

# THE SIMSBURY VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY

## 871 HOPMEADOW STREET SIMSBURY, CONNECTICUT 06070

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### ANNUAL REPORT OF THE FIRE CHIEF MAY 11, 2020

It is my honor to present the Annual Report of the Fire Chief for the Simsbury Volunteer Fire Company. 75 years ago the Simsbury Volunteer Fire Company was coming to the end of its first year of existence as the first responder to fire and other emergencies in the town of Simsbury. Having begun with 17 able and willing residents who became the foundation of our ranks, in that first year they started with 1 engine (from the Ensign Bickford Company) built a 500 gallon tank truck and operated out of donated garage space as there was not an established fire station. That first year the Simsbury Volunteer Fire Company responded to 25 alarms. Today we have grown to almost 90 volunteer members we operate out of 6 fire stations which houses multiple pieces of emergency equipment and answer nearly 700 calls for help from this community. The men and women who serve Simsbury are highly trained, dedicated and have the compassion to put their own lives on hold in order to help a neighbor in their time of need.

Through an agreement with the Simsbury Fire District, the members of the Simsbury Volunteer Fire Company provide their firefighting services at no charge. This savings in

labor cost amounts to millions of dollars that are saved by Simsbury Taxpayers versus the cost of a fully or partially paid fire department. In return, The Fire District provides the best in personal protective equipment as well as the tools necessary to meet the demands of today's fire service which includes intense chemical fires, Haz Mat incidents, transportation accidents, high angle rescues, water rescues, confined space rescues, missing hikers, lock outs, malfunctioning alarms and systems and other non-routine calls. Our Fire District also provides for the necessary training that our members need. Training drills are held every Monday evening for all members and those qualified members who want to take additional instruction, the Fire District will happily pay for that extra training.

Beyond the dollar savings, the town benefits from the heart and soul of each of our volunteers who are willing to sacrifice of themselves to help those who are in trouble. We ask our volunteers to leave their homes in the dead of night, a warm comfortable bed, a family dinner, or a sporting event for a son or daughter, because one of our neighbors is asking for our help. There is no paycheck waiting for these volunteers at the end of day, week or month. This is a pure gift that comes from the heart each time the pager goes off and the whistle blows. Our organization remains committed to maintaining the high level of volunteer service our town is able to enjoy and I know we have the support of the community to do just that.

Being a Volunteer Firefighter is a serious commitment and it is not for everyone. We are proud in the fact that we have shown our ability to maintain a sufficient volunteer force to meet current demands without having to repeatedly call upon mutual aid from neighboring towns. This is something that many other communities are unable to say. Our membership ended the year at 88 active members, which includes 8 junior firefighters. This is the same staffing level as last year and is still ahead of the past 5-year average of 86.8 members. During the year we saw the retirement of 1<sup>st</sup> Assistant Chief Patrick Tourville as he stepped down from active service. I thank Patrick for the more than 22 years of volunteer service to the Fire Company and community. Jason Gilbert was promoted to fill the 1<sup>st</sup> Assistant Chief position, Kristin Kelley was promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> assistant Chief, Mike Brown was promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant Chief, Jeff Holmes promoted to Captain of the Main Station, and Rich Driscoll promoted to Captain of the Tariffville Station.

We recognize the constant challenges that our volunteers face with their personal time and are committed to working closely with them to minimize time spent while not affecting the responsiveness or effectiveness of our work. We also are constantly looking for ways to recruit additional volunteers and remain focused on this effort.

NFPA standards have been implemented that requires the replacement of personal protective turnout gear every 10 years regardless of its condition. The Fire District and Fire Company continue to work together to implement a gear replacement program that

will not only achieve this standard but will get us closer to our committed goal of issuing a second set of turnout gear to each member. Turnout Gear including a second set for our membership represents a total project value over \$600,000 which requires a complete replacement every 10 years. As you will see in the upcoming budget presentation the Fire District is committed to properly funding gear purchases to keep our members safe and properly protected. Another important commitment that we jointly are focused on is the health of our membership. Physical examinations, cancer awareness education, decontamination and thorough cleaning following exposures are just a few of the programs that the annual budget helps to fund.

In the area of equipment... Our apparatus replacement committee finished its work on producing a bid spec document for the replacement of our aerial and pumper in a combined piece of apparatus commonly known as a Quint. The committee worked tirelessly to ensure we didn't lose the basic functionality of our Engine while adding an aerial device and compliment of ground ladders which will support the new three story apartment buildings being built in town. The bid was awarded to the E-ONE apparatus company. The committee continues to work to finalize the construction specs with a delivery expected in early spring of 2021. During this upcoming budget year the replacement of Engine 2 will begin with adequate funding in place to stay in sync with our 20 year apparatus replacement plan.

As I stated earlier, training is provided every week with many additional training programs being taken by our members. Training is the foundation of our readiness and the members of the Simsbury Volunteer Fire Company dedicate countless hours toward this effort. The Fire District recognizes the importance of training and has begun to fund in our capital plan the construction of a second training building that will replicate the new townhouse/apartments that have recently been built. This building will allow for improved ladder and aerial training, hose advancement and rescue techniques using balcony configurations similar to existing buildings. While construction will not begin for another year, I am grateful for the forward thinking of our leadership team and the District's commitment to provide funding for training that is realistic to Simsbury.

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During 2019, we responded to 687 calls for assistance a decrease of 49 over the previous year. Of these 687 calls, we requested mutual aid 6 times and had 33 mutual aid requests for us to assist our neighboring towns.

Beyond the training and readiness of our members, we rely on the support of administration, equipment and apparatus to get the job done. I wish to thank our District Fleet Mechanic Dan Flanagan for the outstanding job he continues to do to ensure our apparatus is maintained, kept up to standards, and will perform to our expectations. To our District Maintenance employee, Ron Kasulaitus, for his continued efforts to maintain

the grounds and buildings in addition to the hydrants throughout town. Our District's Dispatching Staff and Fire Marshalls office for the continued professional service and support given to the Fire Company and community.

Outside of responding to emergency calls and training, we remain committed to the community through a number of company-involved events. This past year the company celebrated the kick-off of our 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year with a co-sponsorship of the Rotary's river run in April, an old fashion Chicken Bar-b-que in June which brought back vintage fun and games reminiscent of the carnival days. In September, we held a 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary parade of the Fire Company along with all the apparatus and neighboring fire departments from around the area. We continued to provide the color guard for the June High School Graduation Ceremony, assisted in the annual Duck Race for Toot'n Hills School held on the Farmington River, supported numerous PTO and School fundraisers with Ride to School on a Fire Truck auctions. We participated in the annual Memorial Day parades in Tariffville and the town center and also continued to provide and maintain the American flag at the town Veteran's Memorial site. We held our annual open house in conjunction with fire prevention week in October which was expanded to opening all stations in support of our 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration. We also continued to support the Fire Marshal's fire prevention visits to the schools. We hosted the annual Fisherman's Breakfast on the opening day of fishing season and co-hosted with the Ladies Auxiliary

the annual Fire Company Golf Tournament, which raises funds for charities and helps support special equipment purchases by the Fire Company.

I cannot thank enough the officers, firefighters and juniors members for the hard work, dedication and professionalism they continue to give The Fire Company, The Fire District and this community. I would also like to thank the members of the Ladies Auxiliary for their continued support of our members during training exercises and emergencies. I thank the Officers of the Fire District and The District Commissioners for their continued support and commitment to ensure our fire company is well equipped with the necessary resources to properly respond to emergencies and to keep us safe. Finally, I want to thank our tax payers for their continued support of the Fire District in funding the dollars needed for today's fire and emergency response services.

As I present this report we are in the final months of our 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration, The Volunteers of this organization along with the District continue to work together with a common goal to protect the lives and property of this community with the recognition that its volunteer force is the key to its success which will allow us to carry on for many more years to come.

In closing, I remind the residents of Simsbury that our website at [www.simsburyfire.org](http://www.simsburyfire.org) continues to report on the Fire Company and Fire District activities and provides valuable

public information on fire safety and emergency preparedness. I also invite any of our residents who may be interested in becoming a member of this incredible organization to contact us or stop by any Fire Station for more information.

Respectfully Submitted,

James A. Baldis, Chief of Department