

Local

Firefighters give their time to help out

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As Keith Mills leans up against a wall in the Weidman fire station with crossed arms, he looks relaxed and comfortable, almost like he is at home.

That shouldn't be too surprising seeing how he spends just as much time there as he does at his own residence.

Mills, who is a volunteer firefighter for the Nottowa-Sherman Township Fire Department in Weidman, didn't want to be labeled a hero. Although he works between 40 and 50 hours a week during the day and saves lives off-the-clock, he said the other firefighters do the same.

"It's not just one of us, it's all of us," he said.

Mills, along with the rest of the department, carries a beeper 24 hours a day, seven days a week. When that beeper goes off he know someone is having the worst day of their life.

Mills is often paged in the middle of the night to a structural fire or rescue run. He never thinks twice about having to jump out of bed and make his way to the station. There have been more than a few times when Mills goes straight from a fire run to his day job without any sleep.

"Somebody has to do it," he said.

"If it weren't for the volunteer fire department there would be no department in Weidman. There isn't enough money for a full time crew," he said.

The Nottowa-Sherman Township Fire Department is a joint venture between different townships.

Fire Chief Dave Livermore said it takes a certain kind of person to be a volunteer firefighter. It's not for everybody.

"We've seen a lot come and go because they can't give up their time," Livermore said.

"It's a huge amount of personal time given up," he said.

Besides being on call 365 days a year, these men and women have extensive training courses three times a month as well as serving on different teams and committees. As first responders, the fire department acts as the basic life support until the ambulance shows up.

Livermore also said the members of his department works as a whole, and as a whole they are all heroes.

"It's not me, it's we♦it has to be," he said.

Livermore said that when responding to a heavy rescue or structural fire the equipment that is used takes more than just one person to make it work.

"One person cannot operate it," he said as he points to a bright red fire truck that holds 3,500 gallons of water.

Frank Benn has been on the department for 26 years. Although he is retired from his teaching job at Chippewa Hills as a physical science teacher, he can't seem to give up the department.

In fact, a lot of his former students are now volunteer firefighters.

"My students thought it was cool," he said of being a firefighter.

Sometimes he would have to leave class to make a rescue run and his students would watch in curiosity and awe as he left the building.

"It was a stimulus for them to get on various departments," he said.

Benn is proud of the other fire fighters and thinks of them as family.

"You won't find a group any tighter knit than a fire department," he said.

"They're family," he said.

When asked why people volunteer, Mills said simply to make a difference.

"I know that at the end of a run we made a difference," he said.

"That's payment enough. That's why we do it."

The department currently has 24 volunteer firefighters. Three of them are female.

"They can do everything we can," Benn said.

"The gals do a fantastic job," Livermore said.

The department made 283 runs in 2007.

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