

Mountaintop Hose Co. No. 1

Between Alarms

Visit us @ www.MTHC1.com

NOVEMBER 2020

NUMBER 58

WELCOME

Welcome to the 58th edition of “*Between Alarms*”.

Today’s newsletter will cover our activities of the past year as due to the Pandemic we did not issue our newsletter in May. We were complying with the mandated shutdown. Although the Pandemic remains, we remain able to function and wanted to update everyone on our activities.

THE PANDEMIC

Life changed for all of us in mid-March. The Pandemic arrived swiftly, creating much fear and many unknowns. For certain, extreme caution to remain healthy became the priority in all that we did.

Within the firehouse we limited access to members only. Active firefighters were required to register their daily temperatures. Protocols limited the number of people in each vehicle and required sanitizing of the cabs of the vehicle and equipment used after every call. The extractor and dryer were purchased and installed to clean our turnout gear. Fortunately within our firehouse family everyone remained healthy.

The community responded in positive ways to support the branches of emergency services. The Rotary Club of Mountaintop applied for a grant that supplied 4,000 pair of gloves and 2,000 masks that were distributed to the fire and police departments on the Mountain. Individuals and businesses also provided supplies of personal protective gear. Many of the restaurants or businesses sent food or gift cards to emergency services at various times. We want to thank Yalch Insurance for gift cards to Junie G’s and the Chalet for our members. Thank you to Pizza Bella, III Guys and Domino’s for sending pizzas to the firehouse. A special thank you to two young brothers, Austin and Colton Greeley, who were concerned for our well-being, and with their parents’ help, delivered cases of water to the firehouse for our use.

In many ways the worst health crisis in a century brought out the best of community as people have displayed concerns and acts of kindness throughout the crisis.



P.O. Box 163, 14 Woodlawn Avenue
Mountaintop, Pennsylvania 18707



MEMBERS SPOTLIGHT

Two of our former active members reactivated their membership in the past months.

Larry Chapman served as an active firefighter decades ago. Eventually Larry moved out of our township. He was not able to continue his active membership, however he faithfully paid his dues vowing he would be back. In fact, he has moved back to Fairview Township and has re-engaged his participation with us. He now serves as a fire police person in our organization.

Mike Aton, who was an active firefighter, has also returned to service with us. Mike was a member with us some twenty years ago. He left the area for the Pacific Northwest. For 8 years he served as an engine captain for the Bureau of Land Management and US Forest Service. The coverage area they served was 1.2 million acres of Federal land in the western United States. In one season Mike was part to the Redmond Hotshot Crew.

Returning to our area, Mike now works as an Equipment Operator/Firefighter for DCNR Forestry in our local District I1, which is the Pinchot Forest District. Mike rejoined our fire company in 2019. In 2020 he was elected to the position of Captain.

We are pleased that Larry and Mike have found their way back to our fire company. Their time and talent are appreciated and it is always good to renew old friendships.

OUR LEADERSHIP

In August we held our annual election for officers. Our officers are:

Dave Hourigan	President
Red Lines	Vice President
Jason Menghini	Secretary
Shawn Prohaska	Treasurer
Jared Aigeldinger	Trustee
Mike Herron	Trustee
Doug Guignet	Trustee
Peter J. Kohl	Fire Chief
Todd Wagaman	1 st Asst. Chief
Josh Antosh	2 nd Asst. Chief
Jared Aigeldinger	Captain
Mike Aton	Captain

SANTA PARADE – DECEMBER 13th

Although the Pandemic does not allow us to conduct our Christmas tree sale and Santa visit on our Bazaar grounds this year, Santa has asked that we conduct our parade so he can see all the boys and girls of our Township before the big day. To comply with Santa's wishes, we will conduct the parade beginning at 2:00 PM on the 13th from the firehouse.

Our parade route will be as listed below. The sound of our sirens and horns will announce Santa's approach. Be sure to come out to wave to Santa as he passes. To keep Santa safe and healthy for the big day, the parade will not make any stops this year.

Additionally, if the weather is miserable we will postpone the parade until 2:00 PM on the 20th. Should the parade be postponed we will post it on our Facebook page and webpage on the morning of the 13th. You can check by visiting our Facebook page or MTHC1.com.

The parade route will be as follows:

Leave Station @ 2:00 PM

Turn L onto SR 309S
L onto North Main St.
L onto Gracedale Ave.
R onto Woodlawn Ave.
R onto Kirby Ave.
L onto Farmhouse Rd.
L onto Pinetree Rd.
R onto Valley Lane
R onto Farmhouse Rd.
L onto Longmeadow Lane
R onto Highland Rd.
L onto Kirby Ave.
R onto Greystone Dr.
L onto Fieldstone Way
L onto Greystone Dr.
L onto Autumn Court
L onto Valley View Dr.
L onto Park Lane
Cross Kirby Ave. to Fairview Park
Straight on Summit Rd. to Spruce St.

R onto Spruce St.
L onto SR 309 S
L onto Garden Ave.
R onto Wilkes Lane
R onto Hemlock Terrace
L onto Cedar Manor
R onto Shady Tree
R onto Spruce St.
L onto Kirby Ave.
L onto SR 309 S
Bear R onto South Main Rd.
R onto Lee Ave.
R onto Woodland Ave.
R onto Woodcrest Ave.
L onto South Main Rd.
Bear L onto SR 309 N
L onto Sherwood Dr.
L onto Robbins Way
L onto Sherwood Dr.
L onto SR 309 N
Return to the Station for Santa's Departure

DESIGNER PURSE RAFFLE

Unfortunately the Pandemic did not allow us to conduct our enormously popular and profitable Designer Purse Bingo this year. However, our ever resourceful chairpersons of the event, Michelle and Jared Aigeldinger, did not want to disappoint the large base of patrons for the event so they decided to conduct a Designer Purse Raffle in place of the Bingo. It was decided to conduct a raffle for 10 purses plus a “grand prize” of a Louis Vuitton purse. Tickets would be \$10.00 each or three for \$25.00. Anneliese Moghul, our loyal friend and long time supporter made a donation to purchase the Louis Vuitton purse. Some purses were donated by others, and along with cash donations, the ten purses were obtained.

The drawing was held on November 14th in a Facebook Live event. The drawing date was after this newsletter went to press. Ticket sales have been brisk. We will report the profit in our May newsletter. Thanks to Michelle and Jared for conducting this event and to all those who helped make it successful.

NIGHT AT THE RACES

The Mountain Top Welcome Club conducted its annual Night at the Races in February. Once again, we were designated to be the recipient of their largest award. As in the past few years our members engaged to help sell horses/sponsorships to help maximize the profit for the event. We were able to raise \$1,690.00, which was matched by a friend doubling our contribution to \$3,380.00.

The Pandemic prevented the Welcome Club from conducting an in person check presentation. The checks that were sent to various organizations were as follows: \$5,000.00 to Mountaintop Hose Company No. 1; \$3,000.00 to the Kirby Library, \$1,500.00 to Candy’s Place, plus checks in the amount of \$1,000.00 and \$500.00 to two Crestwood seniors.

We used the funds toward the purchase of our extractor/dryer that is detailed elsewhere in the newsletter. We are appreciative and proud that once again we were recognized with such generosity by the Welcome Club.

DEBT SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED

We are pleased to report that the remaining balance of the \$200,000.00 loan we took just two years ago to purchase our new rescue truck is now under \$60,000.00. The second loan of \$100,000.00 is paid in full. We were able to accomplish this significant principal reduction using the proceeds of the sale of the Cavanaugh’s building toward the debt, applying \$25,000.00 to the principal in 2019 and 2020 and over \$1,200.00 of our monthly loan payment is applied directly to the principal. Based on our current repayment plan, we look forward to having the truck paid off in 2022. We are quite proud of this fact as the overall cost of the truck was \$800,000.00.

BID FOR FIDELITY BANK IMPACT GRANT FALLS SHORT

We are disappointed to say that we were not the successful winner of the Fidelity Bank Impact Grant in the amount of \$15,000.00. Fidelity opened a new branch in our township late last year. As part of their introduction of themselves to the community they created a contest for 5 non-profit organizations from Mountaintop to compete for the grant. The contest opened in early February and the voting was to be through April 10th. The contest consisted of merely stopping at the bank to vote for your favored charity. One could vote daily and as many times as they wanted while in the bank.

We initiated an active campaign to “get the vote out”. Blasi Printing printed full color postcards that we mailed to every township resident announcing the contest and requesting votes for us to win. Blasi also printed posters that we placed throughout our business community. Blasi did not charge for the materials as the Blasi family are long time supporters of our fire company. The postage for the mailing was paid by another business friend of our fire company. The local and daily papers gave us great publicity. There were no costs incurred by the fire company in the contest.

Unfortunately, the Pandemic ended the contest abruptly in mid-March. The bank decided not to resume the contest at a later date as it recognized the charities involved likely needed the funds as the Pandemic was going to negatively affect charitable donations. The Wright Township Volunteer Fire Company had accumulated the most votes to date and was awarded the \$15,000.00.

Our sincere thanks to Blasi Printing for providing the materials, to all that voted for us in the contest and to Fidelity Bank for conducting the contest. A special thanks to our Mountaintop papers for the publicity they provided for the contest. Congratulations to Wright Township Fire Company in winning the grant.

COVID REALTED GRANTS

In response to the virus, COVID related grants became available through various agencies to help offset costs and loss of income in the fire service.

Early in the Pandemic we applied for and were granted a \$10,000.00 grant under the Federal Economic Injury Disaster Loans and Emergency Economic Injury Grant Program. This money was made available to help businesses and non-profits offset both extraordinary expenses incurred or loss of revenue caused by COVID.

Recently we received notice from the State that we will be receiving \$11,094.00 to accomplish the same as the Federal program.

These grants are very valuable to us as we have incurred the expense of the purchase of the extractor/dryer. Additionally the majority of our planned fundraisers had to be cancelled, resulting in a loss of \$12,000.00-\$15,000.00 in revenue for us in 2020.

PENNSYLVANIA AMERICAN WATER COMPANY GRANT

Each year Pennsylvania American Water Company awards grants in the amount of up to \$1,000.00 to the fire companies in the territories it services.

We applied for a grant in the amount of \$865.00 to purchase gloves and protective hoods for our firefighters. We are delighted to announce that we have been granted the funds.

Thank you to Pennsylvania American Water for conducting this program and for our award in 2020.

GRANTS RECEIVED FROM THE F.M. KIRBY FOUNDATION, INC.

The F.M. Kirby Foundation, Inc. recognized us for our service to the community again this year with a grant of \$3,100.00. The funds were applied to required maintenance checks/testing on our self-contained breathing apparatus.

Our gratitude goes to the Foundation for the decades of support that they have extended to our fire company.

RELIEF ASSOCIATION ALLOCATION

The allocation to our Firefighters Relief association from the State was received in October. The amount was \$26,431.97. These funds are derived from a tax on insurance premiums received by out of state insurance companies and are to be used to provide for the safety and health of our members.

Also, the State Auditors completed their audit of our Relief Association for 2018/2019. We were found in full compliance with all the requirements of the State.

FIRE TAX UPDATE

When we planned the request for implementing the fire tax in 2017, to be implemented in 2018, we projected that we needed \$115,000.00 to replace the revenue from our Annual Bazaar, Annual Fund Drive, and annual allocation to the fire company from Fairview Township. We knew it would take a few years of tax collections to reach this amount as delinquent payments push some of the receipts into the following years.

We are pleased to announce that through October 2020 we have received \$115,299.00 from the tax. There will be some additional money received prior to the end of the year which will result in some hundreds of dollars more.

The revenue is right on target. We cannot imagine where we would be financially without the tax in place. The Pandemic has seriously impacted the revenue of many volunteer fire companies, placing them financial peril.

Knowing that our “guaranteed” revenue is in place is a huge relief for our members as we are able to concentrate on training and preparing to provide the services we do.

SHARPENING OUR SKILLS

Earlier this year we purchased a training module from the Bucks County Fire Academy that provides us with live, in-person training from the Academy. Several of our members are currently completing a 122 hour course in firefighting which has been conducted through the fall. Some of the firefighters will take the next step which will involve more training and then testing to obtain a Firefighter I designation.

Members have also trained in First Aid, CPR and Hazmat operations.

In September a Saturday was spent in Whitehall in a structural burn class with another class to be attended this month in Hanover Township.

Members give up personal time to devote to this training, along with the time they devote to maintaining our equipment and facilities, along with responding to calls.

CLEANING EQUIPMENT PURCHASED

For a few years we have wanted to purchase the necessary equipment to clean our turnout gear after calls. The leading cause of death for firefighters is cancer. Recent studies concluded that much of the illness is caused by carcinogens encountered in firefighting operations. Carcinogens not only remain on the turnout gear after operations, they can permeate the gear and cause skin cancer.

The equipment needed to care for the gear, an extractor and a dryer cabinet, are very expensive. Because of the excessive cost, we were pursuing grants to make the purchase.

However, the advent of the Pandemic with great fury and so many unknowns, compelled us to immediately order the equipment in order to provide the best protection possible for our firefighters. We knew we were in line for the \$5,000.00 donation from the Welcome Club and we decided to use our savings for the difference in cost. The equipment cost \$19,419.27. Our members made some modifications to our building to house the equipment. A plumber was needed to install the water lines and drain. The total cost came to just under \$20,000.00.

The equipment was put to immediate use after it was operational, cleaning our gear in the initial round.

Fortunately, with the grants described in this newsletter, we were able to restore the funds expended to our savings as we will be facing some very large expenditures within a few years. Our self-contained breathing apparatus and a majority of our turnout gear will need replacement due to expiration dates on the equipment.

NEW COUNTY-WIDE RADIO SYSTEM

Luzerne County has awarded a contract to Motorola Solutions, Inc. for the complete replacement of the county-wide emergency services communications system. The system will replace the 20 plus year old analog system that is currently used with a new modern technology digital system. The new \$25 million system will greatly improve radio communications through the 906 square mile county by boosting coverage that is spotty or non-existent in some areas, ending radio interference and open up more channels for emergency service.

In addition to replacing all of the radios currently in use, which include base stations, vehicle mounted mobile radios and portable radios, the transmitting microwave dishes will be replaced in the 14 towers located throughout the county. Three new towers will be built, bringing the total to 17. Four of the existing towers must be replaced as they have been deemed structurally insufficient. The tower on Penobscot Mountain is among the towers to be replaced.

Our allocation of radios includes a base station, four mobile radios and 16 portable radios. The radios are provided at no cost to us. However, any additional portable radios that we may require will be at our expense. The current cost per portable radio is approximately \$3,500.00. Although the technology of these radios is highly improved over the existing system, the costs are hugely more than approximately \$500.00 per portable radio cost of the dated technology.

The cost for the new system is being paid through a bond issued from the county. The work needed to implement the system is under way. It is anticipated that the system will be ready for testing in the 1st quarter of 2021 and the entire system will become operational in the 4th quarter of 2021.

WINTER COOPERATION

Each year we remind/ask everyone to be proactively cautious in the winter to protect yourselves and others.

Be sure that any devices that include a flame are properly maintained or secure. Wood and coal stoves should be maintained annually, as should furnaces. Candles must be secure and away from combustible materials.

Remove the ice and snow from your walks and driveways for your safety and the safety of others or emergency service providers that may come to your home.

Without question, use caution when driving and slow down. Responding to help you if you have an accident puts us at risk. Many accidents are preventable.

Finally, our annual plea. If there is heavy snow and there is a fire hydrant in sight from your house, please clear it. We are in the process of replacing several hydrant markers throughout the Township so the hydrants are easily identifiable. Your help with this request will be greatly appreciated.

DONATIONS / MEMORIAL & HONORARY DONATIONS

We are pleased to report that many of our long time supporters have continued their annual giving to the fire company even though we no longer conduct an Annual Fund Drive. These people recognize the value of what we do and the costs that we incur in our operations. We truly appreciate their ongoing generosity.

Another way of giving is to consider us for an honorary/memorial donation. A great way to honor a person for a special occasion or to memorialize the life of a friend or relative. A gift to any non-profit organization is especially helpful to that organization, particularly in these COVID times where donations are down to all organizations. In 2020 a few families have requested donations be made to our fire company in the passing of a loved one. The donations have accumulated to well over \$1,000.00, which is a significant amount of money to us.

Finally, as the year winds down, we would welcome being the recipient of any year end giving you may be considering. Donations are always welcome and greatly appreciated. Donations may be sent to us at P.O. Box 163, Mountaintop, PA 18707.

THE ALARMS

From January 1, 2020 through October 31, 2020 we responded to 249 calls for assistance. The nature of the calls were as follows: Motor Vehicle Accidents – 76; Automatic Fire Alarms – 60; EMS Assists – 27; Vehicle Fires – 13; Structure Fires – 12; Wires Down – 9; Brush Fires – 8; Gas Leak – 7; Public Assist – 7; Appliance Fire – 6; Burning Complaint – 5; CO Alarm – 4; Smoke Investigation – 3; Child Locked in Car – 3; Trees Down – 3; Fuel Spill – 2; Chimney Fire – 1; Electrical Fire – 1; Dumpster Fire – 1; and Person Locked Out of Home – 1.

127 of the calls were in Fairview Township, 80 calls in Wright Township, 35 calls in Rice Township, 4 calls in Dorrance Township, 2 in Hobbie and 1 in Slocum.

Within our township we did not have any significant loss fires. We did have some motor vehicle accidents that required extraction of an occupant of the car. Three of the calls outside our township were structure fires that resulted in a significant loss of property.

ESTATE BEQUEST BENEFITS FIRE COMPANY

In April we received a bequest in the amount of \$8,360.29 from the Estate of Ann Rutkowski. Ann and her late husband, Bernie, were township residents who over the years would contact us seeking to make a contribution toward equipment that we may need. Upon Ann's passing we learned that her estate included a bequest to our fire company. We were humbled to accept this gift.

The Mountaintop Area Ambulance Association also received a bequest in the same amount.

FIREHOUSE IMPROVEMENTS

We undertook a few projects this year to improve and/or maintain our buildings and grounds.

Members made modification to the building to accommodate the installation of the extractor/dryer.

Our Fire Chief, Pete Kohl, donated and installed a video surveillance system outside and inside the firehouse.

Our members, under the lead of Mike Herron, built and installed new letters on the bank alongside the firehouse building as the frames of the old letters were twisted and deteriorating from the sunlight.

We purchased our own stripping machine for just a few hundred dollars and re-stripped the main lot ourselves, saving us hundreds of dollars.

Member George Albright III, along with his father, pruned the 30 Arborvitae plants along the top of the bank above our parking lot. The Arborvitae both enhanced the appearance of our property and serves as a buffer to prevent anyone from driving over the bank from the upper lot. The shrubs were 4-5 feet tall when planted in 2006 had grown to 20 feet tall and needed pruning to prevent the plants from splitting and growing into the nearby utility lines. Thank you to the Albrights for performing this task for us.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

2020 – A year that will never be forgotten.

We remain in the midst of a grave, life threatening Pandemic, we have endured an election season like no other, hurricanes and forest fires have caused extreme damage and hardships, and our entire educational system was turned upside down. We must resolve as

Americans to face and deal with these challenges for the better good of our country which I believe is everyone's reality.

At the firehouse, and at all fire companies, we deal with many challenges in our operation which include dire, life threatening situations, funding or recruitment challenges, escalating costs and the need to train/learn new technology to prepare for the challenges we face. We all work together for the common good, proudly serving our community in the process.

In 2021 and the years to follow it is my hope that we as a community and a country will work together to solve the current challenges we face and whatever challenges that may come in the future. At the firehouse we are committed to deal with whatever we need to do to resolve matters that come our way.

The Pandemic has created severe financial hardships for many fire companies in our area. Most fire companies depend on fundraisers and fund drives for the majority of their revenue. Most have limited government support. I cannot imagine where we would be financially if we did not have our guaranteed revenue from the fire tax. Looking back, we knew that conducting an Annual Bazaar would soon become an impossible task and the number of donors to our Annual Fund Drive had declined from 60% participation to about 44% participation in 10 years. Never did I anticipate (who would?) a Pandemic that would cause cancellation of nearly all fundraisers and cause a significant drop in charitable giving for all organizations.

My and our thanks again to the Fairview Supervisors for listening to our story and implementing the fire tax in 2018. With the tax we are well positioned to serve our community.

In 2020 over 75 new families have moved into Fairview Township year to date. We send welcome letters to the new families outlining our history and operations.

For the new families and for all reading this newsletter, just a quick reminder that we are an all volunteer organization. Our members share their time and talent with us to maintain our operation and provide the services we do. We proudly serve to the best of our ability, continuing the tradition of the volunteer fire service which was found by Benjamin Franklin in 1736.

As we head into the winter and Holidays, do all you can to remain healthy and safe. This year especially we need to work to protect one another, keeping us safe and healthy.

Happy Holidays!

Dave Hourigan



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