

## Alna Volunteer Fire Department

17 February, 2014

Hello neighbor,

We need to talk. Or *I* do. But then I do want to hear from you—many of you, I hope.

First, I bring you some not unexpected but still unwelcome news. Within the year Marcie Lovejoy will retire after many years with the Alna First Responders. *Many* years? *Thirty* years! She has been essential to the growth, stability and capability of this service for so many years that we do not know how we will continue without her. But do so we must.

Somebody will take over Marcie's duties as director: eagerly, willingly or grudgingly. The administrative job will be filled, but we will still have one fewer person who will respond to calls. We will need to bring more individuals into the service to ensure that we can continue to provide the care we have become accustomed to. Some of us remember a time when we did not have First Responders; we think none of us would prefer to return to that condition. So we need volunteers. I hope some of you reading this will answer that call. We will train you. We will support you as you learn and back you up as you serve. Your neighbors will come to rely upon your help; you will enjoy the satisfaction of helping them. Someday you may well avert a medical complication, exacerbated injury or death, possibly in your own family, because you will have stepped into this vital role.

I see three possible paths into the future: we rebuild and revitalize our own First Responders; we investigate hiring coverage from an existing out-of-town entity with slower response times and greater cost; we allow coverage to lapse. Do most of us prefer the comfort and quality of continuity? This is the question we need to answer together.

Men, women, young, old, born here or just arrived in town, we need any and all of you who will join us. The first step is easy. Call Marcie or call me and we'll answer your questions, tell you what you can do and try to give you some idea of how rewarding it can be to be somebody your community will rely on in a difficult moment.

My next concern is not so immediate, but it could quickly become an urgent issue, as it has in the past. I think you know we have one of the finest small fire departments in the region. For a town our size, our capabilities, our response time, our ability to handle complex situations and to integrate with neighboring departments is remarkable. It is a fortunate fire chief who is granted the facilities, the equipment, the community support and the dedication of his firefighters that I know I have backing me up every day.

And right at this moment we have a roster of twenty or more firefighters. I can remember when we had a half dozen. There have been years when we questioned whether we could maintain the minimum effort that would allow us to function. But whenever we have called upon this town for volunteers, those volunteers have come to us. While there is never a time that we do not seek additional personnel, we are likely approaching another crisis point in the fairly near future.

We are an aging department. I got into firefighting when I was a teenager. I am now, suddenly and inexplicably, well past forty. I am far from the oldest firefighter. People get old; they wear out physically and emotionally. Retirement is inevitable, even for the most fiercely committed. Also, people move away. We have lost some critical members in this way; other towns now benefit from their great abilities. We must have new members coming along just to keep us where we are, and of course what we really always wish to do is to get even better.

I grew up in a family where involvement in municipal affairs was never questioned. I am a fireman; I was for a decade and more your road commissioner; I continue to perplex our selectmen with my close attention to even *their* work. I am not alone in this commitment; many of you have served as selectmen, planning board members, on various committees. We go to hearings and town meetings because we care about our common purpose. We do not just *attend* and *enjoy* our fire department suppers and breakfasts, we *contribute* the pies and salads that feed us. And when asked, we send money that allows the department to operate at a higher level than it could without such extra effort. We are in this together, every contribution appreciated, every skill and scrap of knowledge put to use in our common effort.

Not everyone can fight fires. Probably most can't. But if you are at least eighteen years old, generally healthy and fit, and will join us, I can tell you there will be no better use of your time, no more rewarding way to be a part of something larger than yourself, than to enlist in the Alna Volunteer Fire Department. And we need a grant officer, building and grounds maintenance persons, and there is always paperwork of various sorts. If you will help, we will find a role where you will fit.

There are no dues. In fact, we will pay you for your training time, time spent on calls, and all fees, tuition and equipment necessary to fit and outfit you as a firefighter. You will be asked to do what you can, trained in necessary procedures. You will develop skills you may not have known you could possess. To the extent that you show leadership ability and should you wish to take it on, you will be encouraged to advance, to accept additional duties and responsibilities. This is an organization that will give any man or woman the opportunity to become an important and appreciated member of a vital group effort.

The only pre-requisite is a desire to join. The initial effort will be as small as a telephone call, an E-mail, or a visit to the firehouse almost any Wednesday evening. I plan to hold an informational meeting at the firehouse in early March to explain these issues and solicit your opinions and ideas.

Others have gone before you and prepared the way. Sixty-six years ago we were just a good idea getting started; a generation ago we were a small outfit operating from a shed in Puddle Dock; we are stronger today and strive to be better tomorrow. Some smart, hard-working men and women have brought us here; now may be *your* time to join. We need First Responders and we need firefighters and we need each other. Join us. Help us. Help make Alna a stronger, better, safer, more rewarding town. Your children will be proud of you.

Thank you for your time.

Mike Trask

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