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PAUL KINGSTON AND JIM BELFORD, CO-FOUNDERS
CREATIVE FIRE APPARATUS, LLC
EXCELLENCE IN: PRODUCT INNOVATION

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When it comes to fire trucks, Jim Belford knows that bigger isn't always better. In his 35 years as a firefighter, Belford had seen many fires – in parking garages, on the top floor of high-rise buildings, at crowded events in off-road locations – where a 60-ton truck just couldn't do the job.

"I'd noticed that occasionally there were access problems, and I thought, 'If we had a smaller-sized vehicle, we wouldn't have had to drag this hose through the parking garage,'" Belford says. "I have a knack for improving things, and with this, I felt there was a need – a void to fill."

Armed with his vision of a fleet of a powerful, small-scale fire trucks, Belford teamed up with Paul Kingston a year and a half ago to found Creative Fire Apparatus, LLC. Kingston, a family friend and entrepreneur who already was heading three successful companies – Chesapeake Plumbing, property management firm Lakefront Properties, and LMJ Homes, for which he is a master homebuilder – supplied the business know-how. Belford supplied the design.

"I drew the concept out on paper and that took a spell," Belford recalls. "Then when we started to build it in three dimensions, we'd find a way to make it work better – it became a process of assembly and re-assembly." What emerged was a 3,500-pound apparatus built atop an all-terrain chassis that uses a compressed air foam system to produce 17,000



gallons of foam from just 65 gallons of water.

"It is built in the true fashion of a fire truck," Kingston says. "This is not a toy. It has the same capabilities as a full-size truck, just on a smaller scale. But it has advantages because it is smaller, and the compressed air foam is the equalizer."

With prototype and patents in hand, the team took their apparatus to its most crucial audience – veteran firefighters – to solicit feedback. "We wanted to know, are we actually fulfilling a need?" Kingston says. Belford says the apparatus turned out to be a big hit at industry trade shows ("It was a show-stopper") and it generated buzz during demonstrations at a Pennsylvania state fair and the Polar Bear Plunge at Sandy Point State Park, where the team's truck pulled two swimmers from the icy water.

"It's brought overwhelming interest," Kingston says, adding that Creative Fire has been in talks to supply trucks to Six Flags and Disney amusement parks, Harley-Davidson factories, and nuclear plants interested in the safer compressed air foam technology. "It's really starting to take off."

The next hurdle for the nascent product is attaining Class A certification as specified by the National Fire Protection Association. However, the requirements – which include the ability to carry 500 gallons of water – were written with full-sized trucks in mind. "We have basically invented a new class of apparatus," Kingston says.

"As of now, the [International

Organization for Standardization] doesn't recognize compressed air foam units of any kind, but they are in the process of changing that," Belford says. "Foam has a four-to-one knockdown in the amount of fire it can put out, and the insurance industry is recognizing that foam causes less damage than water."

Creative Fire is currently working on a next-generation unit with a closed cab for inclement weather. "It's bad to the bone," Belford says. "But like anything that's new, people in the industry, potential buyers, have to evaluate it. Some new things are a flash in the pan. We want to be in it for the long haul."

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