

Vera Cruz Fire Co. elects new officers

2006 finishes with near-record 187 emergency calls

By GEORGE DEVAULT
Special to The Press

The Citizens Fire Company of Upper Milford Township, more commonly known as the Vera Cruz Fire Company, recently elected new officers as it finished its second busiest year in the department's 64-year history.

Elected by the members at their year-end meeting were: chief George DeVault, assistant chief Jerry Schantz, deputy chief Brian Klepinger, fire police captain Jason Welter, president Kevin Kleinsmith, first vice president William Stahler, second vice president Gary Mohr, recording secretary Roxanne Patzinger, financial secretary Jerry Schantz and treasurer Jennifer Conrad.

"We had a total of 187 emergency calls in 2006 for an average of one call every 47 hours," DeVault said. "That's down only slightly from 2005 when a record 197 calls meant responding an average of every 44 hours." The frenetic pace continues in 2007. In the first five days of the new year, Vera Cruz responded to three alarms.

"July was our busiest month, with 31 calls in 31 days. For the year, our volunteers logged 1,393 hours of service. That's a significant contribution of time away from families and jobs," DeVault said.

"Nearly 48 percent of our calls came on weekdays between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. when the fewest volunteers are available. We are extremely fortunate to have a handful of volunteers who are able to drop everything and respond to daytime calls because they work at home, work second shift or are self-employed."

Mutual aid agreements with neighboring fire companies are also critical on daytime calls, adds the chief. On Jan. 2, for example, both Macungie and Brannans fire police helped Vera Cruz manage a major traffic incident on Chestnut Street at Colebrook Avenue. The next day a Vera Cruz pumper crew backed up Emmaus firefighters at a house fire on Ridge Street.

"It's curious, but less than 30 percent of our calls last year were on weekends when more people are at home and available to respond," Kleinsmith said. "The evening rush hour of 5 p.m. is our busiest time, followed by the noon and 9 p.m. time slots. The heaviest volume of calls comes between 11 a.m. and 6 p.m."

The two biggest sources of calls for Vera Cruz last year were motor vehicle accidents and incidents on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, with each category totalling 38 calls. Vera Cruz covers the Turnpike's Northeast Extension from north of the Quakertown Interchange to south of the Lehigh Valley Service Plaza. Complete details of last year's response statistics are available on the fire company's website at www.veracruzfirecompany.com.

Like all local fire companies, Vera Cruz needs more volunteer firefighters and special fire police. Anyone interested in volunteering can download a membership application from the department's Web site. Prospective members can also call 610-905-9444 or stop by the firehouse at 4093 Main Road West on practice nights, 7 p.m. every Tuesday.