Irondequoit Bolsters Efforts to Recruit Volunteer Fire Fighters

Week of May 6, 2019

The concept of the volunteer fire department is central to the American experience. How central, you ask? Founding Father Benjamin Franklin – known for giving us bifocals, helping drive our independence from Britain and for his experiments with lighting – also helped found the first true volunteer fire company in America in 1736. Shortly thereafter, the Volunteer Fire Department of the City of New York was founded.

Indeed, volunteer fire fighting is not only one of the oldest forms of American community service, it is among the noblest. It is one of the best examples of putting one’s community before their own personal interest - and asking nothing in return.

Irondequoit, like other communities in New York State, reaps the benefits of having volunteer fire districts within our borders. And like most communities in New York and across the county, Irondequoit faces challenges in recruitment and retention of volunteers. Right now, there are about 10,000 less volunteer firefighters and EMTs in New York than there were 30 years ago. This, despite a steady increase in the number of calls for response.

Since 2011, the RecruitNY initiative has served to encourage more men and women in communities across our state to recognize the value in volunteer fire service. Every year, fire departments – including our five in Irondequoit – open their doors and invite residents to see if volunteer firefighting is for them. The push has been successful, helping bring in an estimated 20,000 new recruits over the past several years.

The Town of Irondequoit was happy to partner with our volunteer companies this year to produce a promotional video for the initiative, which took place the last weekend of April. In the video, volunteer firefighters from every Irondequoit department had the opportunity to share their thoughts on the benefit of this invaluable public service.

While this year’s RecruitNY weekend has passed, our volunteer fire companies’ doors are always open to prospective members. I encourage residents to consider this noble line of public service, one that our community couldn’t live without. As always, thank you to all of our first responders for their service to the people of Irondequoit, especially those who do so on a volunteer basis.

Shifting gears, at our April Town Board workshop meeting, I was happy to present Tom Albert with our Staff Spotlight Award. Tom is a foreman with our DPW, and coordinates much of our paving and plowing operations. More importantly, he is one of our hardest workers, and as a link with the rest of this column: Tom is a longtime member of the Point Pleasant Fire Department.