

2011 Report of the Fire Department

I am pleased to submit the 129th annual report of the Abington Fire Rescue & Emergency Services Department for the year 2011.

First and foremost, we saw the untimely passing of retired member Howard J. Gavin. Firefighter Gavin proudly served the residents of Abington from 1968 to 2001, and was instrumental in beginning the department's Emergency Medical Technician program. Howie was larger than life, came complete with many stories, and will be missed by all those who knew him.

2011 was a continuation of major changes for the Abington Fire Department.

Deputy Fire Chief John A. Weckbacher, Jr. retired after 35 years of service to the residents of Abington. "Jack" served many roles during his career, including Fire Alarm Superintendant, the first EMT Intermediate and the first trained in Advanced Technical Rescue. Jack was promoted to captain in 1998, Deputy Chief in 2006, and was Acting Chief of Department in 2010.

Christa P. Prescott also retired, after 10 years of service as a Firefighter/Paramedic. Christa served as a Student Awareness of Fire Educator, training thousands of Abington children in fire safety.

Both Deputy Weckbacher and Firefighter Prescott were honored in 2004 as Massachusetts Firefighter of the Year recipients, following the rescue of an Abington resident trapped in an upper floor during a building fire. I wish both members a long and happy retirement, and thank them for their service.

Captain Edward F. Belcher was promoted to Deputy Fire Chief, and has assumed the direction of the Fire Prevention and Code Enforcement responsibilities.

Firefighter/EMT-I Michael Murphy was promoted to Acting Captain for a period of six months pending a captain's exam list, which was filled by Firefighter/Paramedic George F. Gardiner, Jr., who was promoted to Permanent Fire Captain. I would like to congratulate all of these officers, and thank Firefighter Murphy for stepping up to fill a temporary vacancy. These promotions will provide stability to this department as we move forward.

A reduction in personnel resulting from retirements, attrition and injuries left only fourteen department members available to perform all emergency, prevention and suppression activities during the beginning of 2011. This necessitated the continuation of four-man shifts throughout the year, a dangerous and inefficient manner to operate a department with a call volume of 3,160 responses. A request to lift a hiring freeze was granted by the Abington Selectmen, along with the funding of several positions vacated since 2009, allowed the hiring of five new firefighter/paramedics. Firefighter/Paramedic Matthew Croall was hired in April, and graduated the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy in September. Firefighter/Paramedics Anthony Conso and Jarrod Driscoll graduated the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy in December, and began

working on the last week in December. Firefighter/Paramedics Justin Silva and Christopher Cotti worked on shifts as paramedics and as their experience allowed prior to beginning the Brockton Firefighting Academy scheduled in January 2012. These new members of the Abington Fire Department have brought with them contagious enthusiasm and ambition, and will help to restore more emergency services to our residents.

Many of our members took advantage of the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy courses in 2011, including Deputy Belcher, Captain Gardiner, several firefighter/paramedics, and Chief John Nuttall, who received accreditation from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Fire Service Commission. Firefighter/Paramedic Michael Driscoll, a member of the Plymouth County Technical Rescue Team, attended a week-long structural collapse course, funded by a grant from the Department of Homeland Security.

Two Fire Chaplains were appointed during a department-wide badge pinning ceremony held in February. Rev. Kristy Coburn, from the United Church of Christ, and Fr. James Mahoney, from St. Bridget's Church, joined our department and have assisted in many ways. We welcome them both.

Assistance was provided for several major improvements to the Headquarters Fire Station on Bedford Street. Aaron Hyre, from the Abington Public School Department, assisted with rebuilding the department's main computer network. This allowed for required growth, and provided us with a secure backup of information. These duties have been passed on to the Town's IT Director, Mr. Henry DeStoop, who has continued to be a great help in allowing us to move forward.

A generous donation of materials from Cape Cod Lumber allowed the fire department to renovate the Dayroom, which was vintage 1970. This is the only room available for training, classes, meals and other large activities within the department. Members of the Abington Firefighters Local 2080 donated many hours and materials to complete this project and modernize this area.

Electrical repairs, modernization of smoke detectors, alarms and overhead door controls were also addressed in an effort to maintain this very utilized building.

While Station Two, on Rockland Street remained closed due to manpower shortages, it was temporarily re-opened for the duration of several major storms. This station also saw the beginnings of moderate improvements, with the anticipated re-opening in April of 2012.

Several capital requests were granted during the October Town Meeting, and will begin to provide the residents of Abington with some major, cost effective improvements in public safety. The chronic problem of providing emergency dispatch and alarm monitoring will soon be conducted by the Holbrook Fire Department. Infrastructure changes such as fire alarm receiving, computer-aided dispatch, emergency medical dispatching and radio communications were begun, and should be operational in April, 2012. This will provide constant monitoring of these vital services for the safety of our residents and firefighters.

A new computer software program for the fire department was also approved, and will allow for a complete restructuring of fire records, inspections, dispatch and administrative requirements. This is also scheduled to begin around April, 2012.

2011 was a busy year for the emergency operations of the Abington Fire Department. Winter and tropical storms left numerous residents without electrical power for several days, and damaged our fire alarm system and communications antennas. Several large structure fires were extinguished without injury, and mutual aid was received from neighboring departments. The use of Boston Medflight has become more common, as we continue to see an increase in serious injuries from numerous causes, and wish to provide the best possible care for our patients. State and regional changes in emergency medical protocols also required an increase in training hours.

Fire Prevention and Code Enforcement oversaw the installation of sprinkler systems in several older structures throughout the town, as well as fire alarm and smoke detector improvements. This will provide more protection for our residents, and I wish to commend the Deputy Fire Chief for working with the building owners throughout this process.

The Student Awareness of Fire Educators (SAFE) grant program, coordinated by Captain David Farrell, received an increase in State funding. This will allow for the training of several new SAFE Educators, Firefighter/Paramedics Matt Croall and Justin Silva, who assisted in teaching fire education to Pre-kindergarten through second grade in all Abington public and private schools.

I wish to thank the residents of Abington for providing the support and funds requested for their fire department, which will allow us to operate in a more efficient and effective manner in the years to follow. I also wish to thank all of the members of this department, for working together through this year of transition and reduced manpower to reach the goal of proper staffing levels and reduced response times. Together, these will allow the Abington Fire Department to safely handle all emergency requests from those whom we proudly serve.

Respectfully submitted,
John M. Nuttall
Chief of Department

Members of the Abington Fire-Rescue & Emergency Services Department 2011:

John M. Nuttall, Chief/EMT-I
Edward F. Belcher, Deputy Chief/EMT
Patricia Gordon, Executive Assistant
David M. Farrell, Captain/EMT
John Glynn, Captain/Paramedic
Ronald Howe, Captain/Paramedic
George Gardiner, Jr., Captain/Paramedic
Michael Murphy, Firefighter/EMT-I
Donald M. Farrell, Firefighter/EMT-I
Michael Driscoll, Firefighter/Paramedic
John Force, Firefighter/Paramedic
Robert Neumeister, Firefighter/EMT-I

Don DiDomenico, Firefighter/Paramedic
Kevin Finch, Firefighter/Paramedic
Richard Smith, Firefighter/Paramedic
Shawn Hardy, Firefighter/Paramedic
Brian Fogg, Firefighter/Paramedic
Christopher O'Toole, Firefighter/Paramedic
Matthew Croall, Firefighter/Paramedic
Justin Silva, Firefighter/Paramedic
Anthony Conso, Firefighter/Paramedic
Jarrod Driscoll, Firefighter/Paramedic
Christopher Cotti, Firefighter/Paramedic

The Abington Fire Department responded to 3,160 calls for service, including:

58 Fires
1,948 Emergency Medical Incidents
473 Hazardous Conditions
361 False/Unintentional Alarms
304 Assistance

In addition to emergency or service requests, we also provided the following Fire Prevention, Inspectional and Public Safety Services:

917 Inspections
499 Permits
788 Open Burning Permits
96 Child Safety Seats Installed