

# DELAWARE Beach Life

HISTORY | PEOPLE | HOMES | ARTS | NATURE

AUGUST 2018

## INSIDE

### On Your Mark, Get Set — Go!

Athletes love the competition and camaraderie of triathlons **page 44**

### The Bonds Forged in Fire

Emergency volunteers share a desire to serve the community **page 52**

### Exploring Burton Island

This little-known trail teems with flora, fauna — and a few surprises **page 62**


Delaware Beach Life \$4.95

0 8 >





# Bonds Forged in Fire



The volunteers who respond to coastal Sussex emergencies share a burning desire to serve the community. But they face a growing challenge: development. **BY CHRIS BEAKEY**

**T**he oceanfront house on Sand Dune Drive, like many in the off-season, was empty when it caught fire in the early morning of March 13. Chuck Snyder, chief of the Rehoboth Beach Volunteer Fire Company, was roused from sleep by the dispatcher's call at his

home just east of Route 1 at approximately 3 a.m. The eastward sky was already glowing from the blaze when he crossed the canal bridge five minutes later.

By the time he arrived, the fire had spread to a second house, the brisk northeast winds off the ocean

feeding flames that devoured walls and roofs and **virtually everything else in their expanding path.** Sirens screamed through the air as 16 local fire companies responded, their trucks loaded with 120 men and women pulled from their beds in the middle of the night. >

Fire companies from Milton, Lewes, Rehoboth and Bethany all depend on volunteers to battle blazes such as this intense fire at a home in West Rehoboth.



**Arnie Edelman, foreground, a “retiree” who typically goes on 30 to 40 calls a month as a Rehoboth Beach volunteer, pulls a fire hose with assistance from fellow volunteer Warren Jones during a training exercise at Rehoboth Station 1 on Rehoboth Avenue.**

The sun was rising behind dense gray clouds when the firefighters finally extinguished the blaze. Dazed by the physical toll this work had taken on their bodies, and with blackened faces and the stench of toxic smoke clinging to their gear, they returned to their stations and the arduous task of cleaning up. For most, the day was just beginning as they headed out to their “regular” jobs, exhausted but gratified by their efforts to keep the area’s beach communities safe.

### **Coping with growth**

Three months later the leaders of the Rehoboth, Bethany, Lewes and Milton fire companies have gathered at Rehoboth Station 2 on Airport Road to recount their memories of that incident. While they’re grateful that there were no injuries, they talk forthrightly about the challenges arising from the changing population dynamics of Sussex County — which had a lot to do with both of those homes being unoccupied and therefore more vulnerable.

“When a fire hits and there’s no one home, that means there’s no one to call us,” notes Glenn Marshall, vice president and public information officer of the Lewes Fire Company. “You

can drive through these second-home communities and see houses burned to the ground because no one was living there.”

Indeed, homes unoccupied during the cooler months are a major component of new developments sprawling across Sussex County. The Delaware Population Consortium estimates

that one-third of the county’s households are occupied by seasonal residents, which is more common in coastal areas.

Delaware’s low property taxes and recreational appeal undoubtedly drive that trend, but it’s also the result of some developers’ sales strategy. For instance, New Road Ventures, which aims to build 293 houses on 134 acres off New Road at the edge of Lewes, plans to actively market those homes to seasonal residents.

This dynamic could bring more challenges to an emergency response community already struggling to meet the needs of both old neighborhoods and the new ones popping up across the coastal area. One example is New Road, which, like many other formerly rural byways, has just two lanes and offers no shoulder for walkers or bikers — and very little room for firetrucks that are 8 feet wide and 32 feet long.

Concerns about emergency response capabilities are also frequently voiced in public hearings on development along Route 24 between Midway and Millsboro, where thousands of homes have been built during the past few years. Marshall emphasizes, however, that clogged traffic on wider routes such as Route 1 also can make it difficult to respond to incidents in time to save lives and property.

Consumer preferences for new construction present other dangers. As noted by Bethany Beach Volunteer Fire Company Chief Brian Martin, who owns a construction and remodeling



**FIRST-PERSON ACTION OF A LEWES FIREMAN**  
Go to [www.Reveel.it](http://www.Reveel.it) and scan this page

business, “Everyone wants those two-story family rooms where the air blows right through. But flames thrive on air, and as soon as a fire gets a gulp these summer homes can burn right up.”

Current construction materials can, literally, further fuel the danger. Craig Stephens, a former chief of the Lewes company, puts it this way: “The building industry isn’t here to protect firefighters. Looking back 30 years ago we had 2-by-4s and drywall. Now we have particle board and siding that burns a lot faster and hotter, and with more smoke and more hazards.”

He raps on the conference room table to underscore that point. “Look at this — if it was made of wood it would just burn, but it’s plastic so it’s probably going to send off toxic gas.”

While heads nod across the room, all say that the bigger challenge to protecting Sussex County people and property is finding enough men and women who are qualified and willing to volunteer. Snyder points to the Sand Dune Drive fire as an example:

“We didn’t just need more engines on that fire — we needed manpower. It took every responder to put it out. We would have lost at least three more houses if those guys hadn’t gotten there.”

### Changing demographics

The fire leaders gathered together are all deeply rooted locals, many of them with longstanding ties to the emergency services community. Although Rehoboth’s Snyder is the first in his family

**You can drive through these second-home communities and see houses burned to the ground because no one was living there.”**

to volunteer, he grew up working behind the counter of his family’s Rehoboth Avenue store, Snyder’s Candy. Martin of Bethany is also a first-generation firefighter, but has been a volunteer ever since he moved to the area 25 years ago.

All of the other firefighting veterans look back on family legacies. Johnny Hopkins, president and assistant chief of the Milton Fire Department, grew up watching his stepdad and other relatives race away from dinner tables and onto firetrucks to respond to neighborhood emergencies. Milton Deputy Chief Derrick Harvey responds to calls alongside his father, Frederick Harvey Sr., who

volunteers with the Milton Fire Police. Craig Stephens, who’s the official historian of the Lewes company, grew up on Rehoboth Avenue and followed his own father into the fire service by volunteering at the age of 16.

Warren Jones, an executive manager within the Delaware Volunteer Firefighter’s Association, is developing a plan to improve recruitment and retention. He’s also a second-generation firefighter and father of a son who also volunteered, but knows he can’t count only on family legacies to fill the ranks.

“In previous times we didn’t need a plan because people came into the fire department from one generation to the next, but it’s not the same type of environment today,” he says. “We don’t have that many family connections left.”

Jones has an ambitious target for his plan. Collectively, the Rehoboth, Bethany, Lewes and Milton companies need to recruit at

**WOODY'S**  
*Dewey Beach*  
Bar & Grill

**Voted Best Restaurant in Dewey**  
**Voted Best Crabcake Downstate**

Open every day at  
11 a.m. year round

Where Locals Eat & Drink!

1904 Coastal Hwy., Dewey Beach  
[www.deweybeachbar.com](http://www.deweybeachbar.com)  
302-260-9945

**D**  
**DEWSON**

Celebrating 25 Years of  
Construction Excellence

20616 Coastal Highway • Rehoboth Beach • 302.227.3095

**Kids Cottage**  
The Foundation of Excellence

35448 Wolfeneck Road, Rehoboth Beach  
(302) 644-7690 | kidscottage.com

The secret is out ...  
Kids Cottage, The Foundation of Excellence

least 48 volunteer firefighters each year as a result of population growth and attrition/retention challenges. Based on decades of his own service, he's acutely aware of the type of people the fire service needs the most: "You have to be willing to serve ... willing to learn different things. You also have to be disciplined because we have a command staff and rules that have to be followed, with a passion for helping people, and for being proud of what you do."

He agrees with other area fire leaders that it's becoming more difficult to attract people qualified for the job — a challenge faced by volunteer companies nationwide. According to the National Fire Protection Association, about 70 percent of America's firefighters are volunteers. Nationally, the number of calls that volunteer companies have to respond to each year has tripled in the last 30 years, due in large part to the increase in emergency medical calls. Locally, the Rehoboth fire company alone responds to between 800 and 900 fire calls and about 3,100 EMS calls annually.

While Sussex County gained nearly 30,000 new residents between 2010 and 2017, population growth doesn't necessarily yield more potential volunteers. As Kimberly Quiros, chief of communications for the National Volunteer Fire Council, points out, "People who are transplants to new areas may not have that community tie that makes them want to volunteer with the fire department, and people may not even be aware that their community needs volunteers."

The responsibilities also present another challenge. Volunteer firefighters undergo the same level of basic training as professionals to become qualified to respond. In Delaware, that begins with three weekends of classes. After the first weekend, spent in a classroom learning about fire science and safety, trainees move on to a second weekend of full hands-on activities, such as crawling through a smoke-filled building and handling fire ladders. By the third weekend they're practicing other procedures they'll follow in real incidents, such as advancing hoses and equipment up steep stairways and operating power tools. ▶

**You have to be disciplined, with a passion for helping people, and for being proud of what you do."**

## Fast Facts About Firefighting at the Beach

**Community service is the greatest reward.** About 99 percent of the firefighters serving the communities of Milton, Lewes, Rehoboth Beach and Bethany Beach are volunteers.

**Fire and EMS are ready 24/7 — thanks also to volunteers.** All four local fire companies depend on both paid and volunteer Emergency Medical Services professionals. As Glenn Marshall of the Lewes Fire Company notes, "We have five ambulances serving Lewes and there have been plenty of times when all five were out on calls at the same time. The vast majority of volunteers are doing this on top of their paid positions as EMTs or paramedics somewhere else."

**Those old stories about rescuing cats in trees are pretty much true.** "We respond to all kinds of calls," Marshall says. "It could be a car crash, a guy trapped in an elevator, a kid locked in a car, people who ignored evacuation orders and decided to sit out a flood until they realized that wasn't too smart. We do it all."

**Donations are vital.** All four local companies are funded by state, county and city taxes, but all depend on donations from the community, particularly from businesses and individuals. "Whether you're donating a dollar or a thousand dollars, we're grateful for every level of support," Marshall says. ■



Rehoboth volunteers battle a fire in the Angola area.

**MICHOU**

Michou calls its jewelry "Art to Wear." Each piece is a diminutive sculpture created with exquisite, one-of-a-kind details.

Exclusively available at

**THE TREASURE CHEST**

20 N. Main Street, Berlin, MD • 410-641-0333  
treasurechestjewelers.com [f/TheTreasureChestBerlinMD](#)

**FRESENIUS KIDNEY CARE**

Looking for dialysis care at the Delaware Beaches?

**We've got you covered.**

Your dialysis should fit into your life—not the other way around. Fresenius Kidney Care offers convenient locations close to where you live and work, so it's easier to get to appointments and stay on your treatment schedule. That means you can focus on living life to its fullest.

<b>Fresenius Kidney Care Bridgeville</b> 9115 Antique Alley Bridgeville, DE 19933	<b>Fresenius Kidney Care Millsboro</b> 30164 Commerce Drive Peninsula Crossing Millsboro, DE 19966
<b>Fresenius Kidney Care Mid Sussex</b> 34 Georgetown Plaza Georgetown, DE 19947	<b>Fresenius Kidney Care Rehoboth</b> 19339 Coastal Hwy, Ste 100 Rehoboth Beach, DE 19971
<b>Fresenius Kidney Care Milford</b> 656 N Dupont Blvd, Ste D Milford, DE 19963	

Learn more about treatments, flexible scheduling and how you can thrive on dialysis. **Stop by or call 800-881-5101.**  
[FreseniusKidneyCare.com](http://FreseniusKidneyCare.com)

**Thrive On**

© 2017, Fresenius Medical Care, All Rights Reserved.



## MARCO BICEGO

Join us  
at Elegant Slumming  
**August 11th 2018**  
**12pm-8pm**  
for our Marco Bicego  
Trunk show  
featuring one of a kind  
and limited edition pieces.

**ELEGANT SLUMMING**  
FINE JEWELRY  
(302) 227-5551  
33 Baltimore Avenue  
Rehoboth Beach, DE



Bethany Beach Fire Chief Brian Martin, who began volunteering 25 years ago, reports on progress of a fire at Sea Colony.

Further training includes exercises in structural firefighting and dealing with hazardous materials. By the end of basic training, there's no doubt in any volunteer's mind that the work can be extremely dangerous, physically demanding, and dependent on teamwork.

Local volunteer responders must also accept that they may be called away from their regular lives to handle emergencies at any time. They can be dispatched by pager and/or by phone, and typically have to decide immediately if they're going to respond.

"We don't have shifts; you're always on duty," explains Warren Jones of the Rehoboth company. "Volunteers get a certain amount of points for every class they attend and every incident they respond to, and have to maintain a certain amount of points to maintain their qualifications."

### Finding their place

While the intensity of the training and responsibilities of volunteering have dissuaded some from serving, others are intensely motivated by both.

That's certainly true for Arnie Edelman, who moved to Rehoboth after retiring in 2013 from a long career with the U.S. Department of Energy. In a conference room at Rehoboth Station 1 on Rehoboth Avenue, he describes his journey to becoming a volunteer at the age of 64.

"I'd always had the idea that it would be good to volunteer," Edelman says. "I

thought I'd be answering phones or something else that didn't involve holding a hose or running into a fire."

A few weeks after he first inquired about volunteering, however, he found himself wearing 60 pounds of gear and an air pack, crawling on his knees through the "smoke house" at the Delaware State Fire School in Dover. That air pack was supposed to last up to 30 minutes. Edelman used most of it in 15.

"I knew I was a little older and not in the best of shape when I decided I wanted to train to respond to incidents, but I didn't expect to use up my whole air pack on the first run-through," he says.

The next challenge would have been a nightmare for anyone with a fear of heights.

"I told them I'd go up on an 8-foot ladder. They said, 'There's a 35-foot ladder. I had to go up on that, in gear, carrying an axe. Then, when I got to the top I had to hook my legs into a rung, let go, and lean back. You need to be able to do that when you're dealing with a fire in a tall building.'"

Today, Edelman responds to about 30 to 40 calls a month. He also files incident reports, writes grant requests and assists with other tasks that tap his professional expertise. "My wife has gotten used to the fact that she might be eating dinner alone," he confesses, "but what's the point of being a volunteer firefighter if you don't go out on calls?"

Having a strong reason to stay in top



physical shape is another benefit. Now approaching 70, Edelman walks 3 to 6 miles a day and goes to the gym three times a week.

That's good news to Ryan Peters, company director of Rise Fitness & Adventure, another volunteer with the Rehoboth company who trains many local firefighters. Peters has participated in dozens of obstacle races and military-style endurance events, and is well-prepared to handle the most physically demanding aspects of firefighting.

That's a miracle, compared to where he was 12 years ago.

"I've had spinal issues since my early 30s," he says while walking through his warehouse-like fitness center near Rehoboth Beach, within sight of a climbing wall and rows of exercise equipment. "I spent three months in bed because of neck vertebrae problems when I was 33 years old and when I was 38 doctors told me I had to get my spine fused because of disk problems in my lower back."

Peters took a very different path to stabilizing his spinal column, embarking on a challenging course of carefully planned exercises to "strengthen everything around it." Against enormous odds he succeeded, forging a new determination to continually test his own physical limits.

"I earned over 240 hours of [firefighter] training over the past year because I love being challenged," he says. "The class I took this past weekend was RIT Basic — this is the team that responds

**I'd always had the idea that it would be good to volunteer. I thought I'd be answering phones or something else that didn't involve holding a hose or running into a fire."**

when firefighters have been injured or trapped. It was difficult and high-stress, working with mannequins and other classmates who had to charge in and get this guy and yank him up and drag him out."

These physical capabilities are indicative of what Peters strives to build among the many local firefighters who work out at Rise.

"It's been nice to take some of the younger members under my wing — giving them challenges and getting them to train," he says. "Same with the older members. When Warren [Jones, of the Rehoboth company] started out, it was at the direction of a cardiologist who told him he had to keep his heart rate at a certain level. He started on the stair climber and had to stop after 10 floors. Today he moves way faster and keeps his heart rate where it needs to be and goes 100 floors, talking to me the whole time."

Aron and Catherine Carrow, 18 and 21 years old, respectively, are two more volunteers with the Rehoboth company who also train at Rise. As two of the youngest members of Sussex County's emergency response community, both are physically fit but determined to get into even better shape.

In Aron's case that means surviving Peters' "forest firefighting test" requiring him to go 3 miles carrying a 50-pound rucksack. The key to success, as Peters puts it, is moving fast — as would be necessary in a wildfire — without running, so you're "moving quickly, with a purpose."

Catherine — who he says is "in great shape" — works on



**SO DEL**  
CONCEPTS

**PATIO BAR**

LIVE MUSIC OUTSIDE  
**WEDNESDAY - SUNDAY**

**HAPPY HOUR 4-6PM**  
MONDAY - FRIDAY

**BLUECOAST**  
SEAFOOD GRILL + RAW BAR  
REHOBOTH BEACH, DE

30115 VETERAN'S WAY IN THE REHOBOTH GATEWAY PLAZA  
**(302) 278.7395 | BLUECOASTREHOBOTH.COM**

**OPEN DAILY**

**LUNCH & DINNER**  
**11:30AM-10PM**

**FREE PARKING**

squats and dead lifts, but she's also proud of her ability to get on "the stair-stepper machines with our gear on and do the 911 Challenge — that means going up over 100 floors."

Despite their young ages, the siblings already have a considerable amount of emergency response experience. Aron began volunteering at 16. (Minimum age requirements vary; it's 15 to be a junior member in Rehoboth.) A month after joining he fought his first structure fire from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m., then cleaned up and went off to school. Two years later, he's already gone on more than 240 calls and plans to become a career firefighter after college at the University of Delaware.

Catherine began volunteering in 2017, and soon saw the path toward a career.

"I saw how much fun Aron was having getting calls and running out of the house and finally joined," she explains. "After that, I decided to take it a lot further. I became a volunteer EMT and decided this is what I want to do with my life."



Rehoboth Beach volunteer Ryan Peters uses a Holmatro tool to force an opening into an SUV during a training exercise at Rehoboth Station 2 on Airport Road.

### Special role, special rewards

Catherine's trajectory from volunteer to aspiring professional is a prime example of what can happen among volunteers aiming for full-time work. As Glenn Marshall, from the Lewes Fire Company, puts it:

"If you become an EMT in the county you're probably in one of the better paying jobs and with good benefits. There are EMTs who are making over \$20 an hour ... and you can go on to become a paramedic, where the pay is even better."

Another benefit, according to the Bethany company's Brian Martin, is the gratification derived from serving. "Very quickly you get life experience," he notes. "You see bad things but you learn a lot. You also get to give back to the community. Once you get that feeling, you're hooked."

That sentiment is seconded by others.

"I didn't know anyone when I moved here, but all the sudden I had this great group of people as friends with at least one common interest," Edelman says. "You get to be on the front row of life-saving incidents but you also get to do happy things. My first year here I got to be on top of a rescue vehicle that gave me the best spot for watching the Polar [Bear] Plunge."

Peters agrees. "As I was getting into shape I did a lot of fitness activities led by active military members, including Special Forces.



**Big Enough to Help You.  
Small Enough to Know You.  
Right Here in Your Neighborhood.**

*Personal & Commercial Services*

Rehoboth Branch Office  
Sussex Commercial Office  
19358 Miller Road  
Rehoboth Beach, DE 19971  
Branch: 302-296-0155  
Loan Office: 302-296-0153

Millville Branch Office  
35696 Atlantic Avenue  
Millville, DE 19967  
302-537-2888



**coffin  
hardwood  
flooring, inc.**



**Hardwood  
Floor Sales  
Installation  
Sanding &  
Refinishing**



**P.O. Box 1677 • Millsboro, DE 19966  
302.934.6414**

**coffincontractors@verizon.net  
coffincontractors.com**





Volunteer Aron Carrow, who went on more than 240 calls while attending Sussex Technical High School, suits up at Rehoboth Station 1 on Rehoboth Avenue for one more.

I tend to see eye-to-eye with those people. We're all here to do the job. If you and I are the two who go inside during the fire, you have my back and I have yours. There's a strong level of trust."

That bond appeals to his daughter, Zoe, who spent a lot of time at the station while her father worked what amounted to a 60-hour shift during a period of snowy weather in January of this year.

"There were a bunch of us that stayed at the station and rotated to go out as needed," Peters says. "She hung out with us and saw the teamwork and effort we were putting forward in helping people and realized she wants to do it too. That's why she decided to go to the three-day overnight camp that the Delaware State Fire School puts on for 13-to-17-year-old girls."

The Carrows cite other benefits that aren't typically enjoyed in most careers.

"I like the adrenaline you feel when you respond," Catherine says. "When you pull up to help someone, there's a rush. One of my first ride-alongs was so intense. It was my first cardiac arrest call and it was life-changing — a really good feeling knowing the other EMT and I saved his life."

Aron also saved a life during the summer of 2017 during his summer job as a lifeguard on Lewes Beach when he rescued a little girl who fell off a boogie board into water over her head. He still



**VOLUNTEER AT YOUR LOCAL FIRE COMPANY!**  
Go to [www.k11weel.com](http://www.k11weel.com) and scan this page

feels good about the experience, but adds a sobering footnote that any firefighter or emergency medical responder would likely echo:

"I was so relieved that she was OK. I was glad I saw something happen and just went for it, but also nervous when I thought of how it could have gone."

Both siblings speak of how their involvement in emergency response work has deepened their connection to their hometown of Rehoboth.

"Our chief is amazing," Catherine says of Chuck Snyder. "He always puts us first and makes sure we're

safe and even makes sure we're fed, like the time we were on a fire in the state park for six hours and had pizza waiting for us when we got back to the station."

Aron nods at that memory, and cites another benefit: "Almost every person you meet in the fire service came from a different career. They can offer so much good advice for you."

"Yeah, it keeps you out of trouble and steers you on a good track," his sister says. "All the fire companies are pretty close. When there's something big going down, we're all there. Like when the Allen Harim chicken plant in Harbeson caught fire, every company in the county was there from 10 o'clock on."

"It smelled pretty bad," Aron adds, with a smile. "But we all got through it just fine." ■

CHRIS BEAKEY writes from his home in Lewes. His second novel, "Fatal Option" was published by Simon & Schuster in February of 2017.

## To Get Involved

The Milton, Lewes, Rehoboth Beach and Bethany Beach fire company websites all describe how to become a volunteer or contribute. Visit [milton85.com](http://milton85.com), [lewesfire.com](http://lewesfire.com), [rehobothbeachfire.com](http://rehobothbeachfire.com), or [bethanybeachfire.com](http://bethanybeachfire.com) to learn more. ■