



# *City of Perth Amboy Fire Department*



## *Annual Report For the Year 2014*





2014 has seen a significant reduction in structure fires; this directly saves lives, reduces injuries, and property destruction. The key to reducing fires is awareness and prevention, as well as responding to an emergency with an adequate amount of trained firefighters. The Perth Amboy Fire Department has been attempting to not just teach children fire prevention safety and strategies but teach the entire family as well, which is one of the main objectives of the annual Open House. Throughout the year the department participates in many community events, so that the fire safety message is being delivered year round not just during October's "Fire Prevention Week". One of the biggest challenges the Fire Department will face in 2015 and in years to come is the department as a whole is getting younger and losing experienced firefighters due to retirements. This new younger department will be working harder to be as safe as possible and remain on the cutting edge of the fire service by training and learning from the senior most firefighters and working smarter and safer. The department owes it to itself and the citizens to do so.



**Career Division:**

The Fire Department has experienced significant changes in 2014 with the retirement of five firefighters. These retirements include Battalion Chief Tim Simon, Firefighters Vincent Adamkiewicz, Michael Anderson, Brain Kenny and Antoni Wilimczyk. The department is losing 123 years of combined experience and a wealth of knowledge. The department wishes them all the best in their future endeavors.

After eight years of applying, the City of Perth Amboy was notified that we were awarded a \$477,000 Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response (SAFER) grant. This grant covers the salaries of four firefighters for their first two years, allowing the department to be in compliance with NFPA 1710, the National Standard for Firefighter Staffing for career departments. This now allows the department to staff each apparatus with four firefighters. In February the department hired the four new firefighters and after successfully completing their training Mayor Wilda Diaz swore in Firefighters David Bonilla, Thomas Macri, Joan Munoz and Freddie Vazquez.



On March 28<sup>th</sup> Mayor Diaz officially promoted Abraham Pitre as Chief of Department, after serving in an acting capacity since the retirement of Chief Volk in July 2013. It was noted during Chief Pitre's promotion that he is the first Hispanic Career Chief in New Jersey.

In anticipation of the retirements the Department hired five replacement firefighters in the fall so that they would be ready to be placed onto a shift prior to the retiring firefighters leaving. The five new firefighters were sworn in on November 25<sup>th</sup>: Eric Lewis, Kevin Metz, Joseph Sepelyak, Frank Schumera Jr., and Jaime Tavera. On this day along with swearing in the new firefighters, Mayor Diaz also administered the oath of office to Captain John Breyta as he was promoted to Battalion Chief.



*Battalion Chief Breyta along with Probationary Firefighters Lewis, Metz, Schumera, Sepelyak and Tavera at their November Swearing In*

The department's Marine unit continues to provide the only year round water based fire & rescue services available in the immediate area. Marine 5 has made several water based rescues from vessels in distress in the area waterways and provided initial search and rescue services at various incidents during the year. One of which was on September 29<sup>th</sup> members were able to locate a male who jumped from the Victory Bridge. This male was found alive and treated on board and eventually transferred to awaiting EMS.

Members continue with on-going operational training and maintenance to maintain its year round ready to respond status. Marine 5 made a total of 36 responses during 2014 to a variety of water based emergencies. The marine unit responded to a total of 19 incidents in 2013 which is an increase of 89%. The unit has been utilized by municipalities from New York City to New Brunswick for a variety of assignments ranging from stranded vessels to marine fires, hazardous materials incidents and persons in the water.

In 2014 the Perth Amboy Fire Department Marine Unit became part of a regionalized marine task force. The purpose of the task force is to provide fire rescue services to the Port of New York and New Jersey which starts in the Arthur Kill in Perth Amboy. Other fire departments that have joined the task force are: Newark, Kearney, Hoboken, Secaucus, Jersey City, Linden, Carteret, Bayonne, North Hudson Regional, Edgewater and Fire Department of New York City (FDNY). Representatives meet regularly with the United States Coast Guard to prepare for any anticipated maritime emergencies. An example of the task force at work was a multiple alarm warehouse fire in Keasbey where several of the boats were able to supply 15,000 gallons of water per minute to be able to successfully extinguish the fire. Perth Amboy's fire boat was the sole fire boat operating for the first two hours of the incident.

The unit has also been requested to assist or stand by at various events along the local waterways during the year including:



- ❖ *Celebrate the Amboys*
- ❖ *Highland Park Fireworks Display*
- ❖ *Perth Amboy Memorial Day Ceremony*
- ❖ *Macy's Fireworks Display*
- ❖ *Woodbridge 4th of July fireworks*
- ❖ *Carteret Memorial Day Ceremony*

Through a continued Inter-Local Service Agreement between the City of Perth Amboy and Middlesex County, which partners the department with the Middlesex County Health Department and Hazardous Materials Unit, the department continues to serve as the main back-up agency to the Middlesex County Hazardous Materials Unit for Mass Decontamination response. The need to support the County unit is critical to the emergency response capabilities throughout not only Middlesex County, but also the entire northern New Jersey region; especially in the event of any type of Chemical Biological, Radioactive, Nuclear or Explosive terrorist incident. This also allows the department to have these services immediately available to our citizens, an advantage over most other municipalities in the County

### **Volunteer Division:**

The members of our Volunteer Division continue to be an active participant in department operations. The Bureau continues to develop into a cohesive; well trained and disciplined member of the local emergency response system. Several new members were brought into the ranks of the volunteer division during 2014. As of the end of the year, all members have completed their required fire academy training and have integrated into the full operation of the Division. Their addition to the ranks of the Volunteer Division brings the total number of Certified Volunteer Division members to 20.

The Volunteer Division has continued to maintain their training participation as well as day to day department activities. Members completed a total of 1104 man-hours of training throughout the year.

Members also continue to actively participate in the In-Station duty program. This program allows members to spend 4 hour blocks of "on duty" time in the firehouse to respond with the initial response apparatus to alarms, providing for additional manpower on initial arriving apparatus at an emergency incident. In addition, the In-Station duty program was modified so that every Saturday morning volunteers were scheduled to standby in so that the department could deploy the fire boat for training on a regular basis. The In-Station Duty Program also serves to foster a cohesive working relationship between members of the Career and Volunteer Divisions. Members have spent over 4,000 man-hours participating in this activity during the year; a tremendous increase from 2,500 in 2013.



*Members of the Volunteer Division participating in Training at the Fire HQ during day time and night time drills.*

**Department Training:** On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014, Firefighter David Diaz was placed in charge of the Department's Training Division. The department saw a continued increase in both In-Service and outside agency training during the year. A total of 11,806 hours of training were completed by the Department an increase of over 5,000 hours from 2013. (10,702 Career/1,104 Volunteer). The increase in training can be attributed to a commitment from the firefighters to better themselves in order to operate safely and provide the best service to the residents and visitors in Perth Amboy. All members in the department participate in annual required training topics including Hazardous Materials, Right-to-Know, Bloodborne Pathogens, and Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus/Fit Testing. In addition a wide variety of firematic topics were covered including:

- \* Coaching Emergency Vehicle Operations
- \* Water Supply & Hose Line Advancement
- \* Ventilation
- \* Search & Rescue
- \* Thermal Imaging Camera Operations
- \* Bail Out Training
- \* Water Rescue
- \* Flammable Gas Fires Operations
- \* Ladder Rescue Operations
- \* National Incident Management System
- \* Accountability Training
- \* Mayday Training
- \* Firefighter Rescue



*Members participating in High Angle Training at Middlesex County Fire Academy*

Department members also continue to take advantage of various training opportunities offered through outside agencies. Members completed a total of 53 courses of instruction offered by 15 outside agencies throughout the country. Members completed a total of 6,466 hours of training offered through outside training agencies. In many cases, members are able to bring the education back to share with other members of the department through in-service training.



**Industry:** The department also continues to maintain a good working relationship with various local industries throughout the city. Members once again spent a week of training at the Buckeye facility, conducting hands on training on with the new processes that Buckeye has put in place. This year the department contracted with another industrial facility in Sayreville to provide confined space rescue services. In addition, industrial site training was conducted at Morton Salt, Ashland Corporation, Next Era Energy and Gerdau Ameristeel. This annual training allows members to not only interact with staff of the facility, but also provides valuable information to department members in case of an actual emergency incident within the facility.



*Confined Space Training at Gerdau Ameisteel*

### **National Fire Incident Reporting Data:**



The fire department responded to a total of 2,084\* incidents in 2014, an average of 6 responses per day. This is consistent with the previous four years.

Utilizing data and definitions compiled by the National Fire Incident Reporting System, a department response to a “*Fire*” incident includes any response

generated by the fire department to an open flame in need of extinguishment.

In 2014, the department responded to 184 fires, compared to 229 in 2014. In addition, a “*Building Fire*” is classified as any fire within a building with the exception of confined fires involving cooking with no extension from the cooking container, a fire confined to a chimney or flue, incinerator or trash compactor or fuel/oil burner with no flame extension outside of the heating unit.

The total number of building fires has decreased to 20 from compared to 46 in 2013. Of the 20 building fires, all were kept to the initial alarm or a “working Fire” response level. None were upgraded to a multiple alarm status, which are two alarms or greater. In 2013 16 building fires were classified as a multiple alarm fire. This decrease is wonderful news it is hard to pin point the exact cause in the decrease. Regardless of the cause in the decrease; fire prevention education, early detection with smoke detectors or an aggressive interior attack to keep the fire small and to the area of origin, we are hoping the trend continues into 2015.

The department also continues to see an increase in the amount of service orientated type calls for assistance to the public, ranging from lock outs and residents trapped in elevators to flooded basements and animal rescues. The department responded to 1,900 calls for non-fire or EMS assistance by members of the public during 2014. \*Totals are until 12/30.

Along with handling emergencies in the City of Perth Amboy the department also responded to multi-alarm fires in surround municipalities including: Avenel, Carteret, Keasbey, Woodbridge , Iselin, South Amboy, South Plainfield and Cheesequake.

### **Public Fire Education:**

Through Fire House tours and school visits, the department was again able to provide fire prevention safety education to more than 8,000 children within the city. Department members conducted more than 40 Fire House tours and school visits during the course of the year.

The department has also been represented at Career Day programs that were conducted at McGinnis, Shull, Peterson, Wilentz, Ceres and Flynn Schools as well as the High School during the course of the year.



The department also continues to expand programs and training provided to various groups and agencies throughout the city including:



*Members conducting fire prevention education*

- \* Catholic Charities
- \* St. Peter's Church
- \* National Night Out
- \* Puerto Rican Association for Human Development
- \* Perth Amboy Seniors Organization
- \* Perth Amboy Board of Ed

The Perth Amboy Fire Department held its 4th Annual Open House at Fire Headquarters during Fire Prevention Week in October. Over 400 members of the community attended the event. The event has been growing every year; the Open House allows the public to view what the Fire department does by showcasing rescue demonstrations as well as the equipment. With the assistance of the fire unions and local businesses we are able to donate numerous smoke/carbon monoxide detectors and fire extinguishers to the public. The event is becoming a yearly get together for families where they can learn about fire safety as a family.

A variety of fire prevention and fire service activities were available including the Fire Safety House from the Middlesex County Fire Academy, fire rescue demonstrations by members of the department and an endurance course, where Firefighters assisted members of the public to complete. In addition, raffles, prizes and refreshments were also provided. The interest from the public insures that the open house will be an annual event for years to come.



*A large crowd gathers to hear about fire safety.*

This year the Fire Department collaborated with the American Red Cross to provide free smoke detectors with installations to residents of one and two family homes. The event was kicked off with a canvassing event where Volunteers with the American Red Cross teamed up with the Perth Amboy Fire Department and HOPE worldwide and went door-to-door in fire-affected neighborhoods of Perth Amboy. Nearly 50 volunteers braved the bad weather and were out in the rain offering smoke alarm installation in homes that need them and teaching people about what they can do now to be prepared should a fire break out in their home. The campaign is looking to reduce deaths and injuries from home fires across the country by as much as 25 percent over the next five years. This campaign will continue through 2015.



In the summer of 2014 the department placed in service a new fire engine. This Engine is identical to the engine that was placed in to service in early 2013. With the department purchasing the same engine this minimizes training; this also standardizes the equipment layout on the engines. The City administration made a concerted effort to modernize and replace the aging fire apparatus which accomplishes two goals; it minimizes maintenance and repair costs as well as makes the fleet safer.



*The new Engine #1  
2014 Pierce Arrow XT 1500 gpm Engine*

With the assistance and cooperation of both the Fire Officers and Firefighters unions the department has established a formal Honor Guard Ceremonial Unit which will be utilized to represent the department and the City at Official functions as well as Fire Department Functions. This ceremonial unit is a way to honor firefighters who die in the line of duty. They will assist and guide in the conducting and performance of fallen fire fighter line of duty funeral services both to this department and surrounding departments. The members are dedicated to developing and elevating the ceremonial knowledge and skill level of the honor guard unit while reinforcing a sense of pride and compassion by upholding honor guard traditions with precise attention to detail.



*Honor Guard members: (from left to right) Firefighters Davis Vazquez, Frank Rezes, James Ashby and Danny Arroyo*

Now in our second year the Perth Amboy Fire Department collaborated and partnered with the Personalized Learning Academy (PLA) and the Accelerated High School (AcHS) Learning Through Interest/Internship (LTI) program. The start of this firefighting mentoring program at the Fire Department was for those students who had an interest in learning more about the functions, operations and responsibilities of the Fire Department and which could potentially lead to a future career interest in a rewarding profession for these student interns.

From the start of this program we have mentored Education Center high school students on what it takes to work for the Fire Department, not only as a Fire Fighter but, with many of the internal responsibilities as well as proactive prevent functions, fire safety awareness and first aid. The program provided mentorship leadership, classroom instructions, hands on training, and real world experiences. This experience has been rewarding both for the students as well as the members of the department.



*Two interns being instructed on proper ladder usage*

Day in and day out regardless of the weather or time of day the members of the Perth Amboy Fire Department have demonstrated time and time again that they are committed to the safety of the residents and visitors of the City of Perth Amboy which is evident on the actions that have been recognized through 2014; for various actions on duty and off-duty from saving drowning victims to pulling unconscious victims from burning buildings.

The fire department has been looking at ways to deliver the message of fire safety and promoting the department, social media has been a key tool in being able to reach the masses, specifically the younger generations. The department's page on <https://www.facebook.com/perthamboyfd> currently has 1620 followers and it is a way for the department to reach the community instantly.

During the spring, the department collaborated with the Perth Amboy Board of Education, Police Department and Raritan Bay Medical Center to plan and conduct a full scale school bus accident drill. The purpose of the drill was to test and evaluate the capabilities of local responders in handling a mass casualty incident. With the help of student actors the drill was a great success and it was air on PA-CH 34 for viewing.

The department continually looks for additional funding sources that can alleviate the burden on the taxpayers. This year we secured \$477,000 in grant money and are always looking into other grants that come available through federal sources. We have added an additional \$60,000 to the 2015 budget by contracting rescue services to out of town facilities, as well as looking to local industries for assistance.

Like in years past the department has remained aware of the financial status of the city and we will continue to do so in the future. We continue to do more with less; the members of the department continuously go above and beyond when dealing with building and equipment maintenance and repair. During the past year alone, work performed by members of the department conservatively saved thousands. This continued cooperation and pride in the department will enable the scarce financial resources to continue to be spent on items that are absolutely necessities.

Any alternative funding ability that can be obtained outside of the local property taxation, in addition to continued fiscal responsibility will assist in overcoming the financial obstacles that lie ahead for the department during the upcoming year and beyond. Striving to become a strong and cohesive, well-supervised and trained combination fire department that will be able to meet the challenges of the new millennium by providing fire suppression, medical and rescue services, promote public awareness and fire prevention activities to decrease the perils of fire; as well as responding to other emergencies to best protect the community.



# PERTH AMBOY FIRE DEPARTMENT



**"Always vigilant · planning for the future."**