

## EBR fire department first accredited in La.

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When Chief Dale Hancock began envisioning his East Side Fire Department as the first accredited fire department in the state, his staff got nervous.

"I thought it would be a nightmare and it was," Assistant Chief Bob Gateley said Tuesday.

"But it was worth it."

On Tuesday morning -- four years after Hancock first heard of accreditation at a conference in Dallas -- the process ended.

In a brief ceremony, the tiny Fire Department serving the eastern edge of the parish announced it had been accredited by the Commission on Fire Accreditation Inc.

East Side is among 89 accredited fire departments in the country, and the only in Louisiana, a fact touted often Tuesday.

"We're now even better than we were," said Hancock, who has been chief since 1991.

"There was so much introspection and analysis of what we were doing, there's absolutely no doubt about it."

"We thought we had our stuff together perfectly and we still found shortcomings," he said.

"We've had people come in and say those are no longer there."

To qualify for the five-year accreditation, East Side had to meet 230 criteria that included standards for organization, record keeping, financial planning and ability to respond to fires, hazardous spills and other incidents.

It also was subject to public review.

The process cost the department about \$7,500.

Accreditation of law enforcement agencies began in the late 1970s and has become more popular both nationally and locally.

The Baton Rouge Police Department, first accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies in 1996, will be evaluated for re-accreditation in April.

CALEA also accredited Louisiana State Police for the first time in November.

The East Side Fire Department has two full-time employees -- the chief and assistant chief -- plus 35 part-time employees and volunteers.

It began as a volunteer fire department in 1976.

Hancock said accreditation is a part of his goal of running the Fire Department like a business when he became chief.

"It's a mechanism for continuous improvement and quality monitoring," he said. "This is the appropriate approach for a fire department to improve."



Advocate staff photo by Arthur D. Lauck

Dale Hancock: 'We're now even better'

Underscoring his philosophy, a poster hanging in Hancock's office says, "Rule #1: If you don't take care of the customer somebody else will."

Metro Council members Mike Walker and Darrell Ourso and state Rep. Mike Futrell were on hand for the announcement Tuesday.

Gov. Kathleen Blanco and Mayor Bobby Simpson were invited, but did not attend.

Walker remembered the department being founded by a "couple guys who found an old pumper truck that wouldn't start and leaked."

After a request for \$500 was approved by former Mayor Woody Dumas, the truck was repaired and the department was born, he said.