

## Stories I want to share with you.

Last month we were paged out along with Round Lake Fire Dept., to assist with Law Enforcement . We blocked roads to the restricted area. By working with our mutual aid agreement we give our Sheriff and Deputies the helping hand they needed. The ambulance crew were volunteer EMTs and because of the situation ended up in the hot zone. They did not get any more pay for this situation they came when called and went were they were needed. One of those emt's was my daughter. She got home at 3:30 in the morning and got up at 6 to go to work to support her family.

One Easter Sunday many years ago we had high winds which resulted in 26 fires in the county many from down power lines. If these volunteers had not stepped up to the plate can you imagine, how much more dangerous that day would have been?

Most recently a volunteer fireman in our Cable Fire Dept Bayfield County, risked his own life to jump in rushing waters to help a elderly couple get out of their car. Paul Popelka managed to help the lady in the car out and to safety but it was not possible to save the gentleman. It was only one wrong step and Paul would have been pulled with the current and could have been lost to his family and department.

Our stories are many some are warm and fuzzy and others leave you with a heavy heart no matter the call we have run. We have given of our selves to so many we do not know. This is the job we face as volunteers with the Sawyer County Fire & EMS Association.



## Who am I you may ask Kathy Overman Volunteer Fireman

I am a member of this department for over 20 years. I am Wildland Certified for and have run on many a fire in the Chequamegon National Forest. For 20 years ending last June 30, I was a EMS 1st Responder. I was on call 24/7 and ran on all kinds of calls. I recertified every 2 years over a 6 to 8 week class to keep my qualification current and my skills updated. I was not able to fit my work-schedule with the recertification so I have let my license laps. With so many things being added and required for a volunteer time it came even more apparent that no one realizes who a volunteer is, just a work horse to be told they are required to do more and more for nothing in return not even respect.

I am Kathy Overman married to my husband Jerry for over 43 years and living in the same house. We have raised four daughters through our local school system and they all have jobs in our community and take great pride in where they live. Two of my daughters became members of the Fire Department with Jerry and I. Jenny is an EMT and fire fighter and Heidi is a fire fighter. This is a volunteer job with hours and hours of given time for certification and re-certifications and new requirement.

I am also the Town Treasurer, Sec/Treas WTA Sawyer County Unit , active member of the Sawyer County Fire & EMS Association. I am the Business Manager for Fishing Has No Boundaries Inc, National Organization

My Family is active in SLFD or Association Jerry Overman, Vice President Sawyer County Fire Assoc. Jenny Overman EMT, Fire Fighter, Safety office for dept. Single Mom with 2 kids, and fulltime job

Town of Spider Lake,  
Sawyer County  
Hayward WI

## Town of Spider Lake Volunteer Fire Department 8 members



Town of Spider Lake  
108 square miles  
99 miles of road

The town is made up of 357 residents with the biggest population retired. In summer our population increases with 2nd home owners, tourism, resorts and logging. With a large portion of the land being lakes, some of Sawyer County Forest, State and the Chequamegon National Forest. Approximately 800 individual property owners not counting County, State and National Forest.

Spider Lake Town Hall  
10896W Town Hall Rd.  
Hayward, WI 54843

715-462-3977



## Volunteer Fire Departments Sawyer County Fire & EMS Association



Sawyer County Fire & EMS Association is made up of 12 departments in the county along with one from neighboring Bayfield county to give us a stronger ability when called to a scene. Our association includes: Sheriff

Dept., Dive Team, SAR, EMS,

DNR, Forest Service, GLIFWC, Emergency Government, Ambulance Service, Sawyer County Highway Dept, City police and town of Hayward Police Dept. This association works with a Mutual Aid agreement that gives all of the members the ability to call in reinforcements if needed when paged to a situation.

We have worked together to help each other in getting trainings organized, purchasing bulk supplies, equipment recertified, service capability that one department may not have and another has. Some examples jaws of Life comes to mind not all departments have them. City of Hayward has a tower truck, but if needed could be called out to assist. Our association raised funds for an Airboat for use anytime of year. When ice is thin or when the dive team is called out for someone lost underwater. The Association continues to maintain this vital piece of equipment.

We have teamed up together with other Fire Departments in the north on a recruiting campaign in May called **BE SOMEBODY** For a few years it did bring some people out to find out more about it and some new members were recruited. The time and finances to put this on every year got costly along with time consuming for our volunteer base. How much do you expect from a volunteer?

Sawyer County is 1350 square miles, 1257 land 93 water

Population 16,513

Population density 13 people per square mile

### Recruitment

Discussions I had with Fire Chiefs it would be very helpful if the State would work to recruit volunteers. Creating a program that is mandatory in Public Education that makes it an opportunity to take the training for Entry level fire fighter. It would be a skill they can take anywhere along with understanding the importance and responsibility of this service. This is a service needed everywhere. How do we expect people to become part if they never have an understanding.

### Retention

How do you retain anyone in a volunteer position when you basically charge them for this opportunity to service the community?

For example:

When you reimburse them for the gas money you apply that to taxable income.

To recognize your volunteers we charge them tax for the shirt given to them to show they are members of the department.

My department works on the point system and every three months they receive a check depending on how many runs they made. So the points value is not the same each time. Yet that is taxable income with no deduction for the cost on my vehicle or gas. Working miles the deduction is .54 cents a mile as a volunteer it is .14 cents a mile.

How do retain a volunteer and what they bring to make it a stronger department. When you tax them for the time and skill they bring to make a difference in the community.

When you want to thank them by a dinner in their honor and it is taxable why should they be a volunteer. Retirement programs if you had enough people who would benefit from it great but for those that had many older department members who would not benefit we utilized a retirement fund which was distributed once a year and this income was taxable.

We need to find away a way to give a tax break for their service. We do it in the military is this service not as important? Maybe a way to give a property tax break to the person who serves in their community. Without these people who would do it? Before our department existed we paid a department 20 miles away in an emergency if two situations happened one in there town and one in ours where do you think they would go first.

Don't forget natural disasters such as in July that we lost so many roads because of flooding we mutual aided in several towns and county clearing trees marking roads for detours, washouts needed to be marked neighbors and guests in our area needed to be checked on. For these are faces we do not know but their lives are in our hands.

Another issue that not many think about are those that live and work seasonal jobs. Why does unemployment push these volunteers so hard to find another job? Why do we reduce their unemployment when they receive a small amount for the work they have done as a Fire department volunteer they do not give a work expense disregard for that income they take that whole amount make it taxable and reduce their unemployment. A volunteer who makes a run on the ambulance and got paid for the hour or two it took, why did that tip the scale that that volunteer no longer had badger care.

### Commitment

These volunteers are committed to community. They take time away from family and home to keep our town safe. They come forward when needed outside of their town they assist where needed as it is what we do. It is not done for the money we make, it is knowing we make a difference in where we live.