

# MENDOTA HEIGHTS FIRE DEPARTMENT



## 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

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"Just fine . . . we're good . . . I'm good." These phrases have been my standard reply for much of my personal and professional life when anyone asks me how things are at the station. If the person asking had a few minutes to spare, I shared recent successes, upcoming events or how well things were going.

Sometime in 2020, my standard answer changed to, "we're hanging in there . . . we're just trying to figure it out." Again, if someone had the time, I would elaborate.

By the end of 2020, my elevator answer changed to a speech, which would usually go something like this:

Well, we're trying to finish construction on the station, which is not an easy task since we're limited to virtual meetings with the construction team, and the supply chain for construction material is all out of whack. Our membership is down; we're trying to recruit new firefighters, which is not an easy sales pitch amid civil unrest, in the middle of a global pandemic, with a partially-built station. Operationally, we're trying to find a way to provide Fire and EMS service – which by their very nature occur in environments in which it is impossible to maintain social distancing. Frequent, hands-on training is the backbone

of the fire service and is required to maintain our proficiency and State certifications, but we are still looking for the blueprint on how to do that with a half-built fire station. How about public safety education and outreach? I won't even go there.

As 2020 was coming to an end, my answer changed once again to, "we're doing ok . . . we're hanging in there and adapting." Looking back, we really were doing ok! We managed to attract and hire a rookie class of six talented and motivated individuals. The station is 99% complete and it is fantastic. Our training staff did an amazing job reinventing how training was delivered. Our Public Education team managed to deliver several programs to our community through out-of-the-box thinking. Our officers and firefighters continued to provide a high level of service to our citizens in a timely and professional manner.

Looking back, all of the challenges we faced provided us the opportunity to grow, explore new ideas, and even learn a few things along the way. We are a better and more prepared department because of these challenges, which explains why my answer is back to, "just fine . . . we're good . . . I'm good."

*Chief Dave Dreelan  
Mendota Heights Fire Department*



## A message from the Mendota Heights Fire Relief Association

When you hear "Relief Association" you may think of groups such as the Red Cross assisting in the aftermath of a catastrophic event. While these groups do a marvelous job in providing relief to those affected by natural disasters, a relief association within a fire department serves a different function. These types of relief associations manage the retirement funds for the general

membership of the fire department.

Each year, the City and the State of Minnesota contribute financially to the Fire Relief Association's retirement pension fund. The fund is managed by the State of Minnesota, and it is a balanced portfolio designed for long-term growth. Once a member of the department reaches their twenty-year anniversary, they become fully vested

upon retirement. The retirement pension serves as a benefit for a long and dedicated career of service. Additionally, it also serves as a selling point to anyone who may be interested in dedicating their time, efforts, and energies to the community through membership on the Mendota Heights Fire Department.



## Support the Fire Relief Association

Beyond managing the department's retirement fund, the Fire Relief Association also manages fundraising to support various projects not covered by the City budget, such as the annual retirement banquet, scholarship programs, and community engagement activities.

The Fire Relief Association is always happy to accept donations. If you would like to support our efforts, please mail a check, payable to the Mendota Heights Fire Relief Association, to:

Mendota Heights Fire Department  
2121 Dodd Road  
Mendota Heights, Minnesota 55120

Thank you for your consideration.

*The above statement has been prepared and paid for by the Mendota Heights Fire Relief Association.*



## Hanging Up Their Bunker Gear For The Last Time

As we closed the chapter on 2020, we also said goodbye to four long term members and their years of service: **Rich Burrows** with twenty-three years; **Rich Gapinski** with nineteen years; **Justin Fitzgerald** with fourteen years; and **Jason Stone** with ten years. When members of the department retire, not only do we miss their presence, we also miss their collective experience – in this case sixty-six years' worth – as well as their individual talents and contributions.

For much of his career, Firefighter Burrows managed the department's safety program.

Rich brought a sense of calmness to the fire ground and provided a “voice of reason” both professionally and personally. Rich continues to work in Public Works for the City of Mendota Heights.

Firefighter Gapinski will be best remembered for his level-headed thinking, hardworking attitude, and food. In addition to his duties on the Fire Department, Rich owns a local restaurant so the membership got quite accustomed to enjoying appetizers after a night of training or station maintenance.

Firefighter Fitzgerald was passionate about

our trucks. Not only did he enjoy driving them, he was always the first to volunteer anytime one of them needed some extra TLC or reorganization. Justin worked full time in the EMS field, so he provided an additional level of expertise related to EMS calls and equipment.

Many would consider Firefighter Stone the department's social chairman. Jason understood the stress that came with trying to balance firefighting with a career and raising a family. To help maintain the balance, Jason was always willing to host a family event or find creative ways to build camaraderie.

As sad as we are to say goodbye to four members, we're excited that six new members began their Fire Service careers in 2020. After a long hiring process that started in the spring and ended in December, our new members are Michael Agan, Jeff Bostic, Luke Olson, David Perrault, Steve Reamer and Dustin Truesdell. So what is the common thread that brought these six individuals forward to the department? Well, every one of them were asked why they wanted to join the department, and each in their own words replied with “wanting to give back to their community.”

*Pictured L to R: Rich Burrows, Rich Gapinski, Justin Fitzgerald and Jason Stone*



*Photo courtesy of Jack Kennedy*

# BY THE NUMBERS



## 2020 Summary of Fire Calls

FIRE	Lilydale	Mendota	Mendota Heights	Sunfish Lake	Total
Building fire	0	0	5	0	5
Cooking fire, confined to container	0	0	2	0	2
Chimney or flue fire	0	0	1	0	1
Vehicle fire	0	0	5	0	5
Brush/grass fire	0	0	4	0	4
Outside rubbish, trash, waste fire	0	0	2	0	2
Dumpster fire	0	0	2	1	3
Excessive heat/scorch burns	1	0	0	0	1
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>23</b>

RESCUE & EMERGENCY SERVICE	Lilydale	Mendota	Mendota Heights	Sunfish Lake	Total
Medical assist	5	3	43	0	51
Accident with injuries	2	0	5	0	7
Extrication from vehicle	0	0	1	0	1
Removal from elevator	0	0	1	0	1
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>60</b>

HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS	Lilydale	Mendota	Mendota Heights	Sunfish Lake	Total
Gas spill	0	0	4	0	4
Gas leak	0	0	10	1	11
Carbon monoxide alarm	0	1	12	1	14
Electrical wiring/equipment problem	0	0	1	0	1
Heat from short circuit	0	1	0	0	1
Powerline down	1	0	6	2	9
Arcing, shorted electrical equipment	0	0	5	0	5
Vehicle accident, general clean up	0	0	1	0	1
Lightning strike	0	0	1	0	1
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>47</b>

# ANNUAL REPORT



SERVICE CALL	Lilydale	Mendota	Mendota Heights	Sunfish Lake	Total
Defective elevator, no occupants	0	0	1	0	1
Unauthorized burning	0	0	1	0	1
Lock-out	0	0	1	0	1
Assist police	0	0	1	0	1
Public service	0	0	2	0	2
TOTALS:	0	0	6	0	6

GOOD INTENT	Lilydale	Mendota	Mendota Heights	Sunfish Lake	Total
Dispatched & cancelled	1	3	43	6	53
Authorized controlled burn	0	0	1	1	2
Smoke scare	1	0	10	0	11
HazMat with no HazMat release	0	1	10	0	11
Citizen complaint	0	0	1	0	1
TOTALS:	2	4	65	7	78

FALSE ALARM AND FALSE CALLS	Lilydale	Mendota	Mendota Heights	Sunfish Lake	Total
Malicious, false call/alarm	0	0	4	0	4
Unintentional	5	1	37	4	47
Malfunction	0	5	39	2	46
TOTALS:	5	6	80	6	97

GRAND TOTALS	16	15	262	18	311
MUTUAL AID CALLS:				37	
CALL TOTAL:				348	

## MUTUAL AID CALLS

Eagan	9
Inver Grove Heights	6
Saint Paul	1
South Metro Fire (South & West St. Paul)	21
TOTAL:	37

## Mendota Heights 2020 Fire Losses:

PROPERTY	CONTENT	TOTAL
\$207,636	\$136,100	\$343,736

# FIREFIGHTER TRAINING



## Training During the Pandemic

The Mendota Heights Training Department strives to provide high-quality training to all members of the department. We train on all facets of the profession in order to meet and exceed local, state and federal standards.

As was the case everywhere in 2020, our lives at the Fire Station changed with the introduction and integration of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines regarding COVID-19. Following these guidelines and the mandates issued by the governor were critical to protecting staff and the public we came in contact with, and to ensuring the department was available to respond when needed. Of course, this created challenges as we were required to transition to remote solutions and practice social distancing.

We were able to produce in-house training videos shared on an internal website for staff to complete while maintaining social distancing. As the situation with COVID-19 evolved, we were able to source commercially available online training options that met federal and state standards. The online training was specifically designed to improve knowledge of fire behavior and the most recent research into the effects of fire on modern homes.

We also took significant steps to maintain firefighter health and safety for hands-on

training. To maximize social distancing, trainings were broken down into smaller groups within larger areas of the newly remodeled and expanded station, and we all got very accustomed to wearing our masks at all times – for trainings, call response, or any other time we met at the station. These modifications allowed us to continue working on the customary firefighter skills: ladders; ropes and knots; search and rescue; tactics; and fire ground communications.

An important part of operating a modern fire department is working with our neighboring departments. We rely on our neighbors to assist us when needed, and they rely on our assistance in return. The Training Department worked to continue building those relationships by conducting specialized training for joint operations.

We were able to plan and conduct a Water Supply operation with South Metro Fire Department. This simulated fighting a fire in an area without hydrants, and involved working with a water tender (tanker). We also worked with South Metro Fire Department to provide our firefighters with specialized training in Water Rescue techniques.

In 2020, sixty-two formal training sessions were completed compared with seventy-two sessions in 2019. However, we were able to adjust the way we trained during the pandemic and still provided more total training hours to staff during the year. This allowed for a total of 2,800 hours of training; an average of ninety-four hours of training per firefighter over the course of the year.

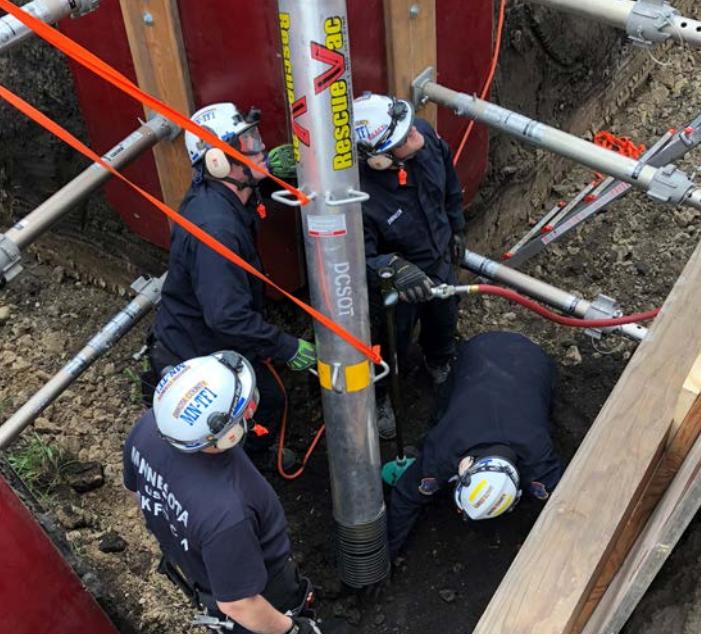
## 2020 TRAINING HOURS



Average Per  
Firefighter



Department Training  
Hours - Total



## Specialized Training

Though the department trains thoroughly for the most commonly encountered situations, there are certain specialized skills that are not practical to train all firefighters on. To fill some of those gaps the department relies on the Dakota County Special Operations Team (DCSOT). The DCSOT is a cooperative effort of public safety agencies in Dakota County, which specializes in incidents involving hazardous materials, weapons of mass destruction, technical rope rescue, confined space rescue, trench rescue, and structural collapse rescue.

The team consists of thirty-six members from police, fire and EMS agencies within Dakota County. Team members operate as highly skilled rescuers, while ensuring crime scene preservation and the tactical safety of those involved in the incident. The DCSOT is on call 24/7 to assist fire and police agencies within Dakota County with these specialized incidents. Mendota Heights Firefighter Dan Johnson is currently serving on this team.

## Interested in Becoming a Mendota Heights Firefighter?

Have you ever had the desire to give something back to your community and be a part of a larger cause? Build on your leadership skills? Become a part of a larger family that can create lifelong friendships? Maybe even take your education skillset to a different level or direction?

The Mendota Heights Fire Department is forming a list of qualified candidates for future openings. We are looking for unique and driven individuals who would like to learn more about our department and how we operate. We're looking for candidates who:

- Desire to give back to their community
- Demonstrate drive, ambition, and commitment
- Function well in a team environment
- Are 18 years of age or older
- Have a high school diploma or equivalent
- Have a valid driver's license
- Live or work within six minutes of the Fire Station

All work experience backgrounds are welcome with all necessary training and education provided. Our department consists of trades professionals, city employees, sales executives, corporate professionals and even some career firefighters from other departments.

Established in 1947, we have a very strong history with a deep tradition of serving Mendota Heights, Mendota, Lilydale, and Sunfish Lake. Mendota Heights firefighters are "paid on call" volunteers (with a pension) who respond to both fire and medical emergencies. There is no doubt that the thirty-two members of this department enjoy their "calling" by helping people in their time of need, helping each other, and teaching fire prevention to all age groups. It is a rewarding life experience.

Learn more at [mendotaheightsmn.gov/becomeafirefighter](http://mendotaheightsmn.gov/becomeafirefighter) or email [FDRecruiting@mendotaheightsmn.gov](mailto:FDRecruiting@mendotaheightsmn.gov).

## Tour the New Station

After years of planning and nearly two years of construction, the new addition and the remodeling of the old station is complete and ready to service the community for many years to come.

Some of the more significant upgrades are dedicated training spaces, a state-of-the-art classroom and Emergency Operations center, dedicated administration space for department officers and staff, modern decontamination and carcinogen control systems, upgraded IT capabilities, and increased space in the apparatus bay. Take a video tour of the completed station online at [bit.ly/MHFD\\_Station\\_Tour](http://bit.ly/MHFD_Station_Tour).

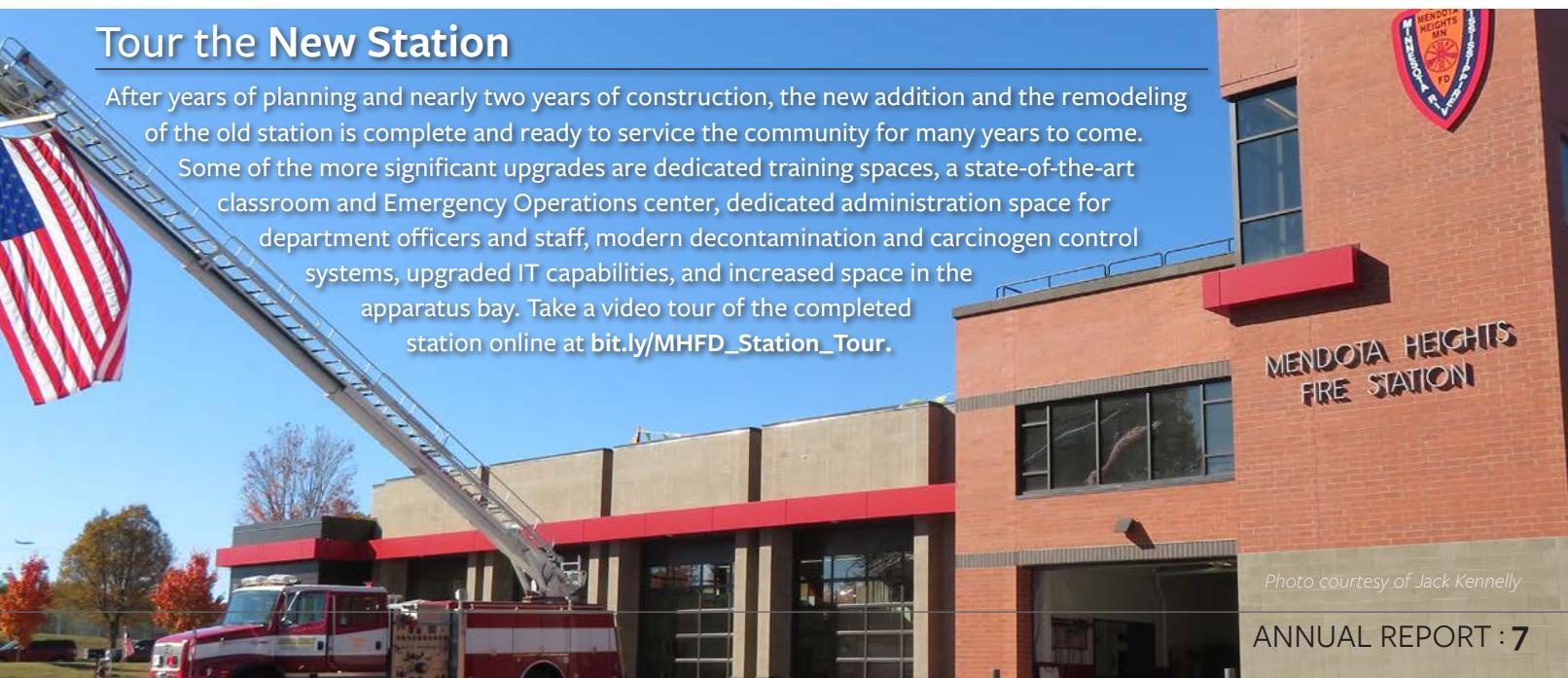


Photo courtesy of Jack Kennelly



City of Mendota Heights  
Fire Department  
1101 Victoria Curve  
Mendota Heights, MN 55118  
mendotaheightsmn.gov

Photos courtesy of Jack Kennedy



## Public Education Makes a Difference

Due to COVID-19, the Public Education Department wasn't able to be physically present at events as in previous years. With event restrictions and social distancing measures, we had to rethink how we could continue to reach out and serve the community.

Online fire prevention and safety content was quickly developed to be accessibly 24/7 through the City's website. This included fire prevention videos completed entirely in-house, and resources from the National Fire Protection Association. We also created online content for a virtual children's Safety Camp in the summer. Our fall outreach also adapted by sending online content and handouts to the elementary schools for

Fire Prevention Week, and driving by many of the schools and daycares with our fire engine since we weren't able to have live visits.

During Fire Prevention Week, instead of hosting our usual open house, we got creative and hosted a drive-thru event. Members of the community drove around the outside of the Fire Station, and we were able to visit and discuss fire safety topics at a safe distance.

The Mendota Heights Fire Department is dedicated to community outreach and fire safety education. If you are interested in scheduling a public education event, please contact City Hall 651-452-1850.



## Fire Safety Learning Library

Visit the  
**Fire Safety Learning Library at**  
**[mendotaheightsmn.gov/  
fireprevention](http://mendotaheightsmn.gov/fireprevention)**

Explore a range of fire prevention resources and materials for kids, families, educators, and the community. You may even recognize some familiar faces of the firefighters as they introduce topics and provide valuable fire safety information.