bill and his team of officers are excellent. They are all well trained, experienced and willing to accept responsibility. His commitment is extraordinary. His professionalism is unmatched. The respect he receives is unsurpassed and well deserved. Bill has made sure that the Fire Department is ready for any event whether it be a natural disaster, stupidity, a nuisance, fire code enforcement, or a motor vehicle crash, and we are proud to call him our Chief.

We all strongly urge you to recognize Bill Bellion's 31 years of service. We are extremely grateful for his innovation, collaboration and dedication to the residents of Canaan, many other New Hampshire communities, and more than fifteen states and provinces.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MSamson', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Michael Samson  
Canaan Town Administrator  
Canaan Board of Selectmen  
Sam Frank Canaan Police Chief  
Bob Scott Canaan Highway Superintendent  
John Coffey, Canaan Water & Sewer Operator  
Canaan Firefighters Association  
Members of Canaan Ambulance