

Mountaintop Hose Co. No. 1

Between Alarms

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NOVEMBER 2017

NUMBER 53

WELCOME

Welcome to our 53rd edition of *"Between Alarms"*.

Our November Newsletter contains news of the Fire Tax implemented for 2018, a summary of our final Bazaar and news of the replacement of our 2004 rescue truck. We hope you find this newsletter informative and interesting.

18th ANNUAL FUND DRIVE

Our 2017 Annual Fund Drive, which is our final Fund Drive, has been disappointing. The number of donors declined from 839 in 2016 to 812 in 2017. This represents 43.9% return on our request.

The bright spot is that we received \$39,514.00 from the mailing. This compares to \$38,415.00 in 2016. The increase is mostly the result of the fact that we increased the amount requested from \$40.00 to \$45.00 in 2017. We also received a few very generous donations, two were one thousand dollars. One of these was from our loyal and long-time supporter, Anneliese Moghul. The second was in appreciation of our responding to automatic alarms at a home which was experiencing a faulty alarm system over the period of a few weeks.

The net revenue to the fire company after printing and postage expenses is \$37,980.00. Since the inception of the Fund Drive we have printed and mailed the requests ourselves, saving the costs of a third party vendor to do the mailing. This has also allowed us to incorporate timely messages in Special Editions of *"Between Alarms"* that were important to share with our community.

As indicated in previous newsletters, our number of donors has declined steadily since our high of 1017 in 2008, which represented a nearly 60% return. The decline in the number of donors is not unique to us. It is an ongoing trend experienced by the volunteer fire service. Although we have consistently told our story of being all volunteer and relying mostly on donations and our Bazaar in a welcome letter to every new resident moving into Fairview Township and in our semi-annual editions of *"Between Alarms"* the decline has been real and ongoing. This decline was an important consideration in our pursuing the implementation of the Fire Tax that you will read about elsewhere in this edition of *"Between Alarms"*.

 P.O. Box 163, 14 Woodlawn Avenue
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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Josh Antosh joined the fire company at age 15 in 2003. Over the years Josh has been enthusiastically involved in every aspect of the fire company, having served for several years as a Captain and now serving as Second Assistant Chief.

Josh takes his responsibilities at the firehouse seriously. He takes the initiative to keep our trucks and equipment in good operating order and he willingly participates in our various repair and maintenance projects.

On his own time Josh has established an impressive resume of firefighting education and courses. He has travelled to Harrisburg and Bucks County training facilities, along with LCCC for a number of courses. Having completed a vast number of courses of study he has achieved the designation of Fire Instructor I. Josh often uses his vast knowledge and talents in our training exercises at the firehouse.

We are pleased to have Josh as one of our team leaders in our operations.

OUR LEADERSHIP

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

Dave Hourigan	President
Phil Holbrook	Vice President
Bill Aigeldinger	Secretary
Shawn Prohaska	Treasurer
Tim McGinnis	Trustee
Mike Herron	Trustee
Doug Guignet	Trustee
Peter J. Kohl	Fire Chief
Todd Wagaman	1 st Asst. Chief
Josh Antosh	2 nd Asst. Chief
Mike Herron	Captain
Steve Taylor	Captain

RELIEF ASSOCIATION ALLOCATION

Our allocation to the Relief Association from the State this year is \$26,414.59. This money is made available through a tax on premiums paid to non-Pennsylvania based homeowner insurance companies. The money is to be used to provide for the safety and welfare of our members, including premiums for accident and disability insurance, protective gear, safety equipment or safety features on our vehicles. Annually we use the fund for the insurance premiums, protective gear and training. The vast majority goes into savings accumulating to fund vehicle replacements as they come due.

UTV AND TRAILER NOW IN SERVICE

As described in previous newsletters, we took delivery of our new Utility Task Vehicle (UTV) in late May. The UTV will be used in off road emergencies, including transporting patients from areas not accessible by road, missing person searches and transporting firefighters to wildland fires. The vehicle cost \$14,672.00 and was paid for with a grant from the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency.

In October we took delivery of a custom made enclosed trailer manufactured by Look Trailers in the Crestwood Industrial Park. The trailer houses and transports the UTV when it is pressed into service. Look Trailers, being a good neighbor, provided special pricing for the trailer. The trailer, along with its lettering/safety decals, was paid for with a \$6,000.00 grant from the F.M. Kirby Foundation, Inc.

THE ALARMS

In the period of April 1st – October 31st we responded to 231 calls for assistance. The calls within our township break down as follows: Automatic Fire Alarms – 45; Motor Vehicle Accidents – 40; Structure or Possible Structure Fires – 13; Vehicle Fires – 12; EMA Assists – 10; Gas Leaks – 9; Trees Down – 7; Brush Fires – 3; Wires Down – 3; Structural Collapse – 2; ATV Accident – 2; Burning Complaint – 2; Tree Fire – 1; Road Collapse – 1; Dumpster Fire – 1; Smoke Investigation – 1; CO Detector – 1; Assist to Police Department – 1; Lockout – 1; and Burst Water Pipe – 1. We responded to other communities as follows: Wright Township – 43; Rice Township – 23; Slocum Township – 4; Dorrance Township – 2; Ashley – 1; Dennison Township – 1; and Nuangola – 1.

Our call volume has vastly increased in the past five years. In 2017 we have already exceeded the number of calls for any prior year and by year end we will likely have responded to nearly double the number of calls of just five years ago. The increase is mostly due to the amount of calls which respond to automatic fire alarms, motor vehicle accidents and assists to other townships.

On the night of October 10th, we responded to a commercial fire alarm at 123 North Mountain Blvd. The building housed professional offices. As the police arrived on the scene they reported heavy smoke from the building. Just prior to our trucks arriving on the scene the fire broke through the roof. Although we were able to stop the fire in its rooms of origin, the building is a total loss.

With the heavy smoke reported, the fire escalated to a second alarm. Assisting at the fire were departments from Wright, Dorrance, Dennison, Hazle and Hanover Townships, along with Ashley Boro.

SMART 911

In the event you require emergency services, it would be very beneficial for the responders to have essential information pertaining to your home or business, and any special needs that you may have. SMART 911 provides this information to responders. Enrolling in SMART 911 will give us, EMS and police this information. As soon as a call is placed to 911 from the devices registered, the information you provided will pop up on the call takers screen. This information can include family members and ages, special needs, medical information, special hazards, your vehicles, pet information and contact numbers. An array of information that would be most beneficial to you and responders in the event of a call.

We urge you to enroll in SMART 911 by visiting Smart911.com on the web. All information is entirely confidential and only available in case of an emergency.

44th ANNUAL BAZAAR – “ONE LAST TIME”

In our May newsletter we announced that our Annual Bazaar in July would be the final Bazaar that we would conduct. A variety of reasons led to the decision to end the Bazaar.

Our President, Dave Hourigan, announced at the close of our 2016 Bazaar that the 2017 Bazaar would be the last Bazaar he would chair. Dave stated that he had chaired 35 Bazaars and he had done his part. As our core group of Bazaar organizers discussed what we would do going forward, it was the overall consensus that the ability to conduct the Bazaar had become very difficult for a variety of reasons, plus some pending future challenges would create another layer of difficulty in conducting the Bazaar. In the discussions it really came out that many had stayed involved in the Bazaar out of loyalty to Dave for his years of service. Nearly all agreed that the work involved required more time and energy than most could devote to the event.

The challenges in conducting the Bazaar included the willingness of people from within the fire company and the community to volunteer to conduct the Bazaar. Some of the other challenges were that only about a third of our stands/events were profitable yet we had to provide all the stands to make the Bazaar function. The requirement to conform with the Small Games of Chance laws both cost the fire company money in lost profits and exposed our team and workers to liability if we did not conform. Looking a few years ahead, the provider of our games and prizes indicated they were phasing out of the Bazaar business, and the eventual construction of the trail bed by the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor on their property we used with permission will significantly impact parking.

After the decision was made to end the Bazaar, our core group and members resolved to make it a memorable event for all involved. Through a vendor's idea we developed the theme of “*One Last Time*”. Our Bazaar T-shirts were modified adding this theme. The weeks of preparation were done in harmony with everyone looking forward to the final Bazaar. As it became known that the Bazaar would be our last, and also that we would be proposing a Fire Tax referendum to replace the income, the final Bazaar received a significant amount of media coverage prior to the Bazaar and a huge amount of TV coverage from all of the local TV channels for all three nights of the Bazaar. The coverage brought large crowds, especially on Saturday and Sunday. Additionally, on Saturday night the Tom Slick Band played at the Bazaar, helping to swell the crowds of Bazaar patrons. Tom Slick played at our first few Bazaars and 44 years later played at our final Bazaar. A great time was had by all, including the Band Members, creating a memorable night for all.

On Sunday night as the Bazaar moved toward closing and our drawings, there was a bittersweet feeling in the crowd. There were many red eyes in the evening and as the prize drawings concluded there were many more. It had been a good run and there was a lot of sadness to know it ended.

The weather for the weekend was nearly perfect. The Bazaar profit was by far our largest ever at \$45,538.50. Typically the Bazaar profit ranges between \$34,000.00 and \$36,000.00. As always, we want to recognize and thank all of our Bazaar Corporate/Individual Sponsors:

*Preferred Travel ~ Baab Jewelry Showcase ~ Baab Optical ~ Triangle Pharmacy ~
Cornell Iron Works ~ McCune Funeral Service, Inc. ~ Anneliese Moghul
Modern, The Floor Store ~ Mountain Peaks Newspaper ~ Ayers Towing ~ Reilly's Garage
Century 21 Smith Hourigan Group ~ Community Car Wash*

We also want to thank the membership of the Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs and the Mountaintop Family Church for providing workers for our Bazaar for many years. As it was Dave's last Bazaar, our members presented him with a custom framed poster from our first and last Bazaars, thanking him for his service over the years.

HOLIDAY / WINTER SAFETY

With the approaching Holidays and winter it is important to be alert to prevent any accidents from happening.

- In your decorating do not use any electrical devices that have worn cords. Be sure all devices have a safety lab test designation on them.
- Open flames can quickly cause a fire. Be cautious with candles, fireplaces and stoves. Do not have any decorations near them.
- Holiday entertaining often results in lots of cooking in preparation. Be sure to tend to your cooking while doing it. Kitchen fires are among the top causes of residential fires.

When the snow and ice arrive we have two requests. Slow down on the roads. Whether you drive a conventional car, SUV or truck, none of these vehicles stop any better in snow or ice conditions. Our other request is for you to remove the snow in front of fire hydrants that are located near your home. Know that a hydrant may be some distance away from your home but it would still service your home as we have a minimum 1,500' of hose on the trucks to connect to a hydrant.

OTHER NEWS

- In early October we conducted our Annual Fire Safety Week visit to the students at Fairview Elementary School.
- On Halloween night we, along with the Fairview Township Police Department, distributed 1,400 glow necklaces to the Halloweeners in our Township. Thank you to the Fairview Township Supervisors for providing the necklaces. We also participated in the Fairview Elementary School Haunted Nature Trail and the Christ Methodist Church annual Trunk or Treat.
- The 13th Annual Cavanaugh's Golf Tournament for the benefit of the fire company and the Mountaintop Little League resulted in checks in the amount of \$2,500.00 being presented to both organizations. Our thanks to Billy Aigeldinger and Kevin Foley for conducting the tournament and to the players/sponsors who participated.

2004 RESCUE TRUCK TO BE REPLACED

In our long tradition of keeping our vehicles current and up to date, this fall we began to explore the replacement of our 2004 Pierce Rescue Truck. The Rescue has served us well, however we have outgrown the storage capacities of the truck and in reality we need a heavier duty chassis for the weight requirements for all that is carried on the truck. Also fourteen years later, today's vehicles provide great safety and environmental features for our protection and for the environment. Over the years we have learned that the resale of used vehicles have a far greater value when the vehicle is less than 15 years old.

The Rescue Truck serves in many capacities and is our most used vehicle. It houses our extrication tools (popularly know as the "Jaws of Life") and the hydraulic equipment that operates it, an on-board generator provides for a light tower, scene lighting and portable lighting capacities, our trench

rescue equipment is stored on the truck along with cribbing used at accident scene which combined require a lot of storage and weight capacity, there is a multi-function electronic winch, a portable generator and a large variety of tools and equipment used for various scenarios.

All of these factors play into the planning of the configuration of the Rescue. Storage compartments must be sized for the various equipment, built-in shelving and trays configured for the tools, proper placement of the Jaws of Life, hoses and hydraulic system to operate it, along with a cab configured to best serve our personnel when the vehicle is in use. A complicated and involved process requiring a lot of planning and discussion as all of these features are custom to the truck ordered.

The truck we are planning will be different from the truck we are replacing in that it will have a dual axel for additional weight capacity and it will have a larger rescue body to provide for the additional storage capacity we require. Since the truck is larger than our current truck the motor will be 525 HP vs. 450 HP now, plus the transmission required will be heavier duty. The hydraulic system, known as the "Ultimate System", that operates the rescue tools will be replaced as a new system is approximately \$50,000.00 to install as the cost to transfer the 14 year old system is \$25,000.00. We believe that we will recover the difference in this cost by including the existing system in the truck to be sold.

We are working toward the final cost for the truck. The cost will be in the low seven hundred thousand range, plus the cost of the "Ultimate System" brings the total cost to the mid/upper seven hundred thousand range. The price will be finalized and the order initiated before the end of the year to avoid a price increase January 1st. The delivery time frame for the truck is early 2019.

The truck will be paid for using a combination of savings of approximately \$250,000.00, the resale value of the existing truck (approximately \$150,000.00 to \$175,000.00) and loans from the State and the manufacturer at preferred interest rates.

It is interesting to note that the 2004 Rescue cost \$405,000.00 with the "Ultimate System" included. Although the new truck has upgrades which add approximately \$40,000.00 to \$50,000.00 to the cost, it will be built on a less expensive model chassis compared to our existing truck, so the net increase in cost, comparing the new to the old is between \$25,000.00 and \$35,000.00 for the additional features. Although the final pricing is not known, the price increase between when we ordered the existing tuck in 2003 and order the new truck in 2017 approaches an 80%-85% increase in cost in a period of 14 years.

FIRE TAX IMPLEMENTED FOR 2018

In our May edition of "*Between Alarms*" we discussed the need to replace the income from our Annual Bazaar and to address the declining number of donors to our Annual Fund Drive. Our plan was to ask the Fairview Township Supervisors to authorize a referendum to be placed on the November election ballot for the implementation of a Fire Tax in Fairview Township. Our plan was to ask the public to implement the tax to replace the income from the Annual Bazaar and Annual Fund Drive, plus the annual allocation that the Township provided for our organization. We felt confident that properly explained that the residents of our community would understand the need to fund the fire company and that a referendum would easily pass.

The average income/revenue to the fire company from the sources stated has been as follows: the Annual Bazaar provided a five year average income of \$34,252.00; our Annual Fund Drive most recently was \$37,500.00; and the annual allocation from Fairview Township totaled \$36,170.00 which included a

cash contribution of \$26,520.00, utilities payment of \$5,250.00 and vehicle insurance of \$4,400.00 under the Township fleet policy. These figures total \$107,922.00.

With this figure in focus and knowing that we need to make provisions for increased operating costs for the foreseeable future, plus the collection of the tax would not be a true number considering rebate payments and uncollected taxes (for the first few years) we projected that the tax should have the ability to provide \$115,000.00 income for the fire company. The 2017 Fairview Township total taxable assessed value is \$384,174,500.00. Using a factor of 3/10 of one mill as a tax rate, the full income before deductions discussed is \$115,252.00. We proposed with the tax implemented, the Annual Fund Drive would be suspended and the \$36,710.00 currently budgeted to us from the Township would end. The Township will apply these funds toward general operations. A 3/10 of a mill tax equates to a tax of \$30.00 for every \$100,000.00 of assessed value on a property.

In August, the Township Supervisors authorized the Township Solicitor to draft the referendum question to be added to the November ballot authorizing the 3/10 mill Fire Tax. When the request for the referendum was submitted to the Luzerne County Election Board for inclusion on the ballot it was refused by the County on the interpretation that State law only provides Fire Tax referendums when the amount of millage requested exceeds a total millage of 3 mills as allowed by law.

After learning this, we engaged in a series of meetings and discussions with the Township Supervisors asking them to implement the Fire Tax in 2018 to properly fund the fire company. The discussions included our prudent financial management, included reviews of our income and expense records, the fact that the fire company is debt free having purchased nearly one million dollars in vehicles since 2012, renovated the firehouse building for over \$100,000.00 in the same period and currently having accrued over \$200,000.00 in savings after these expenses.

We also discussed the fact that our annual budget must include a portion to savings to plan for major capital expenses in the future. The Supervisors inquired as to what our other sources of income are and will be in the future. These sources include our Annual Golf Tournament, building rentals, grounds rentals, smaller fundraisers and miscellaneous donations we receive throughout the year. Additionally, we will continue to apply for and obtain grants from private foundations and the State which provide funds for new equipment and are awarded annually. We will also seek Federal grants, however these are more competitive to obtain although we have successfully been awarded four grants totaling \$235,209.00 since 2004 which provided for protective gear, air packs and a compressor.

In our discussions we also discussed the challenges of recruiting new members and retaining existing members. Family and personal responsibilities only allow people limited time to devote to community service. It has become apparent in the fire service that many of the individuals who are interested will devote their time to training, maintaining and responding to calls. Most do not want to have the responsibility to raise money.

Other factors discussed were the challenges of the absurd escalating costs of our tools, particularly vehicles, the decline in the number and percentage of donors and the overall reality that the fire company must be properly funded to protect our community and our firefighters.

All of these factors and more were thoroughly discussed with the Township Supervisors. We are pleased to announce that the Supervisors agreed with our request and voted to enact the Fire Tax in their October 30, 2017 budget meeting. We extend our sincere gratitude to the Supervisors for listening to and learning about our request, understanding both the validity and necessity of it and having the courage to implement the tax.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

It has been an exceptional six month period since our May newsletter. The conclusion of the Bazaar and the implementation of the Fire Tax were events that completely change the operation of the fire company.

The ending of the Bazaar was bittersweet. Relief that we did not have the responsibility to conduct it with limited personnel and many challenges, and sadness that the event had come to an end. The Bazaar always required a lot of work to conduct, but it was fun putting it together and seeing how much money we could make. However, the task became a burden rather than a pleasure for the reasons defined in today's "*Between Alarms*" and more. Our engaged members understood all of our challenges and for this reason no one wanted to assume the responsibility to conduct the Bazaar. In reality, our Bazaar was one of the few remaining fire company Bazaars in the area. Our game vendor, Fundraising USA, has experienced an enormous decline in Bazaars, between fire companies and churches. The drop was from an average of 60-70 Bazaars per year to just 12-15 in 2017.

During the Bazaar I received many expressions of gratitude for my service from a variety of people knowing it was our last Bazaar. As indicated, the crowds were large. Many came, some from far away, knowing it was our final Bazaar. I appreciate all of the acknowledgements and I also appreciate my fellow team members presenting me with the poster acknowledging my service from "The Men" as we affectionately referred to ourselves. At the risk of forgetting anyone, I want to thank everyone for their service, support and loyalty over the past 35 years. It was a good run for all of us and I couldn't be more pleased that we ended our "*One Last Time*" on a high note.

The process of planning for and ordering a new vehicle is always an exciting time at the firehouse. There are many decisions to be made using the input and expertise of many. It really is the equivalent of building a house, as every detail is planned and customized to properly accommodate for our equipment and our safety.

The spiraling costs of a new vehicle are stunning. I anticipated that the cost would be in the low six hundred thousand range complete and it will be in the mid seven hundred thousand range. These escalating costs really contribute to the necessity that a Fire Tax is a reality in order to provide adequate funding for the fire service.

We look forward to completing our order. We will detail the final specifications and price in our May newsletter.

No one likes the prospect of increased taxes, however as we analyzed our situation it became crystal clear to me that the only way that the volunteer fire service will continue is if it is properly funded. In Pennsylvania the ranks of volunteer firefighters has declined from 300,000 two decades ago to 50,000. The primary reason cited for the decline is the amount of time people can commit to community organizations. Within the fire service volunteers want to devote their time to our mission, not to fundraising.

Fire Taxes are currently not common in Northeastern Pennsylvania, although a few municipalities have a tax. However in many areas of the State Fire Taxes exist. Communities have recognized that the fire service must be funded and in general the rising costs of equipment and vehicles make it nearly impossible for companies to stay current.

In performing our discovery to determine what the tax rate should be, the declining number and percentage of donors convinced us that it would be most equitable to include funds in our tax rate to incorporate this amount into the tax rate, therefore allowing us to suspend our Annual Fund Drive. We will no longer do our spring township-wide direct mailing. Looking to the future, perhaps we will need to conduct a Special Purpose Fund Drive. We don't anticipate we would need to unless we had a catastrophic loss or extraordinary event which would necessitate a request.

Finally, and without exception, our post office box will remain available for donations going forward. I believe that many of our loyal supporters will want to donate; especially in the instance that the tax they pay will be less than the generous annual donations they have made. I would also urge that people continue to remember the fire company in bequests, honorarium/memorial donations, and when appropriate in recognition of services that we have provided.

Together, over 35 years we have all worked together to create an extraordinary, well equipped fire department that we can all take pride in knowing we were part of the process.

Thank you for the faith and confidence that you have placed in me in allowing me to lead the fire company and know that, using one of my favorite expressions, "*The Best is Yet to Come*".

My best wishes to one and all for a Wonderful Holiday Season.

Dave Hourigan

 *Mountaintop Hose Co. No. 1*

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