

## **PLEASE REMEMBER OUR FIRE DEPARTMENTS**

Do you ever think about what you would do if your home is burning and there is no siren indicating a firetruck is on the way? Imagine a loved one is trapped in the home. How can you save them? We take for granted that the fire department will always be available – will always respond when we need help, but in many communities this is not the case. The number of fire departments in Allegheny County has decreased because of closures and consolidations. The number of volunteers has also decreased in Pennsylvania from approximately 300,000 in the 1970's to 38,000 in 2018, and of those, only half are actual firefighters.

Volunteerism is at an all time low for many reasons such as both parents working in the household and the time commitment required. A collaboration that encourages volunteer fire fighting activities is the FireVEST partnership with Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC) and the Allegheny County Fire Academy (ACFA). Students enrolled in the program receive a full scholarship for any associate's degree or certificate program at CCAC, as well as training at the ACFA. A five-year service commitment to a volunteer fire department in Allegheny County is required. Additional information is available on the websites of either fire department and CCAC listed at the bottom of this article.

South Park Township is extremely fortunate in that we have two volunteer fire companies: Broughton Volunteer Fire Department and Library Volunteer Fire Company, available to respond to calls. If volunteers were not available, it would be necessary for the Township to fund a paid department which would greatly impact Township taxes. Yes, this means residents would pay for the service. Volunteer departments save municipalities millions of tax dollars that would otherwise be expended for paid services.

Another escalating cost is firefighting equipment and fire trucks. The cost of fire vehicles can range from \$900,000 for an engine, to \$1.5 million for a specialized truck. The cost of basic bunker gear to outfit a firefighter is \$4,000, and totally outfitting a fireman is \$12,000. Yes, you read that correctly.

South Park Township does assist the fire departments by providing insurance, workmen's compensation, fuel, and a monetary allocation toward equipment repairs and purchases, but it is not sufficient to financially sustain one department, let alone two. The departments actively raise funds by conducting bingos, gun bashes, cash bashes, and hall rentals. Donations from residents are also a critical fundraising component. Each residential household should have received a 2023 request for a donation depending upon which department services the address. Please don't just discard the envelope. Open it up and read the material. A second mailing will soon be sent out. Only 17% of Township residents responded to the initial request.

Volunteer firemen must train a minimal of 200 hours annually to meet state requirements that are increasingly more stringent. This means that while you and your family are enjoying a baseball, softball or soccer game, or maybe a night out to dinner, these men and women are dedicating time to improving their firefighting skills at the expense of family time, or responding to a call. Why do they do this? That's a great question and one that warrants an answer. They do it because they love their community and are willing to sacrifice their time, energy and possibly their very lives to respond to a potentially deadly call. These are special people who continually give rather than take. Residents are asked to take a moment to give as well and donate to help sustain these vital services.

Additional information about the two fire departments, including the FireVEST Program, can be found online at the following:

Website: Broughton Volunteer Fire Department - [www.broughtonvfd.org](http://www.broughtonvfd.org).

Website: Library Volunteer Fire Company – [www.libraryvfc.com](http://www.libraryvfc.com)

Community College of Allegheny County – [www.ccac.edu](http://www.ccac.edu) – click on Public Safety Institute

Any support you are able to give is most appreciated.