



# Mountaintop Hose Co. No. 1



## Between Alarms

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APRIL 2023

NUMBER 61

### WELCOME

Welcome to the 61<sup>st</sup> edition of *Between Alarms*.

After our edition in November 2021 we suspended the printing of *Between Alarms* for various reasons, including the cost of printing and mailing it. However, there are several topics that need to be shared with our community, so we are sending this newsletter today.

### WEEKDAY / DAYTIME DRIVER POSITION CREATED

We, along with many volunteer fire companies, were facing a serious crisis in having our volunteer firefighters available to respond to daytime calls. Because of work commitments and some members moving out of the Township we found that we did not have anyone in proximity to the firehouse to respond to weekday / daytime calls. As the solution, we faced the reality that we had to hire someone into the position of a daytime driver to assure a vehicle would respond to our calls.

We intended to hire a number of professional firefighters to fill the position, each working on a part-time basis on a rotating schedule. The anticipated cost to create the position was \$38,000.00 to \$40,000.00 annually, including wages, payroll taxes and workman's compensation insurance.

We created a job description and wrote standard operating procedures. We had 19 applications for the job. We hired 7 people to be part of the rotation. The first day of coverage was February 6<sup>th</sup>. The system is working our well. We are now dispatched with EMS while the driver is on duty to assist with the calls or administer aid if the ambulance is not immediately available.

Many of our calls are investigations and rendering simple assistance such as identifying wires down or removing a tree branch from the road. Having a prompt response to these and all calls is particularly reassuring to the caller. When a call is more grave in nature, some of our firefighters will leave their work or travel some distance to assist. Having the truck on the scene when they arrive saves precious time allowing our firefighters to get right to work.



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## **FUNDING THE DRIVER POSITION**

As we planned for the driver position, we identified that we could not use the funds from our existing revenue stream from the fire tax that was created in 2018 or we would be critically short of money needed for major purchases we face in the near future. These expenses include the mandatory replacement of our Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA), our protective turnout gear and the eventually replacement of a vehicle. These projects involve hundreds of thousands of dollars. Although we apply for grants for major expenditures, the grants are not guaranteed.

Funding the position would take \$38,000.00-\$40,000.00 annually. We approached the Fairview Township Supervisors to request the fire tax be increased from .3 mill to .4 mill. This increase would result in \$38,000.00 in revenue. We thought the request was reasonable as the tax increase to our resident would be minimal in that it translated to \$10.00 for a home assessed at \$100,000.00. The Supervisors did not agree, stating that the taxpayers were particularly burdened with increased costs due to inflation. The Supervisors suggested we conduct fundraisers and we bring back our Annual Fund Drive, which was suspended in 2018 when the fire tax went into effect. The need for us to have daytime coverage was not in question. The only question was funding the position. For 2023 the Supervisors offered to pay us a lump sum of \$30,000.00 from the Township's American Rescue Fund and asked us to undertake fundraising and a fund drive in 2023 to determine what additional funds we could raise.

### **2023 FUND DRIVE – APRIL / MAY**

We are reinstating our Annual Fund Drive to not only assist us with funding the part-time position we created but also help us offset the skyrocketing costs of everything we buy.

The rising costs to the fire service are crippling the fire service and threaten to put smaller companies out of existence. In 2019 prior to COVID we could outfit a firefighter with turnout gear for just under \$2,500.00. The pricing has increased to \$4,577.00 in a quote we obtained for new gear. As we put together our proposal for the tax increase we checked with the manufacturer of our trucks. The pumper truck that we ordered in 2013 which was delivered in 2014 cost \$478,133.00. The price for an identical replacement truck in October of 2022 was \$883,300.00 not including a 6.5% price increase to be effective November 1<sup>st</sup>. Know that we are not intending to purchase a truck, the quote was obtained for comparison as we were making a presentation to the Township outlining the costs we face as we requested the tax increase.

A successful Fund Drive will help us fund the driver position for 2024 and/or continue to create resources for the major equipment expenditures we are facing. The Fund Drive letters will be mailed in early April. Watch your mailboxes for our request and please respond as generously as you can.

## **THE ALARMS**

In 2022 we responded to 331 calls for assistance. The nature of the calls were as follows: Fire Structure Fires – 24; Vehicle Fires – 14; Vegetation Fires – 3. Rescue and EMS Calls: Motor Vehicle Accidents – 38; Extraction from Vehicles – 5; Rescue Calls – 4; EMS Assists – 21. Mutual and Automatic Aid Calls: Automatic Alarms – 189; Mutual Aid to Other Fire Companies – 15. Other: Weather and Natural Disaster – 6; Hazardous Conditions – 14.

In the late afternoon of April 29<sup>th</sup> we were dispatched for a brush fire just north of the Glen Summit development off Woodlawn Ave. The fire grew in intensity quickly and as darkness fell lit up the sky causing much concern in nearby developments as the fire was burning in multiple directions. Fortunately, the wind was in our favor, and although very scary to see, there was not imminent danger to any homes or structures. The fire was brought under control into the night, however was monitored well into the day Saturday to douse hot spots and prevent reigniting.

We were assisted by several area fire departments, several wildland crews from fire departments throughout a wide area and by the PA Department of Forestry in the operation.

Many thanks to all the firefighters who assisted and to our general public for their concern. We received several donations from families who observed the fire from near and far.

## **BOY SCOUT / CUB SCOUT SPONSORSHIP**

In the fall of 2022 we were approached by the leaders of Pack 106 of the Northeastern Council of the Boy Scouts of America asking us to sponsor the Pack. Members Jason Menghini and Shawn Prohaska saw this as a great opportunity to help the Scouts and volunteered to be our leaders in the affiliation.

Pack 106 has about 39 Cub Scouts and about 20 Boy Scouts. Interacting activities began with the Scouts in January with meetings held, tours conducted and presentations made at the firehouse. The Scouts and their families have gained much knowledge on our operations in the process. Additional fire company members have become engaged in the process and will be sharing their knowledge to help the Scouts gain their merit badges and conduct outside activities when the weather allows.

The Scouts maintain their own treasury, our leaders help with the oversight of the funds.

We are confident that the affiliation will result in some Scouts asking to become members of our organization, which will be a win for all involved.

## OUR LEADERSHIP

The current leadership of our organization is as follows:

Dave Hourigan – President  
Red Lines – Vice President  
Jason Menghini – Secretary  
Shawn Prohaska – Treasurer  
Mike Herron- Trustee  
Doug Guignet – Trustee  
Jerry Baynas – Fire Police Captain

Pete Kohl – Fire Chief  
Todd Wagaman – 1<sup>st</sup> Assistant Chief  
Josh Antosh – 2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant Chief  
Mike Aton – Captain  
Mike Herron – Captain  
Ray Loucks – Fire Police Lieutenant

A change in leadership will transpire in August of this year. Dave Hourigan, our President for forty years has asked to transition out of the role as President. Jason Menghini will become the President in August and Dave will transition into a Trustee position, working to maintain the relationships with the Foundations and our long-time donors. Dave and Jason are working together to assure a smooth transition. Jason looks forward to continuing the successful leadership provide by Dave and to implementing new ideas which will include plans for retention and recruitment for all aspects of our operations.

## MEMBERS WELCOME

We need your individual strengths to make us better!

Want to give back to the community by joining a service organization? You don't have to fight fires if you become a member (but you can if you want to!).

We are welcoming:

- Firefighters
- Business members
- Auxiliary members \*
- Help with fundraising
- Help with maintaining buildings and equipment
- Help with community outreach
- And more...what is your strength?

If you are interested in joining us and need more information, reach out to any of our members or email [secretary@mthc1.com](mailto:secretary@mthc1.com).

- \* Several of our female associate members are reinstating a Ladies Auxiliary – to be a separate committee (not a separate organization as it once was) to undertake tasks and raise funds for our benefit. Jina Kohl is chairing the committee. If you are interested in learning more contact Jina at [jina@c-kalarm.com](mailto:jina@c-kalarm.com).

## **DEBT FREE**

We are pleased to report that we paid off the balance of the \$200,000.00 loan for our 2018 Rescue Truck when we received our fire tax allocation in March of 2022. The truck, which cost \$805,160.00, is now paid in full. The fire company does not have any other debt.

However, we are facing the major expenditures of replaced our SCBA and our turnout gear within the next few years, the cost of which will exceed \$300,000.00. If we are not successful in obtaining Federal grants for these purchases, our saving will be depleted. In addition to these expenses we need to allocate resources to savings for the purchase of a truck replacement in 3-5 years, the cost of which will easily exceed 1 million dollars at the time.

## **WILDLAND FIRE CREW / VEHICLE IN PLACE**

In the past few years we have been slowly putting together and equipping a Wildland crew to assist with fighting brush/forest fires throughout the region. A Wildland crew is sanctioned by the Department of Forestry. Forestry provides much necessary equipment and tools. Members of the crew have to have training for the operations. Eight of our members are certified to be part of the crew. When they are called into service for incidents outside of Fairview Township they receive a stipend from the State for their work and our fire company receives funds for the vehicles engaged.

In August of 2022 Forestry titled a used vehicle to us to use in our operations. It is a 2004 Ford F350. The vehicle was mechanically sound, however in need of body work. The work was been done throughout the winter by members and volunteers. The State has provided a brand new slip in unit for the truck which consists of a 200 gallon water tank and a 150 GPM pump. This unit is being mounted on the truck. The truck will be complete and ready for service in the spring fire season.

Placing the truck and crew in service returns a local Wildland crew to Fairview Township where a Wildland crew was originally established to cover the area decades ago. The crew is designated the Black Diamond Crew which was is original name decades ago.

## **2022 FUNDRAISERS**

### **Purse Raffle**

We conducted our popular Designer Purse Raffle in December thinking ticket purchases would be brisk and lucky winners would have either a great gift or great purse for the holidays. The past few years were successful with the raffle so we wanted to build on that momentum.

Jina Kohl and Tiffany Herron volunteered to chair the event. Donations were solicited to purchase the purses. Long-time loyal supporter Anneliese Moghul provided the donation to purchase the grand prize of a Louis Vuitton purchase and the following businesses/individuals

provided donations to purchase the 15 additional purses awarded. Many thanks to Mountaintop Animal Hospital, Pinnacle Roofing, C-K Alarms, Inc., Ayers Towing, Frank Orloski, Jr., Pat Curley Detective Agency, Century 21 Smith Hourigan Group and Dr. Thomas Biscotti, DMD.

The net to the fire company from the event was \$12,385.00. Many thanks to all that donated to or participated in the event, and to Jina and Tiffany for organizing it.

### **Trivia Night**

In May, Pam and Jeff McGovern, co-owners of the Broadway Tavern conducted a Trivia Night for the benefit of our fire company at the Broadway. Tickets to the event were sold and gift baskets were collected. An evening of fun was had by all as several teams competed for top honors. The event resulted in a donation of \$2,535.00 to our fire company.

### **Christmas Boutique**

In November Joanne Joseph, an active Mountaintop business person and volunteer conducted a Christmas Boutique at the Broadway for the benefit of the fire company. Over a dozen vendors participated to show and sell their products to the public who attended the widely advertised event. The event resulted in a check in the amount of \$1,012.00 being presented to the fire company.

Many thanks to the McGoverns and Joanne for their hard work in undertaking the fundraisers.

## **GRANTS RECEIVED**

We have been successful in obtaining grants/donations for several Foundations/Organizations. Some of the grants/gifts were as follows:

- F.M. Kirby Foundation, Inc. - \$3,800.00 for the purchase of one set of turnout gear
- The Nesbitt Family Charitable Foundation - \$5,000.00 toward the purchase of Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs) to replace the dated units carried on our trucks
- The State of Pennsylvania - \$14,835.00 – Annual grant allocated to fire companies for the purchase and maintenance of equipment used in our operations
- The Fred M. and Jessie A. Kirby Episcopal House, Inc. – A donation of \$4,100.00 received after a response call to the facility to be used for the purchase of turnout gear
- The Marquis George MacDonald Foundation - \$1,000.00 for general operations
- Pennsylvania American Water Company - \$500.00 for the purchase of pagers for our firefighters
- Relief Association Allocation - \$29,462.65 – money received from the State generated by a 2% tax on non-Pennsylvania based insurance companies for casualty insurance premiums paid within a community. The funds are to provide for the safety and welfare of community firefighters.

- The Rotary Club of Mountaintop - \$1,000.00 – a donation to our operations for providing parking and personnel to assist with parking for the Rotary Steam Train Ride in July.

## **FEDERAL GRANT RECEIVED**

The Department of Homeland Security conducts the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG) to allocate \$300 million in Federal money to fire departments throughout the county for the acquisition of equipment, vehicles and facility updates. The program is very competitive with the dollar volume of the requests far exceeding the funds available.

Although we had been successful in obtaining grants in the past, our requests fell short since the 2014 program. This stated, and facing very large purchases in the coming years, we hired a grant writing firm to assist us with the process. Late in 2021 into early 2022 we worked with Firehouse Grants from Southeast Pennsylvania to put together our application. Our request was for funds for radio equipment to add to the equipment provided by the County to be compatible with the pending new radio system. The cost of the equipment was \$86,248.00 with the grant request being \$82,248.00. The fee for the grant writing was quoted at \$4,500.00. If we were not successful in obtaining the grant, the firm would re-submit the following year for \$1,000.00.

We were notified in mid-August that our grant was approved. The equipment was ordered and is now in service. The grant allowed us to outfit each of our active firefighters and all of our fire police with portable radios and additionally acquire mobile radios for our vehicles.

## **2023 FEDERAL GRANT REQUEST**

With a successful grant application in 2022, we hired the same firm to complete the application for funds needed for the mandatory replacement of our Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA). We currently have 26 SCBA units in service. The program allows us to apply for a grant to replace 20 SCBAs. The cost for 20 SCBAs, along with a face mask and spare air bottle is \$185,638.00. The grant requested is \$176,798.10. Upon a success award, we would purchase the additional SCBAs with savings. If the grant is not successful, we will be facing an expense of over \$241,000.00 which will greatly deplete our savings. We also face the replacement of the vast majority of our turnout gear in the next 1-2 years will be an expense of \$100,000.00 plus. A successful grant award will assure that we have the resources to make the purchases we are facing.

## **NEW RADIO SYSTEM FINALLY IN SERVICE**

The much anticipated new digital radio system implemented by Luzerne County 911 finally went live beginning in the late summer of 2022. The last phase of the operation was activating the system for the fire service which transpired in October. Overall the changeover



went well with somewhat of a learning curve for our firefighters who quickly adapted to the new equipment.

Communications are more reliable with no dead zones. There are a number of operating frequencies that can be used in an operation so departments are not stepping on one another in the event of multiple incidents.

As described, some equipment for the changeover was provided by the County, some acquired through our successful Federal grant and some from a grant from the F.M. Kirby Foundation, Inc. in 2021. The overall cost of the equipment involved approached \$175,000.00. The grants received covered all of the costs. Our vehicles are now properly equipped and all of our firefighters and fire police are equipped with a portable radio.

### **FROM THE PRESIDENT**

As stated in this newsletter, our Fund Drive will return this year as a means to raise additional revenues to not only fund our new Driver positions, but to additionally help offset the spiraling costs that we incur in all that we purchase. The funds will hopefully offset the need for, or at least the amount, of a tax increase in 2024.

In the years ahead the face of the volunteer fire service will be changing as the costs for equipment and vehicles are extreme and the number of volunteers has diminished greatly within the fire service. The first pumper truck we bought when I became President was \$110,000.00 with a whole new complement of 4” hose. Our most recent pumper purchase in 2014 was \$485,000.00. We have learned a replacement vehicle would be in excess of \$900,000.00 if ordered today. In the 1970s the volunteer fire service in Pennsylvania, the state where it was founded by Ben Franklin, there were over 300,000 volunteers. Today the numbers are approximately 37,000. Membership has declined in part due to the time commitment people have to their families and the extensive time commitment now required to be trained for a firefighter position.

The face of the fire service will change because of these factors. The State will need to become involved in the organization of the fire service providing leadership and funding on a broad approach as the rising costs are not sustainable, and personnel must be available to answer the calls. In the interim, your positive response to our coming Fund Drive will ensure that we are on solid financial footing in our organization.

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Many of you have probably heard by now, I have decided not to seek re-election as President of the Mountaintop Hose Company No. 1. Forty years ago, and just recently married, I went home after our February meeting and told Sharon that I was the new President until our August elections as our then President, Bob Leyfert, was moving out of the area. I never committed to a year, just a month it appears. Luckily Sharon supported me with what she called “the other woman” for all these years.



I am turning 70 in June and our first grandchild is coming soon. It's time for me to free more time for family as all of the sudden I am realizing that there really is an end date to our lives. Not that my demise is pending, but just in case it is, time to be spent with family and friends becomes a priority.

Jason Menghini has agreed to become President in August. I have begun sharing what my responsibilities are with him so that he can transition into the role. I plan to continue as a Trustee. In that capacity I can ensure that the donor relationships that we have built over the years continue to keep MTHC #1 on sound financial footing.

Jason has fresh ideas for our operations which will be unfolding in the months ahead. Please listen, support him and help where you can.

It has been a great run. Together we have built the Mountaintop Hose Company No. 1 into the dynamic organization it is today. We have the best of equipment and vehicles, and are well prepared for any challenges we may face. We are highly respected around the Mountain and throughout the Valley as being a first class organization in the fire service.

The list of people I owe acknowledgements to for their help along the way is very long. At the risk of missing people I want to say thank you to all with two exceptions. Thank you to Sharon for allowing me the time and providing the support she has over the past 40 years and thank you to our Fire Chief Pete Kohl, with whom I have partnered in all that we accomplished in my tenure as President and he as Fire Chief.

Some have suggested that there be an event to celebrate my service. Much appreciated, however Sharon and I do not want an event. Your support and help along the way is what mattered to us. However, if you want to do something, make a donation in our honor when our Fund Drive request arrives in April.

As stated, it has been a good run. Thanks to all, past and present, who have helped along the way.

Dave Hourigan