

## 2014 A Year in Review (1)

As the Fire Department of Westfield looks back on 2014, it will be a year remembered for change and accomplishment. With a change in leadership, new volunteers brought into the department, and new equipment purchased, the department continued its tradition of service to the village and town of Westfield.

The Fire Department of Westfield responded to 649 calls for service in 2014. Of those calls, 505 were for emergency medical services (EMS), with 413 of those EMS calls being within the village of Westfield and 76 of them within the town of Westfield. Eleven of the EMS calls were mutual aid to neighboring communities, and the remaining five were responses on the NYS Thruway.

The next largest category of responses were for fire calls. There were a total of 88 fire calls in 2014, with 52 of those incidents occurring in the village, while 15 calls were within the town of Westfield. There were four fire calls on the thruway, and 17 requests for mutual aid related to fires in 2014.

The most significant fire handled by the department in 2014 was the April 9th fire at 41-43 Clinton Street. In the pre-dawn hours of that morning, the Fire Department of Westfield responded to a structure fire at a vacant, multi-dwelling apartment complex. Firefighters arrived to find the structure well involved with flames, and threatening the adjacent structures owned by Mason Funeral Home. Due to the concerted fire attack by the fire department and their mutual aid partners, the adjacent structures were saved, and no one was injured.

A joint criminal investigation by the Westfield Police Department and the Chautauqua County Sheriff's Fire Investigation Team resulted in determining the fire was caused by an act of arson. Timothy Dulmus, a resident of 51 Clinton Street, was subsequently arrested and charged with third degree arson, and second degree criminal mischief.

In addition to these EMS and fire calls, the department handled 28 motor vehicle accidents, 18 service calls, and 10 calls which were determined to be false alarms.

The busiest month for our fire department was July when 73 responses occurred. The next busiest month was January, when 62 responses were handled. The 649 calls handled in 2014 occurred at all hours of the day and night, and are a testament to the efforts of our dedicated volunteers.

As 2014 began, the department saw a change in its leadership in the positions of Chief, First Assistant Chief, and Second Assistant Chief. Appointed to those positions were Chief William H. Bills, First Assistant Chief Jerry Ruch, and Second Assistant Chief Brad Szymczak.

Chief William Bills is a 17 year veteran of the department. Chief Bills joined Hook and Ladder Company #1 in April of 1997. In April of 2005, Chief Bills was voted by the members of the Hook and Ladder Company to be their Lieutenant, a position he held for six years. In the spring of 2011, Chief Bills became the Captain of the Hook and Ladder Company, where he proudly served for two years. In the Fall of 2013, he was appointed to the position of First Assistant Chief. Following that

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appointment, he was subsequently appointed as Acting Fire Chief. In April of 2014, Chief Bills was selected as the department's Fire Chief.

Chief Bills is a life long resident of Westfield. He is a 1991 graduate from Westfield Academy and Central School. Chief Bills has an undergraduate degree in Elementary Education from SUNY Fredonia, and he holds a master's degree in Education from Mercyhurst University. Chief Bills and his wife Shannon are proud parents of a ten year old daughter, Lauren.

First Assistant Chief Jerry Ruch is a 27 year veteran of the department. First Assistant Chief Ruch has been an emergency medical technician (EMT) for the past 25 years. He has served as a Lieutenant and Captain for Citizen Hose Company #1. He has also previously served the department as a First and Second Assistant Chief. From 2003 through 2005 he was Chief of the Fire Department. First Assistant Chief Ruch is a qualified interior firefighter, a previous department safety officer, and is a member of the Past Chief's Association. First Assistant Chief Ruch has been a town of Westfield resident his entire life. He is married, and has three children, one of whom is currently a member of the department.

Second Assistant Chief Brad Szymczak is an eight- year veteran of the department. Second Assistant Chief Szymczak has previously served as a Lieutenant and Captain of Cascade Hose Company #1. He has also served as the company's secretary and treasurer. Second Assistant Chief Szymczak is a qualified interior firefighter. Second Assistant Chief Szymczak and his wife live in the village of Westfield, and are the proud parents of an infant son.

The Fire Department of Westfield welcomed two new members in 2014. Chad Gollnitz and Byron Peterson joined the department as members of Hook and Ladder Company #1.

The department also formed an Explorer Program in 2014, which is Explorer Post # 291. The Explorer program gives young, aspiring firefighters an opportunity to see the operations of the fire department from the inside. The training, discipline, and teamwork experienced by the participants can prove invaluable in preparing them for a future in the fire service. The department's Explorers are Nicholas Chasse, Benjamin Cleland, Joshua Dolen, Justice Kuhn, and Ricky Schrader.

The Fire Department of Westfield has also been blessed to have Albert Clody serving as the department's chaplain in 2014. His experience, insight, and compassion can only make us better.

This past year was also a year of loss for the department and the community. Two retired members of the department passed away this year. The department extends its condolences to the family and friends of William "Reed" Powers, and Everette Reynolds. Their contributions, dedication, and sacrifice for the department will never be forgotten.

Thanks to the fiscal prudence of the Village Board of Trustees, coupled with the generosity of our community members, the department was able to make some key equipment purchases in 2014. As a result of money raised through donations and fundraising, the department purchased a Thermal Imaging Camera. The funds raised were deposited into the fire department's Special Equipment Fund, and have now been used to purchase this piece of equipment which will allow our members "to see through smoke" to find hot spots,

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locate victims, and can also help the firefighters find a safe way out if the need arises.

In addition to the Thermal Imaging Camera, the department was also able to purchase air bags that are used to safely rescue victims by raising vehicles or other obstacles from on top of them. The funds for the air bags came from the Special Equipment and Memorial Funds. The Memorial Fund consists of donations made to the Fire Department in memory of individuals that have passed away.

The Fire Department extends its gratitude to the Village Board, and all who have donated to the Special Equipment and Memorial Funds. Your generosity will save lives in the years to come

As we close out 2014, and look forward to a new year with new challenges we thank those who have answered the call to volunteer as members of the Fire Department of Westfield. The department currently has 41 volunteers spread among three companies. Listed are the three department companies, followed by the volunteers assigned to them and their years of service to the department:

Cascade Hose Company #1: James Pacanowski (50 years), Theodore Marsala (40 years), David Cochran (36 years), Jon Belcher (32 years), Jeffrey Breads (20 years), Marsha Holland (19 years), Brian Paternosh (14 years), Bradley Szymczak (8 years), Joshua Belcher (8 years), and Jake Alonge (1 year).

Citizen Hose Company #1: Clifford Brown (47 years), John Kolpien (47 years), Jerry Ruch (27 years), Randall Edwards (29 years), Christopher Kolpien (18 years), Gloria Kincaid (11 years), Jeremy Zanghi (9 years), Paul Black (5 years), Nathan Betts (4 years), Corry Fleck (3 years), Herbert Johnson (2 years), Colin Cleland (1 year), and Jeremy Ruch (1 year).

Hook and Ladder Company #1: Edward Kneer (46 years), Lyle Holland (42 years), Selden Wethli (40 years), William F. Bills (40 years), Alan Holbrook (39 years), John Hanmann (26 years), Edward Rotunda (21 years), William H. Bills (17 years), Everett Reardon (16 years), Christopher Reese (11 years), Jack Bills (11 years), Jeffrey Janicki (11 years), Matthew Damcott (10 years), Justin Bausum (7 years), Christopher Chasse (1 year), Chad Gollnitz (9 months), and Byron Peterson (6 months).