

A DAY in the LIFE OF... Vermillion Fire Chief Proud Of Team

BY SARAH WETZEL
For the Plain Talk

Better safe than sorry takes a lot of work when you're a Fire Chief. "My day starts at eight in the morning," said Vermillion Fire Chief Richard Draper. "I take my kids to school then come into the office. My work revolves around keeping the department running, ordering equipment, checking equipment, things like that. I check reports and keep all of our requirements. I also handle all the budgeting for our department and go after grants for funding different projects. We have 75 volunteer and paid-in-call staff so we also work with them."

However, everything gets dropped when duty calls. "Last year the department had more than 1,000 calls," Draper said. "Most of those were EMS calls. 177 of those were fire calls." According to Draper, about 50 percent of emergency calls come either after hours or over the weekend. After hours calls to the station are forwarded to Draper's cell phone.

"Last year I think there were a little more than 100 (calls) that I responded to personally," he said. "There's not a time limit to when we serve."

As far as sending out the trucks, Draper said it depends on what type of call is received.

"We don't send out all the trucks every time," he said. "If it's just a minor medical, a regular medical or a transport, just the ambulance will go. If it's a cardiac arrest we will send the ambulance but also the paramedic unit and also a fire truck. The fire truck goes for manpower just to assist because there are a lot of things that need to happen really quickly like moving patients around, furniture may need to be moved, so we can get the patients out of the house — things like that."

"Then of course there are fires," Draper continued. "If it's just an alarm we'll send one truck. If it's a small fire we may send a couple of trucks. If it's a small grass fire we'll send a few of the rural grass trucks. Then if it's something big, everything goes. We try to have our response be appropriate for the type of call."

Along with regular office hours, Draper and all the volunteer firefighters come in every Wednesday night.

"We do have fire instructors but I'm here every Wednesday assisting them or doing the training myself," he said. "Wednesdays I'm here until 9-10 p.m. at night. That makes for a long day."

Training can include classroom presentations, training or hands-on practice at the training facility near the Vermillion airport.

"It's a four-story training tower where we can have live fires in it and do



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Part of Vermillion Fire Department's efforts to give back to the community included a reading contest for elementary children over the school year which culminated in the winners receiving a ride to school in the fire truck.

all kinds of simulations," Draper said. "Then also there are three or four acres that we use for car rescue and we'll be building some more rescue props. We're very blessed to have that. It came about through a donation by Ivan Pierce who was an associate member here. He made a very generous donation and the volunteer firefighters were able to purchase all the material and then construct it themselves."

Draper gives himself one other night during the week to finish things up in the office.

"So, it is more than 40 hours that I put in, but it's what I love doing," he said. "We're here to serve the community, there's not a time limit to that."

His attitude is shared by the 75 volunteers that make up the department who, according to Draper, are all dedicated to service to their community.

"They're here every Wednesday night," he said. "They responded to 177 calls last year. That's people leaving their home. They're sitting down to dinner, their pager goes off and they leave. They're getting ready to go to work and are called in to help a total stranger then go to work late."

It's not just the volunteers themselves that make sacrifices.

"We have a wonderful community in the aspect that they support us through donations, but also the support that the families give, all that time away from their father, husband, mother, wife," Draper said. "Also, the employers letting them go in the middle of the day. Our EMT staff is paid-on-call so they're part-time employees. They also have to drop what they're doing when we get a medical call."

Draper's own path to being Fire Chief began as a volunteer himself.

"I started in the volunteer fire service in 1990 in Pennsylvania and just loved it and knew it was what I wanted to do," he said. "I started trying to find a career job as a fireman and ended up going overseas with a contract company Halliburton. I just loved helping the communities.

We would go establish fire departments at military bases but also in the communities that had been devastated by wars."

One moving experience for Draper was in Macedonia.

"We trained local firefighters and had them certified and they performed wonderfully," he said. "One of the most rewarding calls was when they went into a school fire. They made numerous rescues. The training that we had provided them and the policies and the tactics that we had taught all came together. I was totally an observer at that time. Everything that we had brought them and their dedication paid off at that moment."

Draper met and married his wife overseas before returning to the states and taking several firefighting jobs before ending up in Vermillion a little more than two years ago.

Draper and his family enjoy the community and he has learned a lot about being a rural fireman.

"We have a lot of wildfires and grass fires in this part of the county," he said. "Being from a city fire department, we didn't have those. I have learned a huge amount from the firefighters here."

As head of the department, Draper has made some changes since arriving.

"We've increased the training that we're doing," he said. "We've lowered our ISO rating by two points. That in and of itself is a huge thing."

Things are certainly looking up for the department according to Draper.

"We are now a class three fire department on a scale of 1-10," he said. "There is no other fire department in South Dakota better than a three and there are only four that are a three. There are only 3,000 in the country that are a three or better. So we're in the top 3,000 in the nation and in the top four of South Dakota which speaks volumes for our volunteers and the commitment from the community."

Draper made sure to point out that without support from community,

city leadership and the volunteers themselves, the department wouldn't be as successful.

"The ISO rating is just a number on paper but what I can say about the department is that we truly back that up by our actions," he said. "When I got here I told the department that we were going to be community focused. We're not just going to be an entity that provides fire protection. We're going to be focused on and involved in the community."

A promise Draper has fulfilled with one example which took place Monday morning.

"In partnership with the school districts, what we do is reward the child that reads the most from each of our elementary schools, St. Agnes, Jolley and Austin," Draper said. "The schools track the hours however works for their teachers. Then at the end of the school year, they'll give us the list of names and we reward them with a backpack and a trip to school. Then also during the school year we'll visit the schools and encourage them to keep up with the program. It's really a great partnership with the school district and fire department."

Draper and others from the department also make sure to visit all of the elementary grades every year bringing age-appropriate education on things like fire safety and developing an emergency family plan.

Draper said the department takes every opportunity to get the message of fire prevention and life safety out to the community.

Efforts include pamphlets, flyers, demonstrations, visits, tours and classes at the fire station as well as numerous community events.

The department also provides free home inspections and smoke detectors to senior citizens and do fire inspections in the business community.

Two things Draper said community members can do to help are volunteer with the department and become educated in and follow safety codes.

"Not everybody likes rules and I understand that," he said. "Fire codes come from a couple different areas. They're written from fatalities that have happened and emergencies that have occurred. The code comes out because something that has happened. There's a reason for them."

"I see it as an education thing. I don't think that anyone would intentionally not follow codes or do something that would intentionally harm someone. We're going out and educating the community on how they can have a safer environment."

For information on volunteer opportunities, contact Chief Draper at (605) 677-7097

VSD Summer Food Program Set

The Vermillion School District announces the sponsorship of the Summer Food Service Program.

Lunch will be served to all children at no charge and are the same for all children regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability, and there will be no discrimination in the course of the meal service. Meals will be provided at the sites and times as follows:

Jolley Elementary located at 224 S. University St. Meal service will be offered Monday - Friday from June 1, 2015 - July 31, 2015. Lunch will be served from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. For more information, contact Sheila R. Beermann at (605) 677-7000.

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Local Parks Announce Events

Trees are blooming, birds are chirping, school is almost out, and we are getting excited for another great summer full of fun and educational programming at Newton Hills and Good Earth.

Courtney and Verna will be returning to Good Earth, and Newton Hills is looking forward to you meeting our new naturalist Allie who will be joining the team with Gianna.

The Newton Hills programming will kick off on Friday, May 15, with an 8:30 p.m. movie at the amphitheater. On Saturday morning at 9 a.m. our staff is working with the Wildlife Division to have another Step Outside Day. Meet us at Lake Lakota for a morning of BB guns, archery, fishing, fur ID, trapping, and geocaching. After lunch at 2:30 p.m., you can meet up at the amphitheater for SD Critters where we will make a craft and talk about some local animals. At 4 p.m. we will talk about Predator and Prey and play a fun game. At the end of the day you can reward yourself with a movie, some popcorn, and freeze pops at 8:30pm. On Sunday May 17, at 9 a.m. there will be a non-denominational worship service held at the amphitheater for all who wish to join.

If you have any questions about the park or the programs for this coming weekend, do not hesitate to give us a call at (605) 987-2263 or email newtonhills@state.sd.us. More info including an event schedule may also be found online at www.gfp.sd.gov.

To receive weekly email updates on programming at the park, like us on Facebook, or send an email to newtonhills@state.sd.us.

Scam Targeting Vermillion Area

Members of the community have reported receiving calls asking for a donation to the Vermillion Public Library. The Chamber has been notified by the Library that this is a scam—they are not participating in a fund raising effort at this time. These calls, which are coming from an 817 area code, have been reported to the Vermillion Police Department.

If you receive one of these call, do not respond!

The family of Carl Carlson would like to express our gratitude and thanks to all the friends and relatives for their cards, flowers, food, donations for memorials and the encouraging words of support during our recent loss.

We would like to especially thank the dedicated staff at Sanford Hospital, Sanford Hospice and Dr. Tom Olson for their kindness to Carl. A special thanks goes to Steve Miller, the UCC church staff and all those who furnished desserts and served the meal following the funeral. Thank you to the VFW Ladies Auxiliary for furnishing cookies and to the VFW Honor Guard for their service. Thank you also to the Hansen Funeral Home.

The family of Carl Carlson

Meeting

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"A box of chocolates with the American seal, and a nice little medal with the white house on it," said Rebecca.

Rebecca also made a whole heart for him.

Carol Kelley, Rebecca's mother said once the President was given it he signed it and gave it back to Rebecca, a piece of her history that she will always treasure.

"Probably frame it,

and pass it on through my generations," said Rebecca, when asked what she would do with the heart.

As for the candy, she said she will eat that and keep the wrappers.

"I never thought in a million years that I would ever meet the President ever," Rebecca said, adding that she thinks President Obama is one of the best presidents in U.S. history. "I want to say thank you so much there are no words to describe my joy. There's just none."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

90th Birthday Celebration
Betty Jean Knutson
Open House
Sunday, May 24th
3:00 - 5:00 P.M.
Bergen Lutheran Church, Timber Road

50th Wedding Anniversary

The family of Harvey, Jr. and Barb Mount would like to celebrate with a card shower in honor of their 50th Wedding Anniversary -
May 19, 2015
Well wishes may be sent to:
31498 462nd Ave.
Vermillion, SD 57069

MAY 25

VFW Post 3061
Will be hosting a community
Memorial Day Observance
At First Baptist Church
101 E. Main St., Vermillion

Monday, May 25th, 10:00 AM
Keynote speaker:
Lee Felder, Retired Major, US Air Force

Everyone welcome, Refreshments will be served.

NOTICE TO IRRIGATORS

The South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) reminds irrigators to check their center pivots to ensure they are operating properly and are adjusted to spray only upon land authorized for irrigation by their water permit.

"It is important that irrigators do everything they can to avoid over spraying onto nearby roads or neighboring properties," said DENR Secretary Steve Pirner. "Irrigation overspray can damage roadways, lead to unsafe driving conditions, and impact neighbors."

A water right holder is not allowed to waste water or operate an irrigation system in violation of state water law, which includes spraying water on land not covered by the water permit. Irrigation systems and especially end guns must be consistently checked to make sure it is not applying water to where it is not allowed. Irrigators who fail to prevent overspray can be subject to fines or required to appear before the Water Management Board for possible suspension of their right to irrigate.

South Dakota has nearly 5,200 active irrigation permits authorizing irrigation of up to 865,000 acres.

GOT NEWS?
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