New Albany (IN) Fire Dept.

In the six months since New Albany (IN) Fire Dept. implemented Aladtec for its 80-member department, members and leadership are pleased with the efficiencies found with scheduling, and they've managed to eliminate virtually all paper forms associated with operating five stations.

"Members love the fact they can see and manipulate their time off from anywhere, a process that (once took) hours or days can be done in minutes," wrote Station 3 Firefighter Tim Bailey in response to an Aladtec inquiry.

"We not only took our scheduling online, but we were also able to eliminate 95 percent of our paperwork by utilizing the forms section of the program," said Bailey. "We do daily truck checks with auto-notification to accident reports and supply requests."

Like many departments, leadership at New Albany Fire didn't know what it didn't know about cloud-based scheduling until Bailey volunteered to do the research.

He had his selfish reasons. Bailey lives 35 minutes from work, and he was irritated at having to drive to the stationhouse and submit any schedule change request in writing.

"So if I was at home and I needed to take today off, I would drive in here, look at that calendar, fill out the paperwork, drive back home, call my Major. He'd have to drive in here, do the paperwork, and then go back home," Bailey recalled. "Just for me to put in for the day took an hour -- maybe an hour and a half. That was a problem."

Entering annual vacation picks was another ordeal. Each November, a Major would drive around to 22 firefighters' homes in order of seniority and pen the requests onto a paper calendar.

"Until we went to (Aladtec), one hundred percent of everything was on paper," said Bailey.

When Bailey left his role as the union leader, he offered to use that spare time to improve the department's inefficient scheduling processes.

NEW ALBANY, IN

Department Info:

Roster: 80 firefighters & paramedics at 5 stations.

Calls: Approx. 3,200.

Service area: About 15 sq. miles, and a population of 37,500.

Apparatus: Four engines, two ladders, three ALS trucks, fire/rescue boat.

Challenges: Coverage includes I-265 on the north, which carries about 122,000 vehicles daily and north half of the Ohio River to the south.

Special skills: Rope and swiftwater rescue, haz-mat, confined space, and a specialized gross- and fine decontamination unit for the region.

Aladtec users since 2018

Neighboring agencies also using Aladtec:
New Albany Police Dept., New Albany; Lafayette Twsp. Fire Protection Dist., Floyds Knobs; Clarksville Police Dept. Clarksville; Yellow Ambulance, Louisville, KY; Clark County Sheriff's Office, Jeffersonville; New Chapel Fire & EMS, New Albany; Harrison County Hospital EMS, Corydon; Charlestown Police Dept., Charlestown; Oldham County EMS, Buckner, KY; Meade County EMS, Vine Grove, KY; and Dow Silicones Corp. Carrollton, KY
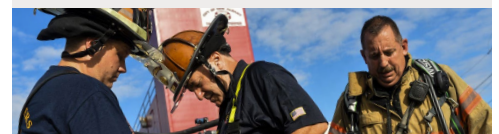
"So I was union president, one my rules was when you have a problem, don't come to me with your problem; come to me with a solution," Bailey said.

"So, I had this problem, right? I went to (Chief Matthew Julliot) and said 'We gotta do something better. I'm not doing union stuff. I'll take it on as my project. He said 'OK.'

"I first started with internet searches and found as many (options) as I could. Then I called around and looked at some prices, and looked at all the departments around here to see what anyone was using.

Then I narrowed it down to about five or six, then I called those and demo'd each one, then I narrowed it down to like two or three, and kind of got a committee of people together and said here's what we have. Then we narrowed it down to two -- (Aladtec), and there was this group out of California (designed by) firefighters who were kind of in the same situation we were," but ongoing support appeared weak. "So I understand that, but if we're investing money into it, I want to get the most out of it I can," said Bailey.

Once Bailey and department officials had chosen the Aladtec solution, they had to win approval from City Hall.

"I had to sit down with the City Controller and the City Attorney, and I went through the entire program. We got to the end, and she said 'OK. Now here's the big question: What's it going to cost?'

"I got ready to tell her, and our Deputy Chief was with us, and he said, "Hold on. Linda, you guess what this is going to cost'.

"So she asked me -- 'Is there a license fee? What's the set-up fee? Is it per-person?' "
Bailey was aware the controller had investigated another prominent scheduling product for the entire city, but it was cost-prohibitive.

"We're about an 80-member fire department, and I think the police department is about the same, and we're the majority of the employees, so you're talking maybe four- or five hundred (employees) citywide. So she guessed that this program was going to run us about $150,000 a year.

"And so when I told her the price, she said, 'Why are you in my office?'"

Bailey realizes it was probably unusual for a rank and file employee to have driven the buying decision on scheduling and workforce management program that helps control overtime and promotes accountability for both members and management.

"Yes. but we have these problems that need to be addressed, and we're so far behind the curve, and I understand, from having been in the union leadership and working with the Chief's office, they have other stuff they have to do.

"They don't necessarily have the time to take on all these pet projects. Even though they want to," said Bailey. "I try to tell guys around here all the time: 'If you've got a problem, come up with a solution and chip in.'"

Implementing Aladtec wasn't tricky, said Bailey, who doesn't consider himself particularly tech-savvy.

After the initial training, he called Aladtec's Support Specialists for occasional help.
"In the beginning I did, just so I got everything set up properly, but once I got the hang of it with forms and reports, I was able to catch on pretty quick," he recalled.

"Every moment has been an 'ah-HA' moment. Going from paper to a system that puts the information and scheduling at our members' fingertips was a huge step forward, not to mention the ability to run reports and have an accurate history of time and pay," said Bailey in an e-mail exchange.

Department leaders were skeptical about the reliability of an electronic program. Members have routinely experienced data losses with some incident-reporting software they use.

Bailey responded: "Hey you guys. It will be alright. I know it's different. It's funny. We did (vacation scheduling) with (Aladtec) this year, but they did it in the background with the paper too. They don't have the (confidence) yet."

But management has become enthusiastic about the many forms Bailey has created in Aladtec, including truck checks, time-keeping forms, station inspections, apparatus checks, and uniform inspections.

"We took everything we did on paper and put it into the forms. That gave our Deputy Chief of Maintenance a huge amount of accountability. Our daily checks before, you just had a piece of paper in the truck, and you checked it every day, then at the end of the month, you may not have handed it in.

"Well now, with the reports section, he runs a report every day, and if by 9 o'clock, if your truck hasn't turned in a truck-check for that day, he's getting a hold of you. So now he's got accountability in the maintenance side also."

"We are a quintessential department that hates the 'C' word. So started telling everybody, when I did the union stuff, we weren't changing things, we were just going to do it differently. You say "do it differently," and it's OK. You say "change," then we have a problem."

Tim Bailey
Tim Bailey has been a firefighter with New Albany Fire since 2006. His most frequent duty assignment is aboard Rescue 7 -- a 2013 Spartan MetroStar/EVI Heavy Rescue, based at Station 3. He served as president of firefighter's local for two years. He also serves as the cook for C Shift, a role that he says excuses him from having to do dishes.