

Mountaintop Hose Co. No. 1



Between Alarms

Visit us @ www.MTHC1.com



MAY 2018

NUMBER 54

WELCOME

Welcome to the 54th edition of "*Between Alarms*".

Our semi-annual newsletter keeps you informed of our activities at the firehouse and the ongoing changes and challenges of the fire service. We hope you find this edition informative and enjoyable.

NEW RESCUE TRUCK ON ORDER

In our November newsletter we announced that we were in the process of configuring and pricing a new Rescue Truck to replace our 2004 Rescue. The process had to be completed by the end of the year in order to avoid a manufacturer's price increase on January 1st.

On December 28th we signed a contract with Pierce Manufacturing for the purchase of the truck, which will be delivered to us in late October/early November. The cost of the truck is currently \$788,394.00 with a prepay discount for the chassis. However, the price will increase slightly as some modifications are needed to the specs for the truck.

We will fully detail the specifications of the truck in our Fall newsletter, however it is similar in many ways to the truck which we are replacing with the exception that it is a tandem axel which carries more weight and allows the body of the truck to be 3' longer to house more equipment. However, the chassis that the truck will be built on is a lower cost chassis than our other vehicles, which to a large degree offsets the additional costs for the changes described. The cost of the 2004 truck we are replacing was \$405,000.00. It is nearly unimaginable that the cost of a vehicle would nearly double in 14 years, however the ever increasing costs are among the challenges that the volunteer fire service faces.

The vehicle will be paid for using a combination of our savings, the proceeds from the sale of the existing truck and loans. The maximum we need to borrow will be \$325,000.00, however depending upon a few outstanding factors we anticipate that the amount we have to borrow will be less, possibly significantly less. We will report on the final borrowing in our November newsletter.



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



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Following a long family tradition, Billy Aigeldinger joined the fire company as a junior firefighter when he was 14. His father, Eric, has been a member for nearly fifty years and his brothers Jared and Mark are also long term members.

Billy currently serves as a Secretary, recording our minutes and keeping our records. He has been an active volunteer in staffing our Bazaars even before he was a member. Billy owns Cavanaugh's Grille and has hosted our Christmas party without charge and he has strongly supported all of our fundraisers, including our Annual Golf Tournament.

We value Billy's participation and we are pleased to have him as part of our team.

DONATIONS WELCOME

Over the past decades we have built a modern, well equipped fire department almost entirely on the funds received from donations and our Annual Bazaar. Unfortunately, in the most recent ten years our number of donors declined significantly even though our township continued to grow. Our Annual Bazaar, which was a staple on the Summer calendar of Mountaintop, became very challenging to staff/conduct, was sunseted last year as we simply could not carry it forward.

For both of these events we had developed a loyal support group from within our community who faithfully contributed or supported all of our requests. Even though we now have the fire tax in place, it is our thought that many will continue to donate to the fire company. This group responded to our every request, almost always donating at very generous levels, exceeding the amount we requested. Their generosity enabled the fire company to make the acquisitions and improvements we have, and be completely debt free.

We ask that our past and present supporters consider a donation, especially considering the cost of the new rescue truck we will accept delivery on in the Fall. No donation is too small, or too large. All donations may be mailed to P.O. Box 163, Mountaintop, PA 18707.

FIRE TAX SUMMARY *

In the Summer/Fall of 2017 the members of the Mountaintop Hose Company No. 1 requested the implementation of a fire tax to the Fairview Township Supervisors in order to properly fund the fire company. The purpose of the tax was to replace the three primary sources of revenue that the fire company had in place. These sources were: the Annual Fund Drive, the profit of the Annual Bazaar and the existing Township contribution to the fire company. The amount requested to be generated was \$115,000.00 equivalent to the funds provided from these former resources.

The reasons for the tax request were as follows:

- The number of donors to the Annual Fund Drive was decreasing annually for nearly a decade from a high of 60% participation to a 43.5% participation in 2017, which was hardly equitable to the volunteers of the fire company and those that did contribute.
- The Annual Bazaar became increasingly difficult to organize and conduct. Well over 100 people from outside the fire company were needed to staff the Bazaar. The number of people willing to help was dwindling, so staffing became a challenge. Also, the requirement to comply with Small Games of Chance laws cut into the profits while exposing our members to penalty if we did not comply. Other factors that presented obstacles were: the uncertainty of the availability of services from long-time suppliers and the looming prospect that the available parking would change significantly with the pending construction of the Trailhead adjoining the firehouse property.
- In total, Fairview Township provided \$36,170.00 for the operation of the fire company. With the implementation of the fire tax this money is no longer allocated from the Township budget and is being used by the Township for general operations.

The fire tax is 3/10 of one mill or \$30.00 per one hundred thousand dollars of assessed value on real estate in Fairview Township. In many cases, the tax is equivalent to the donations received in the Annual Fund Drive from the 43.5% of contributors.

Among the challenges that the volunteer fire service faces is the willingness of the firefighters to conduct fundraising. People are simply busy with work, family and other commitments to raise money and for this reason they do not seek membership in a fire company or only want to participate to the extent of fire company operations, not fundraising. The implementation of the tax helps assure that fundraising requirements do not deter people from seeking membership in our organization.

To update the statement further, to date we have received three checks from the township for the fire tax paid to date. The total received is \$97,999.04. We expect the majority of the additional revenue from the tax in the current face period statement for the tax bill. We want to extend our sincere gratitude to Karen McGinnis, Tax Collector, as she has not taken her commission of 2% on the collection of the taxes which results in a significant amount to the fire company.

* This statement was provided to Karen McGinnis for distribution as people paid their 2018 County/Municipal bill as some taxpayers were not aware of the implementation of the tax.

MOUNTAIN TOP WELCOME CLUB DONATION

The Mountain Top Welcome Club conducts a “Night at the Races” annually to raise money for causes/needs in our community. This year the Welcome Club chose our fire company to be one of the benefactors of the event. Knowing that we are one of the benefactors of the night, and with a special matching challenge from an individual, our members purchased horses and sponsorships to ensure the success of the event. We are trilled to report that the night was highly successful, resulting in a check being presented to the fire company on May 17th in the amount of \$3,000.00. The other Mountaintop organizations that were presented checks were: the Marian Sutherland Kirby Library and the Mountaintop Food Bank. Additionally, two Crestwood students, Andrea Shipton and Clayton Kimsal, were presented scholarship checks for their future education. A total of \$7,500.00 was awarded by the Welcome Club. We are very grateful to the Welcome Club for designating our fire company as one of the benefactors of their generosity.

F.M. KIRBY FOUNDATION, INC. GRANT RECEIVED

In 2018 we applied to the F.M. Kirby Foundation, Inc. for a grant to be applied to the purchase of our new Rescue Truck. We are pleased to report that we received a check in the amount of \$7,500.00, which will be applied to the purchase.

The F.M. Kirby Foundation, Inc. has responded to our requests for grants for over three decades. With their help we have been able to purchase needed equipment, enhance our facilities and apply funds toward vehicle purchases. We are most grateful to the F. M. Kirby Foundation, Inc. for its ongoing interest in and support of our fire company.

STATE GRANT

In March we received a grant from the Pennsylvania Fire Company and Volunteer Ambulance Service Grant Program in the amount of \$13,754.78. This program is available annually from the State with the intent that the grants are to be used to purchase, update and maintain equipment.

In 2018 we used \$3,677.00 of the funds for the required maintenance of our Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA), service of the air compressor that refills the SCBA, and a bi-yearly service of the system that operates our rescue tools. The balance of the funds were used to purchase two sets of protective gear for our firefighters (\$2,695.00 each) and a headset system for Engine 2 so our firefighters can communicate as the truck is responding on calls.

SMART 911

We once again encourage you to register all of the pertinent information that first responders should have in the event of an emergency call, whether it be for fire, EMS or police. You can enter all of this information at SMART911.com and if you call 911 from any of the devices you register, the information will immediately appear on the call takers screen. The amount of information you can provide is vast, giving first responders pertinent information that may be essential to helping you with whatever your special circumstances or needs may be.

The Smart 911 system is entirely free and completely confidential. We urge everyone to please take advantage of this service so we can better serve you in an emergency.

SAFETY TIPS

With the approaching Summer, we want to offer some safety tips from the National Fire Protection Association:

- Fireworks – Did you know that a sparkler burns at 1200° F? This is hotter than the temperature wood burns at or glass melts. Any use of sparklers, especially by children, must be under the supervision of an adult.
- Campfires – Although campfires have an appeal, a danger lurks and precautions must be taken. The area around a campfire must be clear of combustible materials and campfires should be at least 25' from a structure. Campfires are not recommended for windy days. Everyone must be cautious, especially children, so clothing does not catch fire being too close to a campfire.
- Grilling – Propane and charcoal BBQ grills should only be used outdoors. Grills need to be away from the home, deck railings and other combustibles in the event of a grease fire. Clean the grease pans in grills and know that there is a fire extinguisher nearby when grilling.
- Portable fireplaces – These devices have become very popular. Caution should be taken in lighting them and only the proper recommended fuel should be used. Never refuel a device while it is burning or hot and never leave the device unattended.

LOCKBOX ORDINANCE

In our fall of 2017 newsletter, we introduced the concept of homeowners and businesses installing a device known as a Knox Box at their locations which would provide a key to access the property in the event of a call to the location where there was no one present to provide access. The concept was new to our area, and with a few exceptions, there was little interest in installing Knox Boxes.

The numbers of automatic fire alarms we answer are increasing significantly. In 2017 we responded to 31 within our township. Including all of our neighboring townships, we responded to 90 automatic fire alarms in the past year. Often at the address we respond to there is no one present to provide access, especially in business establishments after their regular hours. Because we have been dispatched, we need to remain at the premises until a key holder responds to make a check of the premises. At times, a key holder may not arrive for 30 – 45 minutes.

Earlier this year, and in response to the waiting situation as described, we asked our Township Supervisors to enact an ordinance that would make it mandatory for any business in the township with an automatic alarm system to install a Knox Box at their premises. Note that the International Fire Code was amended in 2012 to make lockboxes mandatory in all new commercial construction and commercial renovations.

In response to our request, the Township Supervisors had an ordinance drawn to require the installation of lockboxes at all commercial locations with automatic alarm systems. The ordinance was advertised for public input for a special meeting on April 3rd. At the meeting a business owner had many questions on the ordinance and the intended use of the lockboxes, so the matter was tabled to do further research until the May 1st meeting of the Supervisors. On May 1st Fire Chief, Pete Kohl, presented the facts on the operation of the lockboxes. The business owners present continued to express their reservations/concerns on implementing the required use and the vote to enact the ordinance failed for the lack of a second.

Although the mandatory installation of lockboxes for commercial locations will not be required, we highly endorse the use of the boxes for both residential and commercial use. We believe that further explanation of the boxes will be helpful.

The system that we have chosen is from The Knox Company. The way the system works is as follows:

Our fire company has contracted with The Knox Company to be the providers of lockboxes (Knox Boxes) for our township. The Knox Company has provided us with a master key that will open any Knox Box that is sold to be used on a property in Fairview Township. The master key is stored in a secure lockbox on our first responding engine. Upon arrival at a scene, the key will open the Knox Box at the property, which will house a key to the property. With a key, immediate access is gained with no delay or no consideration of possible forced entry to the premises. Although our primary purpose is to investigate fire alarms, we could also assist EMS or police with entry where there is a person inside unable to open the door when calling for assistance.

To answer concerns raised about Knox Boxes, we offer the following points:

- The Knox Box on the fire engine is only accessible to be opened by four of our officers. When it is open, it stores the information on software that used their code and how long the key was removed.

- The Knox Box at the location is highly secure and unable to be forced open. It cannot be pried open. As an additional safeguard, the location of the Knox Box can be tied into the central alarm system of the location sending notification if tampering is detected.
- The cost of a Knox Box begins at \$300.00.
- Knox Boxes are purchased online at TheKnoxCompany.com. The box is shipped directly to the purchaser. The fire company does not receive any portion of the purchase price.
- Going online, you simply specify Mountaintop Hose Co #1 as your fire department. You complete the order from there. We are notified through the company that you have made the purchase.
- You or your contractor install the Knox Box.
- Knox Boxes are 1037 UL listed.
- Should you have any questions/concerns, The Knox Company website offers thorough descriptions of the product and how it works.
- Our vendors have similar products; however our research found Knox to be the best fit for our requirements. The Knox Company must provide the box to work in our operation.

We sincerely encourage both our business and residential community with automatic fire alarms and sprinkler systems to seriously consider the acquisition and installation of a Knox Box to limit the amount of damage that may occur. The installation of a box will save all concerned precious time and provide for everyone's safety with quick access in the event of an emergency.

THE ALARMS

In the period of November 1st – April 30th we responded to 154 calls for assistance. The nature of the calls were as follows: Motor Vehicle Accidents – 53; Automatic Fire Alarms – 43; EMS Assists – 11; Structure Fires – 8; Vehicle Fires – 6; Brush Fires – 4; Wires Down – 4; Water Leaks – 4; Trees Down – 3; Fuel Spills – 2; False Alarms – 2; CO Alarms – 2; Furnace Malfunction – 2; Chimney Fire – 1; Dumpster Fire – 1; Public Assist – 1; and Smoke Investigation – 1.

Fifty-nine of the calls were in Fairview Township; 61 of the calls in Wright Township and 23 calls in Rice Township. Responses to other communities include: Dorrance Township – 4; Nuangola – 3; Slocum Township – 2; Dennison Township – 1; and Wilkes-Barre Township – 1.

Note that the frequency of calls to Wright Township are primarily responses to Automatic Fire Alarms in the Industrial Park. Exceptionally cold weather or surges in water pressure can trigger a water flow alert in the industrial buildings, which necessitates a response. The Mountaintop area fire departments work well together, so there is always personnel and equipment on the road to assist one another on our calls.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

My role has changed a lot in leading the fire company. The implementation of the fire tax has ended my responsibility to organize the Annual Fund Drive and Annual Bazaar. Literally these tasks took hundreds of hours of my time. The found time actually allows me to devote more time to my work, family and relaxation.

At this point we have received about 85% of our annual revenue as a result of the fire tax. In addition to freeing time and worry for me, knowing that we are properly funded is a relief to all of our officers and it is creating more harmony knowing we are not responsible to have to raise the majority of our money.

I have stated previously that it is crystal clear to me that the only way the volunteer fire service will continue is that if it is properly funded. Between the many family and job commitments that most have, the training requirements to serve as a firefighter and the escalating, really ridiculous, rising costs of our vehicles and equipment, it will soon not be possible for the volunteer fire service to continue as it exists today. Replacing the volunteer fire service in Pennsylvania is estimated to be between six billion and ten billion dollars annually. The entire state budget is thirty two billion dollars. The volunteer fire service must be adequately funded to be preserved as the costs to replace it are unfathomable. We appreciate our Township Supervisors foresight in implementing the tax which assures we are on solid financial footing.

I encourage everyone to take advantage of the Smart 911 registration system. The information you provide could be invaluable no matter what your emergency or situation may be. The information can include special needs or hazards within your home, prescription information you would want EMS to have and information including photos if you like of your children or pets so they can be easily identified. Additionally, key holders can be identified that can respond to open a door when we respond to automatic alarms. Although most think they will never experience an emergency, in fact one in five people experience a fire or rescue response in a lifetime. On a broader scale, it is estimated that between 200-240 million calls are placed to 911 annually.

There really is likelihood that you will request fire, EMS or police services. Having as much information as possible for our first responders will help everyone.

I can honestly say that neither Pete Kohl nor I anticipated opposition to the proposed Lockbox Ordinance. These ordinances are in place throughout the country and lockboxes are commonplace.

We assumed that the plan would be received as forward thinking and beneficial to all involved. We apparently didn't detail the operation of the boxes properly nor the benefits for everyone involved.

Going forward we will be asking that an ordinance be in place to conform with the requirements of the International Fire Code as it applies to commercial properties in new construction and renovations.

Note that the boxes are as valuable in residential use, especially for properties where the owners winter elsewhere or travel a fair amount. Neighbors don't always know peoples' schedules and no one may be available with a key when we need access. A lockbox is especially useful in situations where people live by themselves and may not be able to open the door in a medical emergency. In reality we are often dispatched to assist EMS with gaining access to a property.

Visit the Knox Box website and learn more about the product. It will be beneficial to you and to us in the event of an emergency.

The increasing costs of vehicles for the fire service is astounding. Never did I imagine that the replacement of our Rescue Truck would be nearly double the cost fourteen years later. The costs increase is a result of mandated safety and emissions requirements, manufacturer's upgrades to the specs and normal cost increases. We avoided a 3% price increase by completing our order by year's end and we recently learned of another price increase as of May 1st due to the cost of metals rising sharply. The increasing costs are borderline ridiculous, however the reality remains that they are real and must be accounted for in our operations.

With the fire tax in place, we are on sound financial footing. However, donations remain encouraged and always appreciated. With the purchase of the new rescue truck later this year, donations would be most helpful in reducing our borrowing. Our mailbox is always available to receive contributions. As stated, no donation is too small, or too large.

It has been a long way to Spring this year. In fact we have barely had a Spring. However, in front of us is a delightful time of year in Mountaintop.

We all look forward to Summer and all it has to offer. My best to all in all of your activities and special events in the months ahead.

Enjoy and Be Safe,

Dave Hourigan