

Ready to Extinguish

Training, family and dedication
keep volunteer firefighters
motivated to help others.

By **GERALDINE MALONE**

Rowan University Grad Student

At 2 a.m. it is not unusual for Dan Malone to hop out of bed, dodge a barking dog, and floor his truck down the street to respond to an urgent fire call.

Although Malone, 20, admits that he has never been an early or easy riser, he does not hesitate before responding to his pager's tones and a dispatcher's scratchy voice. With voluntary firefighting as a new pastime, he willingly disrupts all hours of his day in order to fulfill his civic duty. He says, "You gotta give back something. There's a certain sense of obligation, pride, and ownership in yourself and the community being a firefighter."

Malone's December graduation from Basic Firefighter's Training at Burlington County Emergency Services School in Westhampton expands his responsibilities and duties as a member of the Maple Shade Fire Department. After five months of twice weekly classes and tests, indoor and outdoor training, as well as rigorous simulation drills, Malone is now certified to ride on the first due truck and engage in active fire extinguishing.

Though tiring and attended after Malone put in a full day's work, his training provides him with the knowledge on the basics: how to use tools and appliances, put on all gear, from bunker pants to helmet, learn the chemical reactions and makeup of fires, and most importantly, how to put out a fire.

Perhaps the hardest and scariest part of fire school is the simulation training drills. The Westhampton based fire school teaches apprentice firefighters how to react to, control, and ultimately extinguish car and building fires. The first time through a smoke-filled, burning building coupled with the task of traversing an unknown terrain is terrifying even for trainees. Malone admits, "Not knowing where I had to go in order to find my way out--that was scary."

Aside from the death-defying experiences, Malone feels like he excelled in fire school, sharing that he is a visual learner and fire school is mainly that--visual learning. "Most of the stuff you can't learn in a book. You have to go out and do it," he says.

Now, as an active member of the department, he is obligated to respond to as many calls as he can, making a minimum of 25 percent of monthly calls, as well as attend 25 percent of the meetings and department drills held throughout the year. Since joining the department in July 2007, Malone is a volunteer who will definitely meet his yearly quota, rarely missing an opportunity to be involved.

But with all of his devotion in firefighting, it's a wonder why he only wants to be a volunteer instead of making it his career. Malone says, "We [volunteers] do it because of

dedication and not a paycheck. I know all the guys in my crew are in it for the same reason, and not because the fire hall is a place to hang out. It's worth it to give up a baseball game or an outing to go to a call."

And that is something he does on a daily basis-- respond to countless calls and make sacrifices. Malone doesn't mind getting up in the middle of the night or missing Thanksgiving dinner to help someone he has never met before. "I feel good knowing I'm helping," he says. This is something his family, though often disturbed by the untimely pager, understands.

Malone's father, Ted, 50, a police officer for UMDNJ and a former, 16 year member of the Maple Shade Fire Department says, "It's a very noble profession, and you are there to help other people in their time of need. It takes a lot of sacrifice to miss Thanksgiving—it breaks the family unit, but I know he was doing something good for the community."

Malone says his decision to become a firefighter is just something he decided to do one day. But in speaking with him and hearing his passion for the job, it's obvious that there is more to his story. Malone admits that hearing all of his father's stories while growing up, along with his close pal's recent decision to join, really made him want to be a part of the department too.

As a volunteer firefighter, he loses sleep over his job. At 20 years old, Dan Malone puts others before himself, ready to work at all hours of the day, or night.

Daniel Malone

- AGE: 20
- OCCUPATION: Volunteer Firefighter at Maple Shade Fire Department and Apprentice for Local 14 Insulators and Allied Workers Union.
- RESIDENCE: Maple Shade
- FAMILY: Father Ted, Mother Deana, Brother Sean, Sister Geraldine and Dog Jake.
- SCHOOLING: Burlington County Emergency Services School, Westhampton, New Jersey.
- RECOGNITION: Second Generation Firefighter
- QUOTE: “Gotta give back something. There’s a certain sense of obligation, pride, and ownership in yourself and the community being a firefighter.”

Common Misconceptions

- **Not all firefighters are drunks.**
- **Fire trucks aren't speeding.** The noise and the size make them sound like they are speeding. They actually top out around 48 mph.
- **Most firefighters do not die from burns.** Actually, many more firefighters die from the rush of adrenaline experienced while actively engaging in firefighting, due to obesity or being out of shape.

Basics: What to Do?

1. **Develop an Escape Plan.** This way your family will know how to evacuate if a fire breaks out in your home.
2. **Have a Meeting Location.** Inform your family where to meet once they have evacuated the home.
3. **Lie on the Ground.** If smoke fills a room, lie on the ground because smoke rises. The oxygen will be near the floor.
4. **Have a List of Valuables.** Keep all valuable documents such as homeowner's policy, life insurance policy, and other important documents and valuables in a strongbox or in another location outside the home.
5. **Familiarize Children with Fire Department.** Blaring sirens, huge trucks, and equipped firefighters can be scary for kids. It is important for children to be familiar with firefighters and the fire department so that if a fire occurs, they will not be afraid and hide.