

TILTON-NORTHFIELD FIRE & EMS

2020 Fire Chief's Report

2020 was a year that I will not soon forget. With the arrival of COVID-19, TNFD had to change many of our operating and response policies. This was in an effort to protect, as best possible, the employees of the District so that we could continue to provide the excellent service we have become accustomed to. One of the changes made was the closing of the fire stations to the public. Another was that most of any meeting attendance was done virtually. Another effect from COVID-19 was that many people who needed emergency medical services refused transport to the hospital for fear of catching the virus. This resulted in a decrease in ambulance transports. Though COVID-19 seemed to be fairly well contained for most of the year, it spread rapidly throughout our community after Thanksgiving, especially in the Vets Home where it took at least 37 lives.

2020 was a record year for Tilton-Northfield Fire & EMS. Our call volume increased to 2,010 incidents for the year. Of the 2010 incidents in 2020, 1,381 were for Emergency Medical Services (EMS). EMS calls comprised 68% of our call volume.

In May of 2020, the District applied for a SAFER Grant from FEMA. The purpose the Grant is to assist the District in hiring four additional firefighters, one firefighter for each shift. The Grant is for three years. It covers 100% of the salaries and most of the health insurance costs, depending on which plan the new employee selects. The District does assume the cost for uniforms, physicals, and firefighting gear. After three years, when the Grant expires, the District can then decide if the additional employees will be retained.

The Department continues to repair, modify, and maintain of the two fire stations. At Center Street, we modified the living quarters and gear storage of the station to accommodate four firefighters per shift. All of this work was completed using fire department personnel.

District Meeting last year approved the purchase of a new engine. A committee of firefighters and officers spent several months determining the specific requirements for a new engine. Specifications were put out to bid. Sutphen Corporation was the low bidder. A contract was signed. We expect delivery sometime in the late summer, early fall of this year. I expect the new engine to be in service sometime in October.

The incidence of some types of cancer in firefighters is 2.5 times greater than that of the general public. This is due to the exposure firefighters receive during fires and other hazardous incidents. In an effort to help reduce the risk of cancer and other diseases to our staff, a plan has been put in place to remodel the Park Street bathroom to add a shower for decontamination purposes. The bathroom will also be brought up to ADA requirements.

As many people may already know, the Fire District has leased a small portion of the Park Street property to Wireless Edge, a communications tower company. The location for the tower is at the left rear of the property adjacent to the wooded area as you look at it from Park Street. Wireless Edge signed a contract with AT&T last year. The tower is currently in the permitting process. It has been through the Northfield Zoning Board of Adjustment and is moving on to the Planning Board for site plan approval. Once the permitting process is complete, the communication tower will be constructed. The primary purpose of the tower is to provide an excellent location for some of the fire department communication antennas. The tower will also host FirstNet, an exclusive to public safety broad band network. This tower can also be used for other municipal or public safety communication purposes free from rent. TNFD will collect rent from Wireless Edge once the tower is constructed.

TILTON-NORTHFIELD FIRE & EMS

Zack Mellett has completed his paramedic training and is now a Firefighter Paramedic assigned to Shift D. We now have a FF/Paramedic on each of our shifts.

The Call Company enrollment has slowly declined over the past year. We currently only have 10 active Members as of this writing. The decline in membership is a challenge not only here at TNFD, but also nationwide. This is due to many factors, one of which is a generational change in the increasing importance of personal and family time over community involvement. We are always looking for new people to apply for a position on our Call Company.

I want to thank the community and community organizations who have helped the Department throughout the year. I also want to thank all the employees, both career and call, who have provided excellent service to our District. The services provided within our District could not happen without the dedicated and professional work of our employees.

Finally, I want to let everyone know that if there is ever a question or comment about the Department, or if you would like a tour of our facilities, my door is always open. Please contact me so that we can discuss your concerns. It is our goal to provide a professional service with customer satisfaction and safety held in the highest regard.

Michael W. Sitar, Jr., MPA, CFO, EFO
Fire Chief
Tilton-Northfield Fire & EMS