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## GOOD STORY

### The Galen Cole Family Foundation of Maine's Thermal Imaging Camera Program

#### SUMMARY

In 1997, the Galen Cole Family Foundation of Maine launched the Thermal Imaging Camera Program, which provides financial assistance to Maine fire departments seeking to purchase thermal imaging cameras (TICs). Program applicants pledge to raise a portion of their camera's cost by fundraising within their communities.

#### BACKGROUND

Firefighters use TICs to collect information about sources of heat at an incident scene that are invisible to the naked eye. TICs detect and visually represent "heat signatures," which allow firefighters to "see" through smoke to locate victims. The ability to see heat signatures also helps firefighters identify fires concealed by walls, doors, or smoke. The crucial hidden information detected by TICs helps fire departments save lives, prevent property damage, and protect firefighters.

TICs cost between \$10,000 and \$25,000, a prohibitively large expenditure for many fire departments. Departments that need cameras are often unable to allocate funds from their operating budgets for TICs and must seek external financial assistance. Since 1997, the Galen Cole Family Foundation's Thermal Imaging Camera Program has provided such assistance to fire departments across the state of Maine.

#### Why Firefighters Need Thermal Imaging Cameras

- During a recent fire in [Prince George's County, Maryland](#), the lack of a TIC slowed the search for trapped firefighter Lt. Elmer Mahaffey.
- [Firefighters in Franklin County, Indiana saved two year-old Zachary Sheets](#) from an October 1999 fire by locating him with a TIC.

#### GOALS

The goal of the Galen Cole Family Foundation's Thermal Imaging Camera Program is to equip every fire department in Maine with the thermal imaging technology necessary to protect both citizens and firefighters.

#### DESCRIPTION

The Galen Cole Family Foundation (commonly referred to as the Cole Foundation) is a private operating foundation funded by the Cole family of Maine. The Foundation's mission includes "assisting and directing programs that make a positive impact on the State of

Maine.” Several firefighters work with the Cole Foundation to identify potential grant recipients for other programs. One of these firefighters suggested that the Foundation should contribute to the purchase of TICs. The Cole family agreed that providing financial assistance to fire departments purchasing TICs would be an excellent use of the Foundation’s funds.

The Cole Foundation’s Thermal Imaging Camera Program operates on a yearly cycle that consists of three distinct phases. First, the Cole Foundation selects grantees from among a pool of fire departments that apply for funds by pledging to raise a portion of the camera’s cost. Second, grantees participate in a training course to learn how to use TICs safely and effectively. Third, grantees receive their cameras and begin fundraising in order to meet their financial commitment to the Cole Foundation. Once grantees deliver their pledges to the Cole Foundation, the money is reinvested in the Thermal Imaging Camera Fund to be distributed during the next fundraising year.

### ***Evaluating Applicants and Selecting Grant Recipients***

The Thermal Imaging Camera Program uses a “silent auction” system to select grant recipients. To participate in the silent auction, each fire department applying for a camera submits a “bid” in the form of a commitment to raise funds to contribute toward a camera’s purchase. The fire department that submits the highest fundraising bid is awarded the first camera, the second highest bidder gets the second camera, and so on. This system encourages fire departments to contribute as much as possible to the purchase and allows the Cole Foundation to use its funds to award the maximum possible number of cameras. In 2004, the Cole Foundation contributed to the purchase of 76 cameras for 55 Maine fire departments, valued at approximately \$750,000. During the past eight years, the Cole Foundation supported 214 Maine fire departments in purchasing 252 TICs, a contribution to the State of Maine worth more than \$3,000,000. The Cole Foundation’s grants have increased the number of TICs in Maine by an average of 31 a year.

### ***Training Grant Recipients***

Once grant recipients have selected their camera, they must enroll four of their firefighters in TIC training. The training is paid for by the Cole Foundation and provided by Maine Fire Training, the state agency that coordinates training for Maine firefighters. The 16-hour TIC course consists of four hours of classroom work, four hours of search and rescue training, and eight hours of live fire training. Grantees receive their TIC during the training so they can learn with the same equipment they will be using in the field. The course takes place on a weekend so that volunteer firefighters are able to participate.

Maine has also integrated TIC training into Firefighter 2 Training to ensure that all new firefighters in the state are qualified to use TICs. Maine was the first state in the nation to make TICs a standard part of firefighter training.

### **Learning Objectives for TIC Training**

- **Integrate TICs with existing gear.** This can be especially challenging when firefighters need to work on their hands and knees, which makes holding a TIC difficult.
- **Interpret the imagery generated by TICs.** For example, the color of human bodies in the images generated by the camera varies depending on whether the ambient temperature of a room is cool or hot.
- **Follow safety procedures.** Firefighters using TICs for the first time sometimes mistakenly believe that their ability to see through the smoke and flames makes it safe to leave their partners or take other risks.

### ***Raising Funds Locally***

Fire departments that participate in the program must organize local fundraising events in order to meet their fundraising pledge to the Cole Foundation. Firefighters are able to provide demonstrations to potential donors because the Cole Foundation's support allows grantees to acquire their cameras before they have raised the funds necessary for its purchase. Concrete evidence of the power of TICs makes fundraising efforts more effective.

Fire departments are expected to meet their fundraising goal by December of the year after they receive their TIC. To date, 100% of the 214 participating fire departments have met their fundraising obligations. The money raised by each year's group of grantees is added to the Cole Foundation's thermal imaging camera fund and awarded to future grantees.

### ***Sharing Success Stories***

In order to publicize the Thermal Imaging Camera Program, Maine Fire Training published *Thermal Imaging*, a magazine dedicated to the use of TICs by Maine fire departments. The magazine shared techniques for TIC training and success stories about Maine firefighters' use of TICs to save lives and property. Maine Fire Training sent *Thermal Imaging* to every fire department in Maine to ensure that all departments were aware of the opportunity to participate in the Cole Foundation's grant program. Publication of the magazine ceased last year when the Cole Foundation met its goal of placing a TIC with every department seeking one.

### ***Meeting Program Goals***

The Cole Foundation has placed TICs with 214 Maine fire departments. Every department that applied for a camera has received one, including rural volunteer departments that were only able to raise a small amount to contribute to the purchase of their cameras. The Cole Foundation has met its long term goal of placing a TIC with every fire department in Maine that has applied for one.

## **REQUIREMENTS**

### ***Key to Success***

The Cole Foundation's success depends on its partnership with Maine fire departments and Maine Fire Training. The funds contributed by fire departments participating in the program increased exponentially the number of cameras that could be purchased. The training provided by Maine Fire Training ensured that every department choosing to participate received the training necessary to use TICs effectively.

The sense of ownership felt by fire departments participating in the Thermal Imaging Camera Program also contributes to the Cole Foundation's success. Because grantees raise part of the funds necessary for purchasing their TICs, they feel responsible for and proud of the equipment, and are more likely to care for it properly and integrate it into their work.

### ***Resources***

The Cole Foundation's Thermal Imaging Camera Program has awarded millions of dollars in grants, but its grant award process could be used to distribute any amount of funds.

### ***Training***

The Cole Foundation requires that grant recipients receive 16 hours of training.

### ***Links***

- Maine Fire Protection Services Commission  
(<http://www.state.me.us/dps/fmo/FireComm/>)

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