



HoseLine

SPRING 2022

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Community Day is Back...

On June 4th, the Prospect Heights Community will host the annual Community Day and Lions Club Pancake Breakfast. This annual event had been cancelled for the past 2 years due to Covid safety protocols, but this year it is back, and better than ever.

Please join us as most of the community's organizations will be on hand with fun activities for the entire family. Bring your appetites, and enjoy the pancake breakfast provided by the Prospect Heights Lions Club. *We look forward to seeing you there!*



June 4, 2022 | 9am - 12noon
10-14 E. Camp McDonald Road
(between the Fire and Police stations)

- ✓ Fire and Police Stations Tours
- ✓ Public Works Equipment Display
- ✓ Children Activities & Clown
- ✓ Raffle

Learn more about the agencies in the community that serve you!



For more information, please contact
 Karen Schultheis, Deputy Clerk, City of Prospect Heights
 kschultheis@prospect-heights.org | 847-398-6070 ext 251





Message from the Fire Chief: Chief Drew Smith

Over the past few years we have all faced many challenges. The fire district has been no different. Covid affected our income and staffing in large ways. We have set in motion short-term plans to deal with those. In the big picture, however, we have two large challenges in front of us: Capital improvements to the fleet and facilities and staffing.

Capital Improvement

Future projects with no timeline for completion include new overhead doors at both firehouses and the repainting of the fire apparatus bay interiors. Our headquarters firehouse was last updated in 1991; originally built in 1948 it had its first addition in 1971. The east side firehouse near the airport was built in 2003. The HQ firehouse garage doors are 28 years old. The east side firehouse garage doors are 17 years old. These doors go up then down more 4000 times a year. The last time either firehouse's apparatus bays were painted was when the garage doors were new. While our firefighters have repainted the living area walls, this job is too large and complex for our personnel to tackle. Both of these projects are expensive and time consuming events that will disrupt other activities at the firehouses. In addition to these projects there will be others as the firehouses age. Some are easily handled and inexpensive but others will require planning and budgeting.

Besides future firehouse repairs and improvements, the fleet of fire apparatus and ambulances need planned replacement. All vehicles are provided periodic, comprehensive preventive maintenance and repair but eventually come to an end-of-service-life and need replacement.

■ As we have previously explained in this newsletter, our 29-year old aerial apparatus' replacement is past due. Originally purchased in 1993 using a voter-approved bond and with an expected service life of 20 years, the service life was extended to 25 years when the 2009 recession affected our capital savings ability. We have applied five times for a Federal grant to replace this vehicle with a purchase price of over \$1,000,000. We were denied the grant four times and submitted a fifth application hoping for success. Without alternate funding it cannot be replaced.

- In 2023 and 2024 two ambulances will be due for replacement. Both were rechartered in 2016 and 2017 to extend life another seven years; each will be 17 years old. A third ambulance kept as a spare (to be used when either of the other two are broke down or receiving maintenance) is currently 11 years old and will need to be replaced soon.
- One of the engines (pumper) will be 15 years old in 2023. The reserve engine will be 22 years old. The replacement plan is stated below.
- There are several other capital purchases in the range of \$25,000 to \$125,000 that are paid for from the annual operating budget.



Ensuring adequate water for fire suppression is a huge challenge when much of the community lacks fire hydrants and staffing impairs our ability to bring the water tanker truck. While hiring additional personnel would solve this problem, it is not a guaranteed solution and comes at a great ongoing expense. Our current plan is to purchase a fire engine with a large water tank combining a normal engine with a tanker truck, all into one vehicle that will be staffed. This plan will have a one-time cost about \$900,000 with the new vehicle serving for about 15 years before needing replacement.

Ideally, the fire district will recover from the effect of the unpaid property taxes mentioned in previous newsletters and then restart its capital savings plan that was halted due to 2009 recession and then the pandemic. We are currently more than \$3,000,000 behind in this savings. Ideally, the fire district needs to save about \$300,000 a year over ten years to be able to replace all fire apparatus and ambulances before their service life becomes excessive and maintenance costs escalate beyond reasonable.

Staffing Challenges

Our current daily staffing system has transitioned from one-third full time staffing and two-thirds part time staffing

because we are challenged in continuing to rely largely on part-time personnel. Solving these challenges required converting some part time positions to full time. Further conversion is still required.

- The part-time positions are staffed 24-hours a day, seven-days-a-week alongside the full time positions.
- It requires a large investment of time and money to train up each part time member.
- Part-time members require the same training, certifications and licensure as full-time firefighter/paramedics.
- Part-time staffing is increasing less reliable as fewer people desire the part-time work. In 2004 we had 72 part-time members. Now we have 12 part-time members. 15 full-time employees replaced some but not all part-timer positions.
- Part-time members cannot transition into full-time leadership positions under current state law. Therefore succession management is difficult and may not always provide for the best person.
- Full-time staff costs double part-time staff due to market wages and the cost of benefits. Given the level of current funding available we choose between more but less reliable staff and fewer and more experienced and reliable staff.

From 2000-2016 there were two deputy chiefs to manage the operations and administration. Decreased property values caused by the 2009 recession resulted in a loss of property tax income that required deep budget cuts in 2016. Those cuts were made in administration rather than daily staffing of fire engines and ambulances.

With only one deputy chief for the past five years:

- The training program has been managed by one of the battalion chiefs who divides his attention between two usually full time duties.
- The training program's two parts, training of new firefighters and ensuring incumbent firefighters are proficient and up-to-date, has suffered and become less effective. This has resulted in the number of training activities in the past five years having decreased by almost one-half.
- Succession management (preparing current employees to assume future duties) has become stalled. With the eventual retirement of the fire chief in five years, the potential retirement of other senior and mid-level managers in that same period of time, and the need to

then promote replacements, succession management is essential.

Also in 2016 the then-administrative manager and office assistant positions were eliminated to cut costs. While the fire chief and one remaining deputy chief have been "getting by," time has caught up with us. The things are getting missed. Essential activities such as this newsletter, our website and social media posts are not attended to. Several times a day firefighters are interrupted in their duties between fire and ambulance calls to answer the doorbell and telephone. At a larger scale, the deputy chief must manage payroll, accounts payable and receivable, and human resource functions while attending to technical matters regarding emergency response and fire prevention.

All of this impairs the development of long-range plans and staff development as described above. As a fire protection district we must provide all of our own ancillary functions such as financial management and human resources (usually a function of other municipal staff) as well as fleet and facility management (usually handled by public works). Even if the fire protection district were the fire department of the city, there may exist insufficient city staff to take on these added duties.

Last, under our current staffing plan we do not have personnel dedicated to both a fire engine and an ambulance. We have one crew of three at each firehouse and that crew responds in either the ambulance or engine depending on the nature of the call. Additionally, with the reduced staffing of the past 18 months we also cannot ensure the water tanker truck can respond on a reported fire and rely on tanker trucks from Long Grove, Palatine Rural (Inverness), or farther away to respond to our call for help.

We are up to both challenges

We are developing plans for these challenges and will share them with you by the fall of this year. We have overcome adversity in the past and we will do it again. We value and cannot express enough how much we appreciate all the support the community has shown us over the years, especially the past two. May God bless you all.



Drew Smith, Fire Chief

Welcoming Our Four Newest Full-Time Members

Since late in 2021 the PHFD has hired four new firefighter/paramedics. Teddy Kupiec replaced another member who retired and the other three, Phil Lesniak, Vanessa Kieres, and Kevin Canchola were hired to bolster staffing due to the difficulty in recruiting part time members.



Teddy Kupiec

Teddy Kupiec studied history and business management at North Park University, but a life-changing event forced him to rethink his life's work.

It happened when he was 13. That's when his mother collapsed in front of them in their Skokie home. He ran over to try and help her, but couldn't. The firefighter/paramedics were called, and he remembers one

of them who tried to console him while others were working.

"I found out she had passed away from a brain aneurysm," Kupiec says. "This experience has had a lasting effect on me, of wanting to help others in emergencies like mine.

"It's rewarding to me to think that I can be that firefighter," he adds, "who consoled me when I was young, or who saves another important life."

Kupiec now has all the tools to do that.

He graduated from the fire academy in December 2018 and holds certifications as a Basic Operations Firefighter (BOF), in Hazmat Material Operations, as a Fire Apparatus Engineer (FAE), Fire Service Vehicle Operations (FSVO), Fire Service Instructor 1, Company Fire Officer, Advanced Technician Firefighter and in Rope Rescue Operations.

Kupiec earned his paramedic license in 2018 when he graduated from the paramedic program at Amita Health St. Francis Hospital in Evanston.

"It took about nine months and it was extremely time consuming, but worth it in the end," he says. "Students would attend classes and lab during the week, while also participating in clinicals at the hospital and ride times with a fire department."

Kupiec also brings another important skill to his job: he is fluent in Polish.

"Already," he says, "speaking Polish has helped me in the Prospect Heights community."

Most recently, Kupiec served as a lieutenant in the Lincolnwood Fire Department before coming to Prospect Heights.

As to his initial thoughts about the Prospect Heights department: "I love the people I work with and admire the officers' experience and knowledge, and they make the workday enjoyable. In short, everything."



Phil Lesniak

Phillip Lesniak joined the Prospect Heights Fire Protection District on Jan. 3 and he describes it as something of a dream come true. He grew up in McHenry, where he attended McHenry High School and earned an associate degree from McHenry County College in applied science, focusing on auto mechanics and welding certifications.

But Lesniak has roots in Prospect Heights. His grandparents, Ethelyn and Joseph Lesniak, raised their family in the city, including Lesniak's father, John.

While Lesniak has always been good with his hands and he enjoys fixing things, his applied science degree seemed to fit his talents. Yet he had this nagging desire in the back of his mind, that wouldn't go away: he wanted to become a paramedic.

"When I was a young child, I admired the quick life-altering response of a paramedic," Lesniak says, "and from there on knew I wanted to help others in their desperate times of need."

He enrolled in the Fire Academy, sponsored by the Northeastern Illinois Public Safety Academy, where he passed the basic operations firefighter certification and graduated in June 2015.

Lesniak was sponsored by his hometown department, the McHenry Township Fire Protection District, which sent him to earn his paramedic license at MCC. He ultimately worked as a firefighter/paramedic in McHenry from 2014 to 2022. Over the years, he continued his education and became certified as a swift water technician, an emergency response dive technician and as an ice diver technician, all of which will be useful while serving the City of Prospect Heights.

He was drawn to the department, he says, because of the diversity it offered.

"I enjoy working at a diverse department that includes the Chicago Executive Airport," Lesniak says. "Working here has allowed me to learn new skills."

As for how he fits into the fire station, well, suffice it to say he has quickly become a go-to guy.

"I am mechanically inclined," Lesniak says, "and good at fixing things."



Vanessa Kieres

Vanessa Kieres may be the only woman firefighter/paramedic with the Prospect Heights Fire Protection District, but she holds her own in the department – and in any pickup basketball games.

Kieres grew up playing basketball in Edison Park before attending Regina Dominican High School in Wilmette. As a Panther, she was all-conference

and an honorable mention all-state selection, setting the school record for points scored with 34 in a game.

She would go on to play basketball for four years at William Penn University in Oscaloosa, Iowa, while majoring in exercise science.

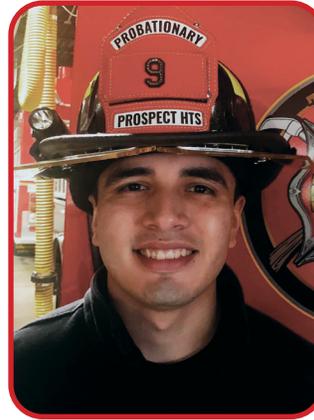
"I love helping people and I was always interested in being a part of the community," she says. "I played basketball all my life and I enjoyed being a part of a team."

"As a firefighter/paramedic you have the ability to work as a team, maintain physical fitness and expand your knowledge," she adds. "No day is the same and you have the opportunity to learn new things each day."

Kieres graduated from the Fire Academy, sponsored by the Northeastern Illinois Public Safety Academy in March, 2020, where she passed the basic operations firefighter certification. She spent her first two years as a firefighter/paramedic working for the LaGrange Fire Department before coming to Prospect Heights, where she is the first woman hired since 2009 – and the first full time female firefighter.

"I really like the tight-knit team aspect of the Prospect Heights department, where everybody takes care one another, whether that's a patient, resident or coworker," she says. "Everybody shares a common goal to get the job done."

With her can-do attitude and emphasis on teamwork, Kieres is a welcome addition to the station, however she brings some tangible skills as well: "I'm good at organizing and figuring out where things belong – and, I am a good 3-point shooter and am very competitive!"



Kevin Canchola

Kevin Canchola holds something of a unique distinction among the four, full-time firefighters hired over the last few months: He is a second generation firefighter/paramedic.

His father was a career firefighter/paramedic. The idea of following in his father's footsteps didn't really take hold until Canchola was a student at

Oakton Community College, studying finance and he needed to help pay his tuition.

"My father convinced to obtain my EMT license," Canchola says. "Once I did, I fell in love with the profession and wanted to continue on in this career."

Canchola grew up in Lincolnwood and worked for the Lincolnwood Fire Department before being hired in Prospect Heights, in January of this year. Just last year, he graduated from the Fire Academy, sponsored by the Northeastern Illinois Public Safety Academy, where he passed the basic operations firefighter certification.

Currently, he is working to earn his certification as a fire apparatus engineer, and he plans to continue his education in fire service to keep advancing.

Canchola credits his interest in continuing education to the professionalism he is experiencing in the department and its emphasis on continued training.

"I like the 'go getter' attitude that has been instilled at the department," he says, "as well as the willingness of everyone to train in order to be sharpen our skills for the public."

Canchola brings some important skills to his service role in the community: He speaks fluent Spanish and that has come in handy on calls. He also likes to cook, which makes him popular in the station.

"I like to think I'm a decent cook," he says, "but I think that's for my coworkers to decide."





Prospect Heights Fire District

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\$150

Rescue and Utility Gloves
\$50

Turnout Pants
\$1,100

Structural Firefighting Boots
\$350

Thermal Imaging Camera
\$3,000

TOTAL
\$18,400

Know the Dangers of Smoke

Did you know smoke is poisonous? It kills more people in home fires than flames.



Today, our homes are filled with human-made materials like plastic and compressed particle board.

These products burn quicker and give you less time to escape.



The most common poison in smoke is carbon monoxide (CO).

CO can make you feel drowsy, and difficult to wake up and get out of your home.



Smoke is hot!

It can irritate your eyes and throat, and make it difficult for you to breathe.

This happens even if you are far from the fire.



Thick black smoke can fill your home in a few minutes and make the inside completely dark.

It can travel through hallways, doors, ductwork, and cracks and openings in a building's walls and floors.

If you see smoke, don't wait! Get out right away!

ONLY WORKING SMOKE ALARMS SAVE LIVES!

Check Yours Monthly!

