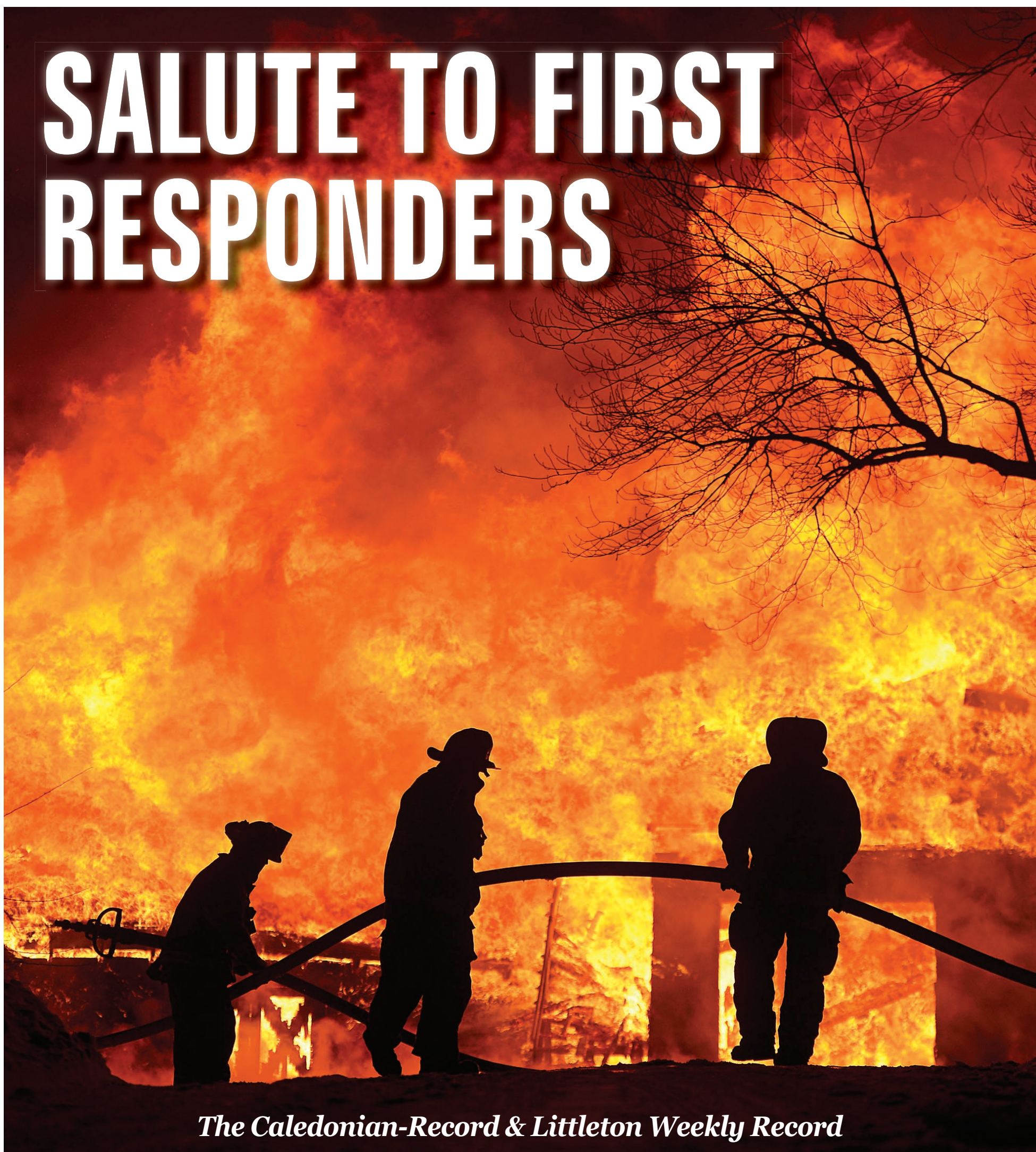


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THANKING THE HEROES AMONG US

Our salute to first responders is a small token of thanks to the heroes among us. These are the people who unflinchingly rush to the front line in times of emergency. Our firefighters rush into burning buildings; our rescuers provide compassionate care when we're at our most vulnerable; our police are the first and best line of defense against our most chilling threats and disturbing social ills. We report on many of these same scenes and have a deep, first-hand appreciation for the calm, focus and competence they each lend to life's most chaotic situations. When all hell breaks loose, these people get to work. We see these good folks during the day and greet them as if they're like us. They aren't. And our appreciation for their heroism and selflessness grew more acute during the tumult of a pandemic. When everyone else was hunkered down in

the safety of their homes, these professionals continued to provide unfaltering care. They transcended brutal conditions to make life better for anyone in need; they quickly respond to our accidents at any hour of the day; they run headlong into chaotic situations from which everyone else flees. In so doing, they frequently put themselves in harm's way with little thought to their well-being. We also know from experience that these heroes work long hours, holidays, and weekends when most everyone else is home with family. They don't get paid very much for putting their lives on the line, but overwhelmingly they perform their harrowing jobs humbly, reliably and professionally. We also watch them volunteer their free time to local organizations, thereby strengthening our communities when they're on and off the clock. We don't say it enough but we're eternally grateful for their heroism and selfless dedication.

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RESCUE

DIRECTED BY DISPATCHER, HELP IS ON THE WAY

BY DANA GRAY
Staff Writer

ST. JOHNSBURY — Communication is key. First responders don't leave their stations until they're sent. They don't know where they're going until they're directed. They don't know the details of the emergency until they're told. A potentially life-saving connection is dependent on dispatchers.

Anthony Skelton, who serves as the communications director at the St. Johnsbury Dispatch Center, said a dispatcher is an integral cog in the wheel that is emergency services.

"So there's obviously a ton of different entities that make up the cogs: dispatch, police, fire, EMS, wrecker companies, mental health; all of those are pieces that are important to the wheel," he said. "We receive the information and then we are the traffic director, sending it to the appropriate agency to handle or referring people to the appropriate agency if we're not the one."

The St. Johnsbury Dispatch Center operates out of the public safety building on Main Street. Dispatchers handle fire and emergency medical services calls for communities in much of Caledonia and southern Essex counties. They also handle



Working the communication equipment in the St. Johnsbury Dispatching Center on a recent afternoon are Anthony Skelton and Lisa Young, while Michael Stringer waits to begin his shift. (Photo by Dana Gray)

communications for the St. Johnsbury Police Department.

Skelton started working in the dispatch center in May 2007. He started serving as director in 2018. Longest-serving dispatcher Adam Colburn has been on the job for 24 years. The remaining dispatchers are Lisa Young with 11 years, who in addition to dispatching duties also handles an

increasingly higher volume of fingerprinting requests, Felicia Mallett with five years, Katey Harris, who's been dispatching there for a year, and Michael Stringer, who started Aug. 1.

There's still an opening for a seventh dispatcher, Skelton said, and "it's a struggle to find qualified people."

To be an effective dispatcher requires calm amid crisis and an exceptional ability to multitask.

"It would have to be somebody that can take the pressure, you know, be able to concentrate along with multitask, prioritize, have empathy and then at the end of the day, go home and can't really talk about it," Skelton said. "It definitely takes a special kind of person."

Seated in the dispatch center on a recent afternoon, Skelton gestured toward Young, who was staffing a communications station.

"Let's take Lisa here; she's one of those people that can definitely empathize with callers but also seems to not have a problem putting them in their place when she needs to," said Skelton.

The range of calls a dispatcher takes each day is vast. There are legitimate emergencies. There are information-seekers. There are prolific complainers whose problems aren't nearly as big as they make them out to be, Skelton said, and there

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We Salute Our First Responders

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RESCUE

DHART... LIFE-SAVING INTERVENTION FROM ABOVE

BY TODD WELLINGTON
Staff Writer

When there's a horrific crash and all hope is lost, just look to the sky.

Since July 1, 1994, the DHART Helicopter has been swooping into rural areas in Vermont and New Hampshire to quickly transport the most badly injured victims to the emergency room at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in Lebanon, N.H.

But the DHART Helicopter is more than just a ride. The medical personnel and equipment on board make it a flying intensive care unit.

"As soon as we had extricated the patient, DHART was overhead and landing," said CALEX Ambulance CEO Michael Wright, as he discussed a recent crash in North Concord. "This allows for rapid care and transport directly to a trauma center with a critical care team that can provide advance procedures on the way."

According to the DHART (Dartmouth Hitchcock Advanced Response Team) website, the helicopter and its crew are ready to go at a moment's notice and usually launch within 5 minutes after receiving an emergency call.

The flight paramedics and nurses carry ad-



DHART and CALEX Ambulance rescue personnel wheel a seriously injured woman to the DHART helicopter in a Walden field off Route 15 on Tuesday, July 21, 2020. The woman was hurt in a head-on two-vehicle collision. (File Photo by Dana Gray)

vanced medical equipment including a supply of human blood to help stabilize patients at the scene.

The DHART program brings the hospital to the patient no matter where they are including on state highways, remote areas and even on moun-

tain tops.

But the local connection is a key element in the process.

"The helicopter can be called in by any medical professional who determines that someone is suffering from injuries that are above the capabilities of treatment for the local hospital," said St. Johnsbury Fire Chief Brad Reed. "So that could be the firefighters responding or first responders or ambulance personnel."

CALEX CEO Wright said the decision to call in the DHART helicopter is based on several factors.

"Severity of the injuries, stability of the patient and location of the incident," said Wright. "Does this patient benefit from rapid transport to a Level 1 Trauma Center or does this patient require advanced procedures such as chest tubes, blood products and other services that will benefit patient outcome immediately at the scene?"

The DHART helicopter landing zones (LZ) are often at local hospitals but the remote landing areas are based on the accessibility and distance from the incident.

"The LZ in most of our communities have been pre-determined," said Lyndonville Fire Chief Jeff Corrow. "DHART has the GPS coordi-

See **DHART**, Page 9

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FIRE

ST. JOHNSBURY, LITTLETON CHIEFS STRENGTHEN BOND

BY ROBERT BLECHL
Staff Writer

Two fire departments serving the largest towns in the region are being led by new chiefs dedicated to the fire service and using fresh sets of eyes to collaborate and develop innovative ways to improve public safety.

As the Northeast Kingdom and North Country continue to grow, the St. Johnsbury Fire Department and Littleton Fire Rescue are strengthening their ties and planning for the future to save lives and better serve the greater community.

Since becoming SJFD chief in January, Bradley Reed has been meeting regularly with LFR Chief Michael McQuillen.

“Our two departments historically have had a tight relationship,” said Reed. “Prior to me coming on as chief, we had lost touch of some of that, but Chief McQuillen and I have made a point to re-energize it and meet on a regular basis to strategize.”

Both have three decades in the fire service, with Reed working his way up the ranks in St. Johnsbury and McQuillen serving in the Londonderry Fire Department before becoming LFR chief in January 2021.



Littleton Fire Rescue Chief Michael McQuillen, left, shows St. Johnsbury Fire Chief Bradley Reed how the technology on LRF's new Engine 1 works. The two chiefs, both new in leading their departments, are collaborating in number of ways to improve public safety in the greater community, including through joint trainings and becoming familiar with each other's equipment so when they respond to incidents they can immediately snap into action. (Photo by Robert Blechl)

Drawing on a combined six decades of experience, their strategies for improving responses and service on both sides of the river include joint training involving St. J firefighters going to Littleton and Littleton firefighters to St. J, sharing resources and equipment, and maximizing efficiencies, especially in an era where call volumes continue to rise and maintaining sufficient full-time and call firefighter staff remains an ongoing challenge.

"Since [Reed] became chief, he and I have been working together and discussing how Littleton Fire and St. Johnsbury Fire can work better together," said McQuillen. "In that period of time, we utilized our manpower for things like a first-alarm call."

Now, any reported building fire in St. Johnsbury will draw an LFR crew on the initial call and any fire in Littleton a SJFD crew.

"It's worked out very well on the fires that we've had," said McQuillen. "Both Littleton has been very busy with calls over the last year and a half and the same thing with St. Johnsbury."

For meetings, McQuillen will visit Reed in St. Johnsbury and Reed will visit Littleton, where he was on Sept. 12 reviewing with McQuillen standard operating guidelines (SOGs) and standard

See **Chiefs**, Page 14

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RESCUE

ST. JOHNSBURY FIRE DEPARTMENT'S DENNIS FARNHAM III

BY KEVIN DOYON
Staff Writer

ST. JOHNSBURY — Family ties drew Dennis Farnham III to become a firefighter and a feeling of community drew him to the St. Johnsbury Fire Department.

His father used to be a firefighter, and he has uncles and cousins that still are.

"I have firefighters in my family and I like to help people," he said. "Seeing the smile on people's faces after helping them, there is no better feeling in the world. When someone has an emergency, it can be their worst day, and someone has to be there for them. As firefighters and EMTs we drop everything to help them out."

"St. Johnsbury has a homey feeling. Being a career firefighter has been a goal of mine and I knew I wanted my career to be in St. Johnsbury."

The 25-year-old is originally from Orono, Maine but moved to the Northeast Kingdom to attend Lyndon State College, now NVU-Lyndon. He spent three years there studying sports management and playing on the baseball team.

During that time, he also joined the Lyndonville Fire Department and would often go to

St. Johnsbury for fires or cover their station.

That's when it clicked, St. J FD was the perfect fit.

"I saw how they were with the community and I wanted to be a part of that," Farnham III said.

Community involvement goes far beyond responding to calls, he added. The FD offers a firefighting/EMS internship at St. J Academy, goes to schools to teach about fire safety and holds an annual golf tournament every year to raise funds for the Gene McDonough Scholarship Fund which is rewarded to a graduate seeking higher education in a first responder field.

They also do pre-plans for businesses, organize the Santa Fund and provide fire extinguisher training and fire safety for elderly housing complexes.

"Something that is really neat is that SJFD leaves dog treats and a water bowl in front of the firehouse in a red hydrant for people who walk by with their dogs," he added.

"I also saw how professional and efficient the fire department was while on a scene and I knew that was a place I wanted to be. When I walk through downtown and go into the shops or head out to the outskirts of town where there are more crops and farm-



St. Johnsbury Firefighter Dennis Farnham III in action. (Contributed Photo)

land, it gives me a welcoming feeling. That is what drew me in."

He joined in September as a probationary firefighter which is the starting rank for the first year.

"It means you have a lot to learn and you have to prove that you can do this job," Farnham III said.

The 24-hour shifts, followed by 48 off, took a little time to adjust to. But it's been the same special feeling of inclusion, sup-

port and community which initially intrigued him that has made the transition go smoothly.

"It can prevent you from spending time with your family outside of the job — this is why I try to do a lot with my family whenever possible," Farnham III said. "You learn how to balance this and get used to it just like everyone does when they get a job. You have your family at home and you have your family at the firehouse."

"Here at SJFD we welcome our family to come and visit us at the station. I think this is why it makes the job and time away from home easier. Knowing my wife and kid will always be able to come to see me while I am on shift and knowing they have a family here at the firehouse who loves them just as much as I do."

During those shifts, free time is spent learning where all the streets are in St. Johnsbury, learning how each truck operates and becoming efficient at it. While on probation, firefighters are tested on multiple categories and are expected to understand how the fire department operates.

There are also certifications needed, such as a Fire Level I

class, which is the basics of becoming a firefighter, and an EMT class because they must be cross-trained to respond to medical calls. Lastly, is a Candidate Physical Ability Test which ensures they are physically fit to perform the role.

"I have noticed that the guys and girls here at SJFD have been by my side helping me the whole way. They go above and beyond to make sure you understand how to properly do your job."

Farnham III has a lot to learn now, but that doesn't mean he's not thinking about his future, too. He hopes to become more advanced in the EMS side of the job and has aspirations of working towards the role of Chief one day.

St. J FD is responsible for the town of St. Johnsbury whether that be fire-related, technical rescue, water rescue, hazardous materials or EMS calls.

"We will be there for our community," Farnham III said.

They'll also be there for other communities including Lyndonville, Waterford, Concord, Danville, Barnet and even respond to calls in Littleton.

"With that being said, we need to make sure we are ready to perform at the highest level when we are called on. This is why we train while we are on shift and we also train as a department every Wednesday."

St. J FD responded to 1,365 calls last year. Farnham III added that they are going to roughly 200 more calls a month this year than normal.

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FIRE

FOR KOPP, ON-CALL IS WORTH THE SACRIFICE

BY PAUL HAYES
Staff Writer

LANCASTER — Mike Kopp has a passion for firefighting.

After 23 years with the Lancaster Fire Department, he continues to turn out day or night when duty calls.

Since his first day on Jan. 12, 1999, he has rotated through every role in the firehouse and currently serves as the assistant chief.

Now 52, he has no plans to quit anytime soon. “It sounds so trite, but it gets in your blood,” he said. “What I’ve often said is, it’s a certain type of person who’s attracted to this work. If you’re talking to one of those people, you don’t have to explain it because they already know it. And if you’re not talking to one of those people, you can’t explain it. A little bit of it is adrenaline. A lot of it is a willingness to help. And a big piece of it is the pride of membership, being part of something bigger than yourself.”

Kopp is a first-generation firefighter.

He signed up in part because his father, grandfather and great-grandfather had served in the military, and he wanted to follow in the family tradition of self-sacrifice for the greater good.

He also didn’t like riding a desk all day at the family business, North Country Ford in Lancaster.

He had already considered becoming a firefighter while attending Plymouth State University, and when he returned home, he took the plunge.

Like 80 percent of New Hampshire departments, Lancaster Fire is on-call, meaning that members do not have regular shifts and are summoned on a per-call basis.

In a short time, Kopp learned that call companies rely on cooperation and commitment.

“No firefighter works alone. All firefighters work as a team,” he said.

Members of call departments are not required to train or respond to every call.

However, Lancaster Fire holds 22 trainings a year (appx. 130 hours) so that its members maintain sharp skills for them to respond to any situation no matter how unusual or unexpected.

LFD members might spend another 100 hours a year at incident responses. Doing so requires them to step away from their personal and professional lives without warning and at a moment’s notice.

While members don’t attend every training or respond to every call, there is an expectation that they will dedicate themselves. Those who fail to meet baseline expectations are shown the door.

It can be challenging.

Kopp and his brother, Kieth, purchased North Country Ford from their father in 2008 and his work responsibilities grew exponentially. Despite that, Kopp made a concerted effort to remain available for fire calls to set an example for others.

“If people only participate when it’s convenient, it doesn’t work well,” Kopp said.

Being a call firefighter can be mentally and physically exhausting work. LFD members share intense experiences, form strong bonds, and achieve a high level of trust in one another, Kopp said.

As a result, they become like family.

“I really do enjoy working with the guys in the department,” Kopp said.

While North Country fire departments have struggled to recruit and retain call company members, Lancaster Fire currently enjoys a robust roster and a strong culture, Kopp said.

The department has stable leadership and a large core of experienced, highly-capable members.

That includes Kopp’s son, Alex, who also works at the dealership.

“He’s proud to tell you that he’s 30 years old but he joined [Lancaster Fire] when he was 14 [as an explorer]. And he’s been pretty active from the time he joined,” Kopp said.

For Kopp, there have been many memorable responses over the years.

One was on Jan. 16, 2013, when firefighters from seven departments contained a structure fire on Main Street. Kopp helped crews to salvage the building, which now houses the Polish Princess bakery, and prevent the fire from spreading to surrounding structures.

“That was definitely a memorable fire. That was a lot of work and obviously we have a lot of pride that the building is still standing,” Kopp said.

Another notable incident was the Jefferson Town Building fire on Feb. 1, 2021, that drew more than 50 firefighters from 10 local departments, including Lancaster Fire. Kopp and his son worked together on the call and helped to protect and save the neighboring Jefferson Fire station.

“When the Jefferson Town Hall burned it was my son and I on a hose line beside the building, putting water on the Jefferson Fire station. That was a memorable experience. Working that close with him, having that amount of fire, and the fact that the Jefferson Fire department did not burn down was certainly rewarding,” Kopp said.

Not every incident turns out well.

But when they do, it’s extremely rewarding.

Kopp recalled once, more than 15 years ago, when he responded to a head-on collision between two oncoming vehicles on Route 3.

“I was involved in a woman in a small car, and she was really stuck. We eventually extricated her from the car, this was in April,” he said. “At the Lancaster Fair that year a woman walked up and asked me who I was and told me who she was. And gave me a big hug. And she was the woman we had extricated. To this day, when she sees me around town, she will always give me a hug.”



Lancaster Fire Asst. Chief Mike Kopp responds to a fire at the Jefferson Town Hall on Monday, Feb. 1, 2021. (File Photo by Paul Hayes)

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POLICE

ST. JOHNSBURY POLICE OFFICER JASMINE HENDRY

BY KEVIN DOYON
Staff Writer

ST. JOHNSBURY — While others grew up wanting to be superheroes — Jasmine Hendry wanted to be a police officer.

If you ask her, they're the same thing.

"This is my 'Super Hero' job," she said. "Some kids have superheroes and the only way I can describe it is exactly that. I've always wanted to be an officer."

A St. J native, Hendry's career goals became more prominent in high school. After graduation, she obtained a bachelor's degree in Human Services and Psychology, with her dream job of being a police officer still well on her mind. As she began the process of applying for jobs, she saw an opening at St. J Police Department, applied and was offered an interview.

"I did not think I could be an officer because it was such a big job," Hendry said. "I've always wanted to do it but thought I would not be good enough."

"I got to a point where I finally said, 'it can't hurt to try,' so I did and after truly trying, I got it."

Hendry says after applying, the department runs a background check, conducts an interview and administers a polygraph test. If approved, the department can hire for full-time or part-time. Part-time requires two weeks at the Police Academy and full-time is 17 weeks.

Hendry was hired in February of 2022 and by March was enrolled in the Police Academy's 17-week program. After that, she joined St. J PD full-time.

Hendry's responsibilities include patrolling, responding to calls, completing paperwork and "just helping the community."

"There is no exact order [for a typical day]," she said. "You do the job as it comes."

Doing the job is a responsibility that Hendry takes great pride in.

"I saw being an officer as the way to get to everyone," she said. "I don't so much see it as putting my life on the line but more of getting to those who need or want help in any way small or big. There is something about rushing out to emergencies that just makes me feel like I'm doing something in the world and that I can really help others."

Hendry admits that it is a role in the community that isn't always appreciated.



St. Johnsbury Police Department's Jasmine Hendry. (Contributed Photo)

"Not everyone supports police and that can make the job hard," she said. "But there are a lot of people who do support police. Good support

or bad support, we still do our job if we are liked as officers or not.

"The role the St. Johnsbury Police Department serves in the community is helping in any way and situation we can."

In addition to patrolling the downtown and being an ongoing presence in the community, Hendry says she and her fellow officers train as much and as often as they can between their work schedules and personal lives.

"My goal as a new officer is to get better in every situation and be more knowledgeable," Hendry said.

She adds that it can be an around-the-clock job, sometimes being called out during all hours of the day or night.

"It's worth the time and commitment because it is something I never really thought I could do and there is so much the job has to offer with the community," Hendry said. "My most rewarding experience so far is just being able to be part of the department, knowing there is so much I can help with."

"It is rewarding to have the 'Super Hero' job I never thought I would be able to get," Hendry said.

FIRE

SHEFFIELD-WHEELOCK FIRE DEPARTMENT ANSWERS THE CALL

BY LINDSAY MILLER
News Contributor

When there is a fire in the Sheffield or Wheelock area, Shane Lanpher and his crew will be called to the rescue. Whether it's a simple campfire that got out of control or a full-blown house fire, they respond.

According to Leslie Ham, a long-time member of the Sheffield/Wheelock fire department, the department was started in the 1950s. Leslie joined around 1975 when things ran quite a bit differently than they do now.

At first, it started with the "red phone" system. Specific volunteers had a red phone that was notified of a fire, then they would notify a list of volunteers specific to them. Eventually, this led to someone calling Northeast Tool or Tap and Die, to notify volunteers who worked at those specific manufacturing plants. Now calls go through St. Johnsbury Dispatch and all volunteers have pagers.

The Sheffield/Wheelock Fire department sets up Sheffield Field day every year. They set up the tents and help with parking. The coordinators of the event are highly appreciative of their work.



Sheffield-Wheelock firefighters pause while setting up for the Sheffield Field Day. From left are Capt. Shane Lanpher, Ryan Hanrahan, Caleb Sanville and Aaron Stetson. (Photo by Lindsay Miller)

All volunteers are expected to answer the call when it comes, but it's a challenge to find volunteers. Lanpher, captain of the department, said, "Every department everywhere is looking for volunteers."

It's the commitment to training time that makes volunteering at the fire department tough, said Ham.

Consider joining the Sheffield/Wheelock Fire department as a volunteer. Meetings are the first Monday of every month.



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RESCUE

LYNDON RESCUE'S LOGAN WALES

BY KEVIN DOYON
Staff Writer

It's been about a year since Logan Wales joined Lyndon Rescue — and she already knows she's exactly where she needs to be.

"I feel like I was put on this Earth to make a difference and this is how I chose to do it," she said.

Making a difference in her own community — along with serving Burke, Sutton, Newark, Sheffield, Wheelock and Kirby — makes it all the more rewarding.

"Most people who need an ambulance aren't always feeling the greatest, so if I can get them feeling a bit better by the time we get them to the hospital then that never fails to make my day," Wales said in regards to meeting community members she otherwise ordinarily wouldn't.

She grew up in Lyndonville and worked with Lyndon Rescue personnel for several years volunteering at the fire department and dispatching.

With experience in multiple areas, Wales will be the first to say that there's no feeling like rushing out to answer the call when it comes into the station.

"I have always enjoyed the adrenaline rush that some calls give me," she said.

Knowing she is on her way to help someone in need is why she considers it her true calling.

"The fact that I am responsible for providing care to someone in need is so rewarding. I love caring for anyone, whether they are sick, injured or perfectly healthy."

Wales embarked on her Lyndon Rescue journey last summer, enrolling in an EMT course



Lyndon Rescue's Logan Wales. (Contributed Photo)

where she received first-hand learning and training through ride-alongs; which Lyndon Rescue offers to any EMT, AEMT, Paramedic or prospective student. She started by observing and providing very basic patient care. Shortly after, Wales became a certified EMT and joined Lyndon Rescue part-time and full-time as an Emergency Dispatcher.

"While I'm still learning a lot, I am now able to assess patients and determine what their best course of treatment would be;" which she says may include providing first aid, administering different medications — including oxygen —

and transporting patients.

A day on the job typically consists of a 12 or 24-hour shift. Being in a rural community means the calls vary in consistency. When they get dispatched, the goal is to get to the patient quickly and safely then provide on-scene care and hospital transportation. Downtime is spent doing building or ambulance maintenance, equipment testing, getting to better know co-workers or writing patient reports.

Long days with an intense workload can be daunting at times, but all it takes to get through it is remembering why she chose this line of work in the first place.

"Life can get very stressful with multiple jobs in emergency services but I have the most supportive family and friends that make it easy," Wales said. "Knowing that I am making a difference in the community and helping those in need makes everything worth it."

Worth doing now and worth continuing in the future. Wales would like to eventually become an advanced EMT — the next step up — and possibly become a paramedic after that.

"But, I'm not in a big rush as I am still learning to become the best EMT I can be," she said.

Formal training at least once a month and a persistent effort to hone her skills and knowledge have her well on her way.

Wales takes pride in her work and encourages others that may be interested in emergency careers to take that leap of faith and reach out by requesting a ride-along.

"Emergency medical services are always in need of providers and it can be such a great career path," she said.

Wales' passion for her community goes hand-in-hand with the impact Lyndon Rescue has on the seven towns it tends to and the rest of the NEK. She says they can provide assistance to any different agency on any given day, depending on who needs it.

Lyndon Rescue also serves in a capacity other than just being on-call for emergencies. There are patient transfers between hospitals or rehabilitation centers; sometimes they even bring patients home if needed. They are also a presence at many local events including concerts, races, fairs and more.

"Lyndon Rescue is greatly supported by the community and we wouldn't be able to provide the care we do without them," Wales said.

DHART

Continued from Page 4

notes to all the pre-determined LZs. Depending on the distance to the pre-determined LZ, we may have to make a decision to find a closer landing area to the scene if we can find an area to land on - like an open field, parking lots or even landing in the roadway if it's clear of any hazards."

Chief Reed said that while the State of Vermont does not

require training for firefighters to prepare helicopter landing zones, there is training available.

"The team at Dartmouth-Hitchcock does provide that for our fire departments," said Reed. "We have been through that training and retake it periodically as a refresher."

DHART responds to calls 24 hours a day, seven days a week but there are times when the helicopter is not available because it's on another call or in bad weather.

"Weather is the biggest factor if it flies or not, ie: snow, wind, fog, rain," said Chief Corrow.

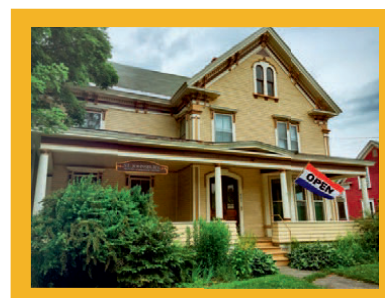
According to its website, the DHART helicopter pilots are equipped with the latest in modern technology including night-vision goggles and "terrain awareness" and "traffic awareness" technology - which allows the helicopter to avoid running into the ground or other aircraft. And DHART has now expanded with airbases in Lebanon as well as in Manchester, N.H and Burlington, Vt.



THE COVER

Firefighters battle a large fire at the Rock's Estate in Bethlehem in February, 2019. (File photo by Paul Hayes)

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FIRE

DANVILLE JUNIOR FIREFIGHTER PROGRAM EMBRACES YOUTH

BY KEVIN DOYON
Staff Writer

DANVILLE — The Danville Fire Department currently has 21 members, ranging from 18 to 68 years old.

The experience of 2nd Assistant Chief Roland Heath, 48 years, and Assistant Chief Troy Cochran, 30-plus years, helps guide a department focused on serving its community in whatever capacity is needed.

But it's the department's junior firefighter program that embarks fresh faces into the station and provides the next generation of Danville firefighters an opportunity to pursue their calling.

"Firefighting is a brotherhood and is very fraternal," Chief Jonathan Austin-Shortt said. "We feel this gives the teens a place to channel their energy and spend time doing things that make a difference in their community. It also gives the adult firefighters a way to connect with today's youth and have the satisfaction of passing down years of knowledge and techniques."

The program is open to 16-17-year-olds and allows them to train and become familiar with the apparatus and equipment. Upon enrollment, junior firefighters are issued a full set of turnout

gear and can attend meetings, training, special events, and emergency calls.

Those calls are not just limited to fires; Danville FD is equipped to respond to many scenarios such as carbon monoxide or other poisonous gas leaks, motor vehicle accidents, water/ice water rescue, remote rescue, structural collapse, hazmat spills and natural disasters.

During emergency calls, the junior firefighters are limited to spectating from a distance for safety reasons but they are allowed to fully participate in most of the regular training activities.

The program was designed as a recruitment technique when it was launched in 2010 by firefighter Peggy Cochran. It lasts until the participants turn 18 when they can then be voted onto the department as full members — with no traditional probationary period required.

"Their time spent as a junior counts towards the normal one-year probation and they generally receive all the necessary and required training as well as real-world experience," Austin-Shortt said.

He added that because of response time, applicants are typically only from Danville, but there is no specific rule saying applicants from other towns wouldn't be accepted.

The most recent program graduate is Logan



Logan Goodwin, the junior firefighter program's most recent graduate, presents a check to the Danville Fire Department, which represents the funds raised to support the organization as part of his senior high school project. With him are (front row from left) Firefighter Laci Sandvil; Goodwin; Lt. Tom Vogel and Capt. Jonathan Austin-Shortt; back row, Roland Heath, second assistant chief; DJ Hodgdon, firefighter; Evan Oleson, firefighter; Tasha Cochran, firefighter; Seth Sjolander, firefighter; Bennett Cochran, firefighter; and Fire Chief Troy Cochran. (File Photo by Stephen Garfield)

Goodwin. While at Danville High School, Goodwin dedicated his senior project to raising money for the fire department.

"Since I was a little kid, I wanted to be a firefighter and give back to my community," he said. "The program was a very rewarding experience. I learned a lot about firefighting and how to do it safely from other members."

Austin-Shortt said that the program offers teens a feeling of belonging, the same they might receive from any club, sport, or extracurricular activity. However, with Goodwin's advancement, there are not any junior firefighters currently enrolled.

He hopes the next way of junior firefighters will not be far behind him.

"Volunteer fire departments are always looking for new members and it's nice to get some younger people with little to no experience in the door and train them the way you want your department to handle situations," Goodwin said.

Danville FD expands upon its presence with the youth by working closely with Danville School. They provide fire safety education which Austin-Shortt says lets the department connect with the kids in the community but also connect with potential junior firefighters.

"I personally believe our presence at the school gives the community a sense of safety and security," he said.

The department is also granted access by the school to use the grounds for training purposes.

Historically, there has been a yearly fire safety day at the school where kids can interact and even explore the fire trucks. The opportunity is used to educate kids on basic fire safety which ranges from making sure the pre-k and first grad-

ers know how to dial 911 and give basic info to dispatchers; to giving older elementary students instruction on having an escape plan for their homes, knowing their address, how and when to call 911, "stop, drop and roll," how to use fire extinguishers, what firefighters look like in full turnout gear and other tips and instructions for what to do in emergencies.

"We feel reaching the kids at a young age is very effective as far as retaining information about fire safety," Austin-Shortt said. "The kids tend to go home and talk about their day openly with parents at that age. It gets the parents engaged and thinking about their role in emergencies as well. This sparks the conversation in the home and gets the whole family involved."

The presence of the Danville Fire Department in the community aims to be widespread whether that be in young students going over the basics of fire safety or just making sure that people of all ages are aware of what to do in case of emergencies.

"It gives the community a future of fire-safe children and adults," Austin-Shortt said. "I feel that if we can prevent an emergency before it happens through education, we are offering a far more valuable resource than fire suppression alone."

As for the junior firefighter program, it's a concept that is strengthening the safety of the Danville community for years to come.

"It's important because the community relies on us to be there for them in times of emergency," Goodwin said. "Without new people joining, it wouldn't last long," Goodwin said.

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RESCUE

NHFG OFFICER REFLECTS ON INCREASE IN VISITORS, CHALLENGES

BY PAUL HAYES
Staff Writer

NORTH COUNTRY, N.H. — After serving eight years in the U.S. Navy, spending months at a time crammed inside tight quarters on a ship, Mark Ober wanted a change of pace.

So, for his next career, he signed up with New Hampshire Fish and Game and went to work in the great outdoors.

Now 49, Ober is the lieutenant for NHFG District One covering the northernmost part of the state.

Explaining why he chose to become a conservation officer, he said, “I’m an outdoors type of person. I grew up loving hunting and fishing. And the old conservation officer down where I grew up [in Ashland, N.H.], I remember seeing him now and then on patrol and admiring him and wanting to do what he did,” he said.

In the world of first responders, conservation officers are unique.

They enforce laws related to fish and wildlife and off-road recreational vehicles, going after illegal hunters and ticketing speeding OHRVs.

They also act as public advocates for the protection of natural resources and act as educators for hunters, anglers, and members of the public.

On top of that, they function as search and res-

cue personnel. They are certified in wilderness first aid and often provide initial medical care for injured hikers, climbers, snowmobilers and OHRV riders.

“We wear many hats,” Ober said. “We have the enforcement aspect of things, where we’re out there trying to catch poachers. And at the drop of a dime, we get called for an injured hiker and we have to become the rescuers.”

In District One, Ober has seen growing numbers of hikers and OHRV riders flocking to the northern Presidential Range and The Great North Woods, especially since the pandemic.

As a result, more people are running into trouble.

Since Jan. 1, District One has reported 70 hiker distress calls, 50 OHRV/snowmobile crashes, and 35 search and rescue operations in Coos County alone.

Five of those hikers died, four near the summit of Mt. Washington. All but one were due to medical issues, the other died from hypothermia.

Rescue operations are complicated, difficult and sometimes harrowing.

The North Country is home to deceptively difficult 4,000-foot peaks and surprisingly severe weather, particularly above the treeline.

Carry-outs must be coordinated between multiple agencies, require personnel to navigate rugged terrain, and frequently occur in distant locations.

Fish and Game personnel must pass mandatory annual physical tests to prove they are up to the task.

“The biggest thing is the remoteness,” Ober said about the search and rescue operations. “Whatever happens it’s not close to a road, it’s not close to an ambulance. Even on the trails, for a crash, not all of them are accessible by EMS people right away.”

Some of those search and rescue calls are due to a lack of preparation.

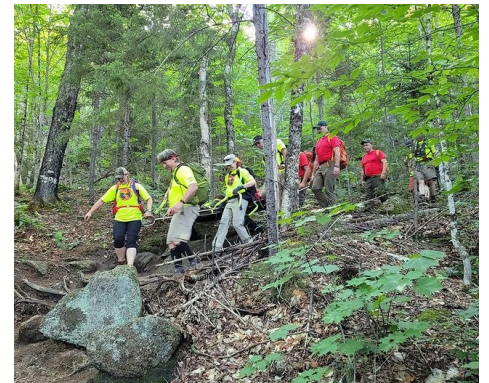
Hikers trek to the top of a high peak with one bottle of water. Others find themselves in darkness without a lamp. Those who rely on cell phones to call authorities or light the way often find themselves with drained batteries.

To conserve manpower, District One (which is understaffed by 40 percent) won’t respond to every nighttime call where someone forgets a flashlight. If the person is safe and healthy, the weather is mild, and no children are involved, Ober will sometimes instruct them to hunker down and wait until morning.

In those cases, Ober said, “I tell people ‘That was your mistake and you’re going to learn a hard lesson. It’s not an emergency, the weather is fine, and you’re going to have to spend the night.’”

Approaching his 50th birthday, Ober looks back on his career with satisfaction.

He remains thankful that he changed career



Fish and Game conservation officers and Pemi Valley Search and Rescue volunteers carried an injured hiker on Middle Sugarloaf Mountain 1.3 miles to the trailhead on Saturday, July 10. (Courtesy photo by the Pemigewasset Valley Search & Rescue Team)

paths in his late 20s, heading from the sea to the mountains.

He just wishes he did it a little bit sooner.

“I wish I could kind of go back in time and only do four years in the Navy and start this career earlier. But I’m glad I made the decision I did when I had the chance,” he said, “I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

POLICE

POLICE CONNECT ONLINE WITH COMMUNITY

BY KEVIN DOYON
Staff Writer

HARDWICK — It’s a digital world, and the Hardwick Police Department recognizes that.

That’s why the department has completely revamped its website and social media — an effort to better connect with the community they tirelessly serve to protect.

Traditionally, communication between residents and police had been through in-person contact or over the phone. While that is still an option, it was recognized by the department that there were available resources that could be expanded upon.

“Social media seems to be a better route for a number of people,” Chief Michael Henry said. “Quite a few people have felt more comfortable reporting crimes through Facebook Messenger rather than having an officer meet with them.”

Henry said there have been several instances where community members have helped the department solve crimes through messaging and the public comment section.

Hardwick PD used to have a Facebook page, but it was not regularly monitored and became unusable when the password was locked. This led to the creation of a brand new page and with it, a much more user-friendly and accessible page.

It is now monitored daily by several officers. Press releases are also posted and public assistance is not only available but encouraged.

The department’s website has also seen an overhaul. Sticking with the goal of providing access to the community they serve, every officer’s contact information is listed. Another resource is now there is an option to download commonly requested forms. Sticking with the convenience factor of the social media page, people no longer have to drive to the PD’s office to pick up a form.

Most recently, social media posts have ranged from asking for help identifying people and vehicles to the announcement of the department’s new bike patrols to a reminder that Hardwick PD offers a drug drop-off box in its lobby; part of the Drug Take Back program, which is just one of the several programs and services presented on the updated website.

All in all, the reasoning for the reconstructed online presence of the Hardwick Police Department came down to presenting community members with more access to desired resources and more ways to effectively communicate with the officers responsible for protecting them.

“We work for the Hardwick community and need to have multiple forms of communication with the members to meet their needs,” Henry said. “Working together solving crimes and quality of life issues helps build a stronger community.”



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RESCUE

LYNDON RESCUE SERVES COMMUNITY FOR 50 YEARS

BY AMY ASH NIXON
Staff Writer

LYNDON CENTER — Serving the region's emergency needs for 50 years, Lyndon Rescue is this year marking its golden anniversary.

A board made up of local town representatives continues to guide the nonprofit emergency service, which is based out of a building on the campus of Northern Vermont University at Lyndon, with the president from East Haven, Delbert Reed.

Reed also is the town representative from East Haven and a longtime community volunteer in his hometown. He's been active with LRI since the 1990s and is an Advanced EMT serving with the local emergency service.

LRI, as its known, has operated from the campus of NVU since 1978. The building was dedicated on Oct. 22, 1978.

Director of Operations Jillian McLaughlin said the rescue company hopes to build a new operations center at some point in the future, a goal that's been in the works for some time.

"We have a building committee that includes members of the Board of Directors and

staff members who are working on a plan," McLaughlin said recently. "The committee is currently looking into the option of purchasing the current building from the college. That seems like the best plan for us financially vs. purchasing land and building a brand new building."

McLaughlin said, "We've been saving money to offset the cost of the purchase and lessen the impact on our budget. We are currently in an information gathering phase to answer lots of questions such as: Would the college be willing to sell it to us? Are there any barriers to that such as splitting off that land from the rest of campus? What repairs would need to be done to the building? What are the costs of building modifications that we would want to do for updates and to accommodate the 3rd ambulance that we currently rent space at Lyndonville Fire for? What would our additional expenses be to add to the budget for the utilities that are currently covered by our rent payment?"

"I thought it would be cool if we purchased it on Oct. 22nd, because that is the day the building was dedicated in 1978 and with 2022 being the 50th anniversary of the organiza-

tion ... but that date is coming up quickly, so I think it's safe to say that we're hoping for 2023," said McLaughlin.

McLaughlin said LRI currently has seven full-time staff and 15 part-time members. She said there are two people on duty all of the time. If there is more than one 911 call at a time or an inter-facility transfer then off-duty people come in, she explained.

In 2021, LRI experienced its busiest year. They made 1,620 total responses which McLaughlin believes was the first time with over 1,600 calls in a year (she said there were 1,455 in 2020).

McLaughlin said LRI's fleet features three ambulances including a 2014 Dodge Pro-master and a 2021 Ford Transit Van (both van-style ambulances used mostly for transfers and special events). The third ambulance is a 2016 Ford Type 1 ambulance, she said.

"The 2021 van ambulance was purchased earlier this summer as a planned replacement to the other van. Due to our third ambulance being totaled in the collision on the interstate this spring we kept the other van for now. The 2014 van will be traded in when we get the replacement for that ambulance which should hopefully be later this fall," McLaughlin shared. "That will be a 2022 Chevy Type 1 ambulance. The 2021 Ford Transit Van was purchased entirely with savings we added to the annual budget the past



Jillian McLaughlin is the director of Lyndon Rescue. (File Photo by Amy Ash Nixon)

few years so no loan!"

In addition to emergency response, LRI is active in the community. The organization is the only child safety seat inspection station in Caledonia County, said McLaughlin, offering education and over 50 inspections a year.

LRI also provides coverage at the Caledonia County Fair, the demolition derby, area youth football games, the NVU Gregg-fest, mountain biking events (Enduro, NEMBA, etc.), and many other events.

Members provide education, CPR and first aid instruction several times a year.

"So far this year we've done 21 classes at community locations with 138 total people at

those locations and have had 20 people come to our station for the course," McLaughlin said. "Most of the people that come to our station for CPR or First Aid classes are individuals that have taken the blended learning course so they've done an online portion and then come to our station to do the skills portion of the course."

Current Lyndon Rescue Staff

Alex Allen EMT
Danny Bigelow EMT
Nate Donley Paramedic
Georgia Hadley EMT
Eric Hannett Paramedic
Rick Hannux EMT
Nate Harvey Advanced EMT
Tristan Henderson Paramedic

Sarah Houghton Paramedic
David Kennedy Advanced EMT
Aaron Martin Advanced EMT
Jillian McLaughlin Paramedic
Patrick McLaughlin EMT
Bill Phelps EMT
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POLICE

SHERIFFS SERVE COMMUNITIES ACROSS THREE COUNTIES

Essex County Sheriff Trevor Colby Follows In His Dad's Footsteps;
Orleans County Sheriff Is First Female In Post

BY AMY ASH NIXON
Staff Writer

NORTHEAST KINGDOM — Each of the Northeast Kingdom's three counties - Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans - has a local sheriff's department that patrols the many towns in each territory, bolstering local and state police and serving the public in a variety of ways.

Caledonia County's longtime sheriff, Dean Shatney, is not seeking re-election this November, and his seat has two candidates vying to be the next sheriff.

In Orleans County, Sheriff Jennifer Harlow made news when she was appointed the first female county sheriff to serve as the head of a law enforcement agency in Orleans County.

Essex County's long-serving sheriff, Trevor Colby, holds the distinction of being the only Northeast Kingdom sheriff who followed in the footsteps of his dad, the former longtime Essex County Sheriff, Amos Colby.

Local county sheriffs' departments provide a variety of services to the public from court security to service of civil process, patrol contracts, highway safety, patrols on the VAST and VASA trail networks, Homeland Security patrols, Department of Public Safety law enforcement services, fingerprinting services, escort, traffic and security contracts and more.

One of the three county sheriffs shared his perspective for readers to get a closer look at what it's like to serve the people of an entire county in the rural Northeast Kingdom, Sheriff Trevor Colby of the Essex County Sheriff's Department.

**'Police are just people':
Sheriff Colby**

Asked what he wants people to know, Sheriff Colby said, "That police are just people. They come with their own skills and deficiencies. Departments are businesses that operate with their own assets, liabilities, strengths and weaknesses."

"Many people expect law enforcement agencies to handle any legal issues that arise. It just isn't structured that way," explained Colby.

He said, "I don't think many people in their communities think they are responsible for determining what policing services they receive. I have, over the years, put together what I can through grants and contracts, but I feel it is really a community decision. It is challenging not to have an integrated policing system for citizens, but that is how the system is designed."

"For towns that ask we put together what we can, and for those that don't ask for services, I have tried to create some services through grants to respond to community needs," Colby said. "Some towns are far more proactive than others, but in general I don't think many people think about what it means to create the type of police services they desire. I think, now more than ever, citizens are feeling the strain on police services where more agencies are saying we're not coming out for that, or that calls are prioritized and we will respond when we can."

Colby said that county budgets don't fund patrol deputies, and sheriff's departments are structured on a fee-for-service model.

"So citizens in towns are responsible for adequately funding police agencies through town budgets for services. There are, of course, state and federal officers, but they are not funded at a level where they can adequately cover all law enforcement services," Colby said. "So citizens need to understand they are responsible for the amount of police services being provided to their town."

Asked how the public can support sheriff's departments, Colby offered, "It takes citizen involvement to police communities as witnesses, complaints, helping bystanders, safe houses and now a lot of people are helping with home video systems



Essex County Sheriff Trevor Colby, right, and St. Johnsbury Police Sgt. Lester Cleary exit 619 Portland St. in St. Johnsbury on Thursday, Feb. 25, 2021 while investigating drug activity at the residence. The law officers were among many who were part of a police raid there that revealed the presence of guns and drugs. Multiple people in the residence were taken into custody. (File Photo by Dana Gray)

and cell phone videos."

"We are missing leadership that is focused on solving problems through analysis of the problems. Many of our local volunteer boards, while at times well minded, do not have the time and resources to dedicate to the larger ills in our communities," he went on. "Our state government is dramatically affecting the safety of our communities by incoherent direction to the entities responsible for community safety. The policies of large government agencies like the judiciary, probation and parole, corrections, mental health, and economic services are driven by a legislature that is elected by the citizens. The current response to our drug epidemic is tragic and continues to unfold in unhealthy ways. Citizens are beyond frustrated, but many just throw up their hands and feel helpless to change things."

Colby asked, "Why are people frustrated? Because for every minute a police officer responds to a traffic call or does speed enforcement, he is not working on a drug investigation; for every family argument intervention, there is not a search being done for stolen property; for every violation of condition of release call, we are not working with schools; for every animal complaint, we're not slowing down

speeders. All of these things are expected to be handled, while also dealing with sexual assault investigations, child abuse, and domestic violence. People want to know why we're not doing more to address their local issue and the answer is time in the day."

Asked how policing has changed in recent years, Colby explained, "The state system has stopped holding people accountable for crime from the judiciary, to probation, and corrections; their policies and inconsistencies just don't make sense. Residential treatment services need to be accessible without having to have insurance prior to attending."

"The drug epidemic has soared and the state has responded horribly. I have seen a decline in people being willing to address issues locally," he continued. "The kids making mischief do not have the neighbor reprimanding them and calling their parents, but instead the police are called. I think in general, there is more anxiety for some community members because they feel that there are more unpredictable persons in their communities."

Colby posed a series of questions, "So if I am a drug addict who sells drugs with my family, are we a crime family? Do they threaten people or make them

fear for their safety if they call the police? Is there erratic and unpredictable behavior regularly occurring that sounds like domestic violence? Are there regularly minor property crimes in the area going unreported or reported? Are there people driving cars high on substance? Are there more homeless people because drugs have stripped them of all of their possessions? Do community members have a general sense of unease?"

"Instead of answering all of the questions above, many people blame cops for the war on drugs, when it is actually the consequences of drug use and behaviors that are impacting our communities," he stated.

Towns making up Essex County include: Averill, Bloomfield, Brighton, Brunswick,

Canaan, Concord, East Haven, Ferdinand, Granby, Guildhall, Lemington, Lewis, Maidstone, Norton, and Victory, Vermont.

What crimes are on the rise?

Colby said, "I would guess that locally 99% of our drug crimes are never caught or prosecuted. Trafficking is a huge problem that goes unaddressed."

"The state of Vermont has become the supportive parent for drug addiction. Catering to their children who are addicted by providing housing, transportation, and financial assistance for people who are not really working to get clean ... while spending additional resources for police to continually catch and release the same people," he said. "Perhaps if the judiciary

See Sheriff, Page 15

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Dispatch

Continued from Page 3
are calls that suggest mental instability.

“Felicia had the one where a caller said a werewolf bit his face off,” said Young.

Skelton said there is no typical day in the life of a dispatcher but gave an overview of frequent responsibilities.

“We get a lot of phone calls for fingerprinting appointments. So you have to direct them to our booking site. We have people that call in new incidents for police, whether it’s vehicle break-ins or really anything and so you have to refer them to an officer or dispatch an officer; you have those same people calling for follow-up. You have people calling to ask if their situation meets the needs of law enforcement. Sometimes it is not so you refer people to a court system or legal aid or say, you know, it’s a civil matter ... and then intertwined with all of that you have all of your fire

and EMS calls, vehicle crashes ... obviously, ambulances do a lot of inter-facility transfers, on top of people calling with their general maladies and then some critical, high acuity calls.”

Stringer said he’s impressed with the skill of the dispatchers he gets to work with as he trains.

“I’ve definitely been on shifts where all of a sudden we have 13 or 14 call cards going on, we’ve got multiple trucks out to different areas and you got ambulances going everywhere, and these guys (dispatchers) have been very good,” he said. “It might look hectic, and they might seem overwhelmed, but as soon as they go to transmit something, they take a deep breath and make sure they get their information out in a nice, concise manner so everybody out in the field isn’t panicking or trying to figure things out.”

Stringer said he’s got the disposition and desire to do the job.

“I’ve heard quite a few people in my life tell me I’m a very calm guy in emergencies,” he said, “and I was looking for a

nice challenge, and this has definitely been that so far.”

Communications for a dispatcher are numerous and varied but all in a day’s work. Still, even the veterans can recall shifts when circumstances combined for an especially hectic communications challenge.

For Skelton, it was 2011, the year of Hurricane Irene. It wasn’t Irene, but the region saw some heavy rain storms that caused significant damage.

“It was an absolute madhouse because so many roads were destroyed,” he said. “People’s emergencies don’t stop just because roads are washed out. It was keeping track of all of the roads closed and trying to get emergency vehicles to navigate around the closures to get them to the places they needed to go. That was an interesting challenge.”

Young’s memory of a difficult dispatching day went to April 24, 2013. She called it a dispatcher’s “nightmare.” The circumstances that unfolded in 7½ hours and the dispatching pro-

fessionalism that was required warranted its own newspaper story at the time.

A breakdown of the calls handled in a single shift by Young, with help from a trainee who is no longer at the center and veteran dispatcher Karen Montgomery (who left after 21 years in 2021), was as follows:

- 4:30 p.m. Medical call requiring St. Johnsbury Fire Department and CALEX;

- 4:46 p.m. Two-car crash on Railroad Street requiring St. Johnsbury Police;

- 4:47 p.m. Lyndon Rescue and Vermont State Police respond to a motorcycle crash;

- 5:22 p.m. Elm Street, St. Johnsbury resident calls to complain that someone was “doing donuts” on the baseball field;

- 5:30 p.m. Burglary alarm at Fairbanks Museum (it was triggered mistakenly by an employee);

- 5:51 p.m. A long series of dispatched radio calls begin related to a structure fire on Jewell Hill in Lyndon; Lyndonville Fire and Lyndon Rescue

initially toned with East Burke, Sheffield-Wheelock, Sutton, Concord and St. Johnsbury Fire departments called to help soon after; Littleton Fire Department dispatched with tower to cover St. Johnsbury; Danville Fire called to relieve Littleton at 11 p.m.

- 6:22 p.m. Grass fire on Lyn-Burke Road was threatening a home; Sheffield-Wheelock in the right place at the right time as it was covering the station for Lyndonville; fire extinguished a few feet from the residence;

- 6:45 p.m. fire alarm at J.A. McDonald construction company on Gilman Road in Lyndon; Sheffield-Wheelock firefighters sent (it was a false alarm);

- 7 p.m. Medical call required one Lyndon Rescue ambulance to leave Jewell Hill fire scene and go to Gilman Road;

- 7:14 p.m. Barker Avenue, St. Johnsbury resident calls to have police check out suspicious kids in the area;

- 7:49 p.m. Caller said a lean-to in Concord was on fire and headed toward a barn;

- 7:57 p.m. Lyndon Rescue was called to transfer a patient from NVRH to their Lyndon home;

- 8:10 p.m. a complaint of a huge bonfire on Charles Street in Lyndonville spurred a response by Sheffield-Wheelock firefighters;

- 9:04 p.m. Two-car crash on Route 5 near West Burke; West Burke dispatched two fire engines, Lyndon Rescue responded and transported one injured party to the hospital, and the Vermont State Police responded and investigated the crash;

- 10:15 p.m. St. Johnsbury firefighters and CALEX sent to Brightlook Apartments for a medical emergency;

- 10:52 p.m. Lifeline call on Pleasant Street in St. Johnsbury;
- 11:07 p.m. A call came in for a lift assist in Sutton; Sutton Fire Department was dispatched.

In that single period, first responders protected people, saved property and met medical needs, and they were put in the position to do their jobs by a dispatcher.

Chiefs

Continued from Page 5
operating procedures (SOPs) that McQuillen said will be streamlined so when crews from both departments work together they will be working under the same umbrella and the expectation for both will be the same.

“Right out of the gate we did aerial training just to become more familiar with each other’s equipment,” said Reed. “We are also working on some boat classes together. We’re taking an out-of-the-box approach and a comprehensive view of the operations that we have and how we can work together with those. We’re taking the approach of Littleton learning our equipment and St. Johnsbury learning their equipment so that when we respond to these incidents, we’re all ready to go.”

That familiarity is essentially when seconds count.

To that end, both departments are looking at buying and using the same equipment, such as air packs, so everyone will be familiar with how it operates, including the fire apparatus.

The boat class training will help with incidents like the pickup truck that left Interstate 93 in

Littleton and plunged into the Connecticut River on June 21.

SJFD was able to deploy its boat immediately and work with LFR for the best possible outcome from that call, said McQuillen.

In addition to mutually responding to multiple building fires, the two departments rely on each other for technical rescues involving motor vehicle crashes, including the one that SJFD responded to in Littleton on July 23, when a driver lost control of a Jeep, which then snapped a utility pole and crashed into the front porch of a house.

In the spring, LFR responded to St. Johnsbury after a tractor-trailer went off Interstate 91 and landed on Mt. Vernon Street.

Along with fast responses, Reed and McQuillen are also looking at the future of their fire departments, particularly during a time of growth in the North Country and NEK, when many people are vacationing in the area and flocking to the downtowns of Littleton and St. Johnsbury.

“We’ve seen an increase of 20 percent in our call volume just in the last year alone,” said McQuillen. “Going back over the last ten years, the call volume in

Littleton has gone up over 300 percent. We’re looking toward the future and how do we utilize our resources to better serve the residents in the area in a way that is more economical and efficient for everybody.”

While not quite as dramatic, SJFD has likewise seen an increase in call volume, with last year seeing 1,396 runs, 50 above the year before. This year, if the pace continues, SJFD will see between 1,500 and 1,600, said Reed.

“We’re at least a couple of hundred runs over where we should be right now,” he said. “Everybody has trended in the same direction.”

Like Littleton, St. Johnsbury also has a busier downtown with more traffic and is seeing new people move into the community, said Reed.

“Right now, there’s a housing crunch and people can’t find a place to live, but eventually they’re going to,” he said. “With that new population that comes in, there also comes the need for more services. As we forecast where we’re going to be in the next five to 10 years, everything that I’m seeing is for growth ... The approach that we’re really taking is to try to get ahead of this, to try to predict where

we’re going to go and set up a successful plan for the future for both of our departments.”

The preparation comes with the assumption that department staffing might not increase by much, even with the increased need for future services.

“It’s sharing those resources and being able to be more efficient,” said McQuillen. “Across the country, we are seeing a decline in volunteerism and call firefighters. We’re even seeing a shortage of full-time public service people who want to work as a firefighter, paramedics, or police officers. It’s trying to identify how we get ahead of that curve. It’s looking toward that future and seeing the problems that are coming. We’re able to staff our calls now and use mutual aid and each other and we want to continue to be able to do that, but we also want to plan for how we’re going to handle those shortcomings that each department is seeing and getting ahead of that curve.”

In the coming year for joint training, the two chiefs are planning technical rescues, like swift-water, confined space, and rescues that involve a rope system, and are looking at developing a team that serves the region.

And cost-sharing makes it

more efficient for taxpayers because the budgets of the two departments won’t substantially increase by purchasing the same piece of equipment, said McQuillen.

“St. Johnsbury has a rescue truck and we don’t need to buy a rescue truck per se because they have one that we can call upon,” he said. “The flip side to that is St. Johnsbury doesn’t have a tanker and we do have a tanker. It’s utilizing those resources so we’re not buying the same thing and duplicating the efforts. We rely on each other to fill in those voids.”

Another new approach by both chiefs is creating an officer development program and succession plan, said Reed.

“We both have very young departments with very new officers,” he said. “Something that’s never been done before is getting them together to have a joint training between them, just to share thoughts on how to better run their crews to make sure that they’re prepared ... If we can prepare our firefighters and have a succession plan so that we have continuity when we leave, then someone will be prepared to fill our shoes. That’s our goal ... It would make it a much more efficient operation

when everything keeps flowing once a department switches an administration.”

It’s giving firefighters the tools and equipment so they can succeed, so when someone is promoted to an officer position that the first responder has a base from which they can draw instead of being handed the badge and the responsibility and letting them figure it out alone, said McQuillen.

“We want to have that development for them so they have a system of people they can rely on, bounce ideas off of, and develop things for the future,” said McQuillen.

LFR, established in 1829, and SJFD, established in 1843, have experienced light years of change through the generations, as well as increasingly busy days.

“The days of sitting around waiting for a call don’t happen because we do a lot of training,” said McQuillen. “We have a lot of service calls, fire prevention activities at the schools, and a lot of commercial partners we have in town that we interact with. There isn’t a lot of downtime.”

LFR will hold an open house at its fire station on West Main Street on Oct. 15, during Fire Prevention Week.

Sheriff

Continued from Page 13

ry wasn't three years behind, we could effectively deal with issues immediately. But when you don't hold people accountable for never coming to court, they get new charges and the police do more work for the courts because we have to keep going back after the same people. If you commit a crime every day, do you think that you get caught and charged for every crime you commit?

Colby said violation of conditions of release and drug-related crimes are on the rise.

Asked what challenges he faces now that he didn't when he began a dozen years ago, Colby said, "Policy demands implemented by the legislature; more requests for service throughout the county; the feeling that there is not a support structure from the judiciary, corrections, and the legislature; (and) the financial resources to keep up with the upgrades in technology.

Most Rewarding

Colby shared, "The days that the emergencies happen and the people involved walk away feeling a personal connection with the officer that responded."

"When the people we serve are surprised by the human experience of a community caretaker being there for them. It doesn't always happen, the referees aren't always the good guys," he said. "But the days when we can reach people with positive experiences are the rewarding days."

Colby said, "As the agency leader I feel this both in the days it happens for me personally, but also when it stems from a member of my team. It is each of these individual experiences that I hope will accumulate into larger, more lasting changes in our community."

Caledonia County

Towns served in Caledonia County include St. Johnsbury, Hardwick, Walden, Danville, Barnet, Peacham, Ryegate, Waterford, Lyndonville, Burke, Newark, Sheffield and Wheelock along with Sutton, Kirby, Stannard and Groton.

In his annual report to the towns across Caledonia County, Sheriff Shatney wrote in early March, "The state of the Caledonia County Sheriff's Department is very good." He reported that rates have been held stable with only slight increases for construction and traffic patrols due to rising fuel prices.

He reported that the use of the radar cart helping to monitor speed across the county was working well and was an investment made thanks to the use of the Governor's Highway Safety Grant funds.

The department is involved in the Responsible Operators Against Distractions (ROAD) program which works to educate drivers about the dangers of texting while driving, noted Sheriff Shatney.

"We continue to do town patrols and we feel that the towns we patrol are a safer place to live & drive in because of our presence," he wrote.

The department is also active in local schools to help ensure the safety of students and staff and works on drills and evacuation plans as part of that work.

"We continue to look at 24-hour dispatching for the county, but are unable to do that right now," wrote Shatney. He reported that the new location for the department, on Route 5 instead of based at the Caledonia Courthouse, has been a positive move.

He noted, "We are more visible and easier to reach, plus the savings on the taxpayers went from \$62,000 down to \$30,000. In nine years, that expense will

go away and the county will own the building."

Shatney closed the annual letter promising to do the department's best monitoring snowmobile trails, saying they are "doing our best to keep the trails as safe as possible, and we will again answer snowmobile-related complaints."

On the website for the Caledonia County Sheriff's Department, it notes that the county is made up of 658 square miles.

Orleans County

In Orleans County, the sheriff's department patrols some 721 square miles, described on the website as a "treasure with its 27,000 people and 1788 miles of roads."

"We are committed to working with our community and policing with the citizens of Orleans County to achieve a safe and desirable place to live, work and visit," the site notes.

The department is led by Sheriff Jennifer Harlow, who was appointed by Governor Phil Scott as the Orleans County Sheriff.

"Sheriff Harlow began her law enforcement career at the age of 16 years old when she joined the Police Explorer Program to learn more about a career in law enforcement, then moved on to become an auxiliary officer," the website notes. "At the age of 18 years old she was sponsored by her hometown police department to participate in the part-time po-

lice academy. Sheriff Harlow was a part-time law enforcement officer for several towns and started to work primarily for the Town of Montague in Turners Falls, Mass."

From there she worked patrol as well as dispatching, then attended and graduated from the Agawam Police Academy in 1999. She was an acting sergeant for several years before moving to Vermont.

"Sheriff Harlow worked for the Newport Police Department for approximately 16 years where she worked patrol, then was assigned to the Special Investigations Unit as a Detective for approximately 8 years where she investigated the most heinous crimes against our most vulnerable population, our children," her background is noted on the Orleans County Sheriff's Department's website. "These cases involved severe child abuse, sexual crimes, and internet crimes against children. Sheriff Harlow also investigated sex crimes reported by adults, aggravated domestic assaults and elder abuse. Sheriff Harlow was promoted to Sergeant being the first female Sergeant to serve the Newport Police Department and was in that leadership role until she was appointed in January 2020 by Governor Phil Scott to fill the vacant Orleans County Sheriff's position."

She serves as an instructor at

the Vermont Police Academy where she teaches a 3-day course on Sexual Violence and Child Abuse to recruits, as well as Domestic Violence Instructor, Rape Aggression Defense Instructor and Team Two Instructor (Mental Health training to professionals within our community). Sheriff Harlow also goes into local schools presenting alongside Savannah Williams with Umbrella on Healthy Relationships as well as Technology Safety.

Sheriff Harlow serves on a variety of boards.

In an update to residents of the county around the time of the annual Town Meeting, Harlow wrote, in part, "We have been using Newport Police Department to supplement our dispatching services for a little over a year which has allowed us to have 24/7 dispatching. This service has worked out very well for the towns we currently have contracts with. The extended dispatching services have and continue to allow community members to call our department when they are in need of services."

"The Orleans County Sheriff's Department has continued to hold and work with several grantees in an effort to keep our community safe, for example, Governor Highway Safety," she wrote. "One grant that I am very excited about is a Mentoring grant through the North Country Supervisory Union. This grant

will allow for Deputies to go into our secondary schools during lunchtime, after school time and build some long-lasting trusting relationships with our children."

Sheriff Harlow went on, "We continue to support Lake Region Union High School with a School Resource Officer, who had done a great deal of training in an effort to better herself so she can better serve our community and the population she works with."

"The Orleans County Sheriff's Department has and will continue to work closely with our Federal, State, and local agencies to investigate crimes involving drugs, illegal use of firearms and violent crimes," wrote Harlow. "I am aware our community and those within have been having a difficult time with the uptick in violent behaviors that have been occurring too close to our homes."

Harlow wrote, "I can promise you the members of the Orleans County Sheriff's Department do not take this lightly and will continue to strive to make Orleans County a safer place for all of us."

Orleans County Sheriff's Department serves the following towns:

Albany, Brownington, Coventry, Derby, Glover, Greensboro, Holland, Irasburg, Lowell, Morgan, Newport Ctr., Troy, Westfield and Westmore.



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