

THE SIMSBURY VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY

871 HOPMEADOW STREET SIMSBURY, CONNECTICUT 06070

James A. Baldis
Chief of Department



(860) 658-1971
(860) 658-5611

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE FIRE CHIEF MAY 10, 2021

It is my honor to present the Annual Report of the Fire Chief for the Simsbury Volunteer Fire Company. The Simsbury Volunteer Fire Company has been in existence for 76 years and during this time we have been faced with some significant challenges. In the early days following the establishment of our fire company, training and equipment was sparse and our members came together to solve these issues by bringing in outside trainers and building our own equipment. The fire company faced the floods of 1955 where the members helped families get out of their flood impacted homes and provided assistance wherever they could. We faced the loss of one of our own at the Knights of Columbus Fire which claimed the life of Lieutenant Richard Kelleher. We faced the challenges of 911 with the concerns of terrorism, the rise of haz mat incidents, and the demands on us to be prepared in ways never imagined years earlier. We face the reality of domestic terrorism with training on keeping our members safe not from fire or hazards of the incident but from outside sources with different intentions. And now today facing a virus that was poised to undercut the ability of all emergency services to respond due to

a highly contagious illness that would render the members quarantined for an extended period of time. Once again our members responded. Committing to protecting ourselves and others by mask wearing, social distancing, not meeting in person but over the computer using TEAMS, sanitizing, washing, and limiting contact. Our members persevered and maintained our response capability at 100%. I can't express enough how proud I am at the level of commitment that our volunteers have to the mission of protecting this community every hour of every day. We ended year 2020 with 101 members (89 regular and 12 junior) an increase of 13 over the previous year. We responded to 740 incidents and increase of 53 over the previous year that included house fires, car fires, brush fires, high angle rescues, missing persons, lost hikers, vehicle accidents, down trees and power lines, along with alarms for fire and carbon monoxide detection systems. The men and women who volunteer 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.

From its formation in 1944, an agreement exists with the Simsbury Fire District that the members of the Simsbury Volunteer Fire Company would 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 and training necessary to meet the demands of today's fire service. 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 those in our community who are seeking help. We ask our volunteers to leave their warm comfortable bed in the dead of night, in the middle of a family dinner, or during a sporting event for a son, daughter or grandchild, because there is a person asking for our assistance. 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 of a volunteer each time the pager goes off and the whistle blows. Our organization remains committed to maintaining the highest level of volunteer service to our community and I know we have the full support of the Fire District and Community to do just that.

During the year we lost a dear friend and example of a pure volunteer to the community, Auxiliary Member Lucy Bowman. While she no longer will grace our events with her warm and always giving presence, she lives on through the auxiliary scholarship, special golf contest at the annual fund raiser and in the hearts of every member of the Simsbury Volunteer Fire Company and Auxiliary.

We realize that each volunteer that chooses to become a member is a gift and there are constant challenges that our volunteers face with balancing personal time and must embrace the need for flexibility. We are committed to working closely with each volunteer to acknowledge that balance and not take advantage of their generosity. We

continue to look for ways to recruit additional volunteers especially in the Tariffville area where our volunteer base has seen a drop over recent years.

As mentioned in previous years the District has been committed to the NFPA standard that requires the replacement of personal protective turnout gear every 10 years regardless of its condition. I am thankful to the District for sticking to this commitment and this year's proposed funding of the final large purchase of turnout gear that will bring us across the finish line of this multiyear effort to keep our firefighters safe with the proper personal protective equipment.

In the area of equipment... Due to the impact of COVID the delivery of our Quint has been delayed until the summer at which time we will use the transition period to have Tower 12 refurbished to remove excessive corrosion that has appeared. This past year an apparatus replacement committee put together a bid spec for the replacement of Engine 2 using the design platform used by all our other front line pumpers. The bid was ultimately awarded to 4Guys Fire Apparatus with delivery expected in 2022.

During the year work was done to finalize the development of plans for a new training building that will provide our firefighters a building that will replicate the design features of the 100's of new apartment and town homes that are being built with egress balconies. We thank the District for supporting this training need and for funding the construction of this building in the budget being presented tonight for 2021/22.

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. A special thanks to our District Maintenance employee, Ron Kasulaitus who retired this past year, for his 42 year effort to maintain the grounds and buildings in addition to the hydrants throughout town and a thanks to our new maintenance staff who has taken over these duties. A thanks to our District's Dispatching Staff and Fire Marshalls office for the continued professional service and support given to the Fire Company and community. A special thank you and happy retirement to Fire Marshal and Emergency Management Director Kevin Kowalski who retired mid-year after serving 32 years.

Outside of responding to emergency calls and training, as an organization we remain committed to the community however COVID-19 resulted in the canceling of many events for the year. The first cancelation was our 75th Anniversary banquet. Next was our fisherman's breakfast, followed by the golf tournament, company picnic, dinner for our honorary life members and holiday member dinner all victim of the pandemic. Due to the town having to also cancel events we were not able to provide the usual support for the Memorial Day Parades, September fest or the events that were planned for the 350 Birthday Celebration of the town. That said however there were some shining examples of the Fire Companies response to the pandemic that adversely impacted the daily lives of

our community. Seeing the impact that isolation was having on family and friends, Simsbury's Auxiliary and Firefighters teamed up to provide a drive-by Easter Bunny event. Over 90% of the streets of Simsbury were traveled with two engines and the Easter Bunny in each joyfully waving to children and families who were able to join the fun from the front lawns of their home. This community outreach effort continued throughout the spring with celebration drive-by parades organized by the fire company and involved the Simsbury Police, Ambulance and Town Highway. These parades provided needed relief from the stresses of being cooped up at home without the normal interactions of friends and family. When the hallmark of the Winter Holiday Kickoff "Simsbury Celebrates" was threatened due to COVID, the members of the Fire Company organized a stationary torchlight parade allowing over a thousand people from the community to enjoy our traditional holiday decorated firetrucks from the comfort of their cars in a spectator drive-by event. Once again faced with a challenge the members of the Simsbury Volunteer Fire Company and Auxiliary come through.

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 Auxiliary for their continued support of our members during training exercises and emergencies especially under the restrictions imposed by COVID. 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.

Hopefully we are in the final months of our response to the COVID pandemic but be assured that 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 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