

Video - On the clock, off the payroll

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Hollywood, MD - It's becoming a tough statistic to keep track of this year. The number of house fires in Southern Maryland so far in 2018 is substantial. They happen just about any time of day, too. Residents are often displaced, valued possessions are lost, family pets meet a horrible demise and people—home occupants and firefighters—sustain injuries. Last month, two small children met their deaths. It doesn't get any worse than that. As we saw last week, businesses are vulnerable, too. With the careless flick of a smoked but still lit cigarette, a much-loved waterside restaurant was devoured by flames. Fortunately no one was hurt in that inferno.

Imagine if you will your own house ablaze and you had to put the fire out yourself. Do you have a sprinkler system? Would your garden hose and maybe a fire extinguisher be enough to get the job done? Does your family even have a plan that would ensure the safe exit of every person in the house? Can you honestly say, "we can rescue ourselves, thank you!" Well, we're guessing, probably not.

Thankfully, the Southern Maryland region has several fire and rescue companies ready to respond. They are "volunteer" companies. They stand ready to respond 'round the clock, however, there are no paychecks for these individuals to pick up at their local company. Many of the volunteers are pros in larger jurisdictions that employ fire, rescue and emergency medical services. Even if they have a different profession—business person, law enforcement, government worker, retiree or student—they have to train extensively. The firefighting and life-saving skills they employ here are free to the public. While it is true, all three Southern Maryland jurisdictions will soon have some paid professionals on board—Charles and St. Mary's already do—the lion's share of responders are uncompensated.

All the local companies could use more volunteers, that is, individuals who want to join the team to work for the best outcomes possible. What our community doesn't need are more volunteer armchair quarterbacks to critique response and leadership. This is serious work that has to be done. The headlines speaking of displaced residents, injuries and death bear that out.

So what are you doing to support your local firefighter? Have you made a donation, attended a fundraising event or filled out an application to join the ranks? In Southern Maryland, the only thing cheaper than what we budget and pay for the skill and expertise of our local volunteers is the talk we hear from their critics.

We thank all our volunteers for their service, protection and dedication. On Sunday, May 6 local residents will get a chance to cheer for these heroes in Newburg. The parade on Rock Point Road begins at 1 p.m.

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Contact Marty Madden at marty.madden@thebaynet.com

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