

## Hourigan Reflects On 40 Years As MTHC No. 1 President

By **NICOLE FAY BARR**

*Correspondent*

As a teenager, when Dave Hourigan heard news of a devastating neighborhood fire, he was horrified and he decided then to volunteer for the Mountaintop Hose Co. No. 1.

Hourigan was inspired by the men and women of the department that were so selflessly giving and made himself a fixture there, becoming president of the organization in 1983 and remaining in that post for 40 years.

With Hourigan retiring this summer as hose company president, he spoke to this reporter about his four decades there, the lifelong friends he made, and the impact on the community that he hopes he achieved.

He related that serving the hose company has been his “pleasure and privilege.” His decision to retire was difficult, he noted, but he felt it was time to slow down and let a younger group handle most

of the hose company business.

Hourigan’s successor is Jason Menghini, a firefighter who has been active in the company along with his wife, Amanda. The couple has three young children and Menghini is enthusiastic to continue Hourigan’s legacy.

“I have all the confidence that Jason will be a good leader and he will implement changes that are beneficial to the fire department,” Hourigan commented. “And he understands and respects the basics that it takes to currently operate things.”

Hourigan is proud to leave the hose company well standing and with no debt. He thanked his wife, Sharon, and his children for supporting him

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all these years as he managed a successful realtor career and took care of the endless day-to-day operations of the hose company.

Meanwhile, he will continue to support the department. He plans to stay on as a trustee, helping with Menghini’s transition, with fundraising, and with grant securing.

### Early Years

Hourigan got involved with the Mountaintop Hose Company No. 1 when he was 16 or 17 years old and he saw a house get destroyed by fire and a family be displaced.

“I wanted to get involved and make sure that didn’t happen again,” he said.

The firehouse at that time was in the basement of the former Fairview Township municipal building. The one truck the company owned was wedged “into the garage with a shoe horn” and with space so tight that the hose had to be rolled out into the supervisors’ meeting room.

beyond running into a burning building.

Then there is the issue of recruiting and retaining firefighters. The number of volunteers in fire service in Pennsylvania has dramatically decreased over the years. In the 1970’s, there were over 300,000 active firefighters; now it’s more like 40,000.

This year, the hose company added a few paid, daytime drivers to ensure that the mountain is protected. But something like that requires funding. Fairview Township has a modest fire tax and Hourigan, in his role as president, endured the non-stop task of finding more funding.

The other challenge faced by fire companies everywhere is the soaring cost of equipment. While it previously cost hundreds to outfit a firefighter, now it costs around \$5,000.

The hose company’s first fire truck was purchased for \$110,000. The last truck, bought a few years ago, cost \$800,000, and the next needed truck purchase is expected to top \$1 million.

When a fire call came in, a dispatcher called volunteers on land line telephones just hoping to reach them. This was far different than today's world where pagers and cell phone apps alert the current firefighters to emergencies.

In 1983, the hose company president moved out of the area and Hourigan took the position. He thought he would be president until that August, but it turned out that he remained in that post until this August – 2023.

That first summer, he organized the famous hose company bazaar, a tradition that lasted until 2017. In its heyday, the bazaar was popular and had many volunteers, including Hourigan's children and their high school friends. When his kids got older, they would bring their friends from NYU and the city-raised visitors would marvel at the smalltown atmosphere and the charm of everyone on the mountain knowing each other's names.

Hourigan spent many years planning the bazaar, beginning in April through to the summer, a time of hard work that he also called a pleasure. He had a regular team of dedicated helpers from the hose company.

“We had lots of good times and we had a lot of camaraderie, working together to get things organized,” he said. “There's no part of the fire company that is self-serving. Everyone is giving.”

And the community always came out to support them. In years when monsoon-like rains ruined one day of the bazaar, residents from what seemed like the whole mountain would show up the next day and spend their money to boost the hose company.

### Changing Times

Hourigan stopped going out on firefighting calls about five years ago, feeling that, since times have changed, he wasn't fully equipped any longer to provide that service. He explained that training for firefighters has gotten more complex.

For example, some vehicles are built with 16 airbags and proper training is needed so that crash victims are not injured further while being extricated. Now there are also electric cars and firefighters need to be in full understanding of how those work. The cut of one wrong cable and an electrocution occurs.

Four decades ago, firefighters took a volunteer introductory class on the basics and became certified.

“It's insane how much everything costs,” Hourigan said, noting the need for government-supported fire services. “Many fire departments struggle to keep the lights on and put on heat in the winter.”

The job of a hose company president is to work with the organization's treasurer to find money, through fundraisers and sponsorships, and through obtaining grants.

Under Hourigan's direction, the Mountaintop Hose Company recently hired a grant writer and it paid off. While the department wasn't successful for some years finding grant money, the new writer quickly secured \$85,000 for radio equipment.

In better times, the bazaar was a money maker for the hose company. With that event no more, smaller activities bring in some funds and Hourigan has strived with his regular newsletter to convey to the public the hose company's needs. He appears to have been successful as, especially this year, many have been generous with donating to the fund drive.

Another important part of Hourigan's job as president was keeping up morale and making sure everyone was “rowing the boat in the same direction.”

Hourigan explained, “Early on, I realized that I needed to have people believe that we could achieve our goal whatever it might have been. Once this is in place, you can easily lead people to accomplish the goal and the next project becomes that much easier to have people buy in.”

“We really did a lot together over the years, building a modern, well-equipped and well-trained fire department that is ready and able to face whatever challenges that come along,” he went on. “I am very proud of all of this and grateful to all that participated along the way. Between the firefighting aspect and the fundraising aspects there have been hundreds of people that helped.”

He concluded, “In fire service, you're close to people because you have to trust them. I've made lots of lifetime friendships because of it. It's been a really great adventure.”

Now, a 120-hour mandatory course is required with rigorous training that goes far

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