

Alpha Fire Co. responsibilities many Volunteers serve State College

By COLLEEN BURRITT
Collegian Staff Writer

Members of the Alpha Volunteer Fire Company will readily agree there is a lot more to being a fireman than just fighting fires.

Their responsibilities also include rescue work, driving ambulances and performing many small services for State College and the surrounding community.

Alpha Fire Company, composed of about 110 active volunteers, serves an area of 132 square miles including the borough of State College and the University.

Fire Chief Ronald Ross said the company answered 196 fire calls and 796 ambulance calls last year. "That's quite a few for all-volunteer," he said. This year, Alpha has answered 94 fire calls.

Ross said his job as chief covers writing the fire reports that are sent to the state and keeping a fire record for the company.

Ross said members are informed of emergencies by a "fire phone system" in each fireman's home.

A dispatcher is always at the S. Fraser Street fire station to take emergency calls. He sends out the message by way of the fire phone system to each fireman simultaneously.

First assistant Fire Chief Joseph Neff said an average turnout at a general alarm fire is about 40 to 60 men and about five to 15 for minor fires.

Ross said the company also receives many "silent alarms" from people who smell smoke or blow fuses. The company sends someone to check such situations.

Alpha Fire Company also has performed some unusual rescues. Ross said he received a call a few evenings ago that a dog chasing a cat had become stuck in a pipe under a highway. Ross drove to the scene, but the dog had already freed himself.

Shortly after he returned, he said, he received another call that a puppy was stuck in a sewer pipe. Ross rescued him.

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and you feel like you're really
doing something for the community.'*

Last summer at a community field, Ross said a fraternity's monkey escaped and crawled up on a church steeple. Alpha Fire Company was called for help.

The company also receives many calls to rescue cats in trees, but the Company has started to frown on such calls.

Neff said "under normal conditions the cats come down themselves," often before the company arrives.

Jerry Ross, a volunteer member for seven months, said the fire company does not receive many false alarms. He said this may be because calls must be telephoned in, and a name and address must be given.

"One of the things that bothers us most is the dumpster fires," Ross said. Fires often start in the "dempster/dumpster" trash disposals along Calder Alley, and the company frequently is called late at night to put them out.

"It isn't as funny as some people think," he said, adding these minor fires irk the members who have to "get out of bed and put them out."

"It's not too funny to lose a good hour or more of sleep because of these pranksters," he added.

Ross said people "who want to join and do something for the community" may contact the fire company. Prospective members are screened, evaluated and voted on by the members.

Ross said a prospective member must be between the ages of 21 and 45, be an area resident for three years and pass a physical examination.

During the first year, he must complete 54 hours of fire school and 18 hours of first aid training.

"They are on a year's probation. If they prove themselves, they are made members of the Alpha Fire Company," Ross said.

Training sessions are held at various times throughout the year. Ted Reigh, a volunteer for seven years, said the company tries to schedule as much training as possible during the summer because of the good weather.

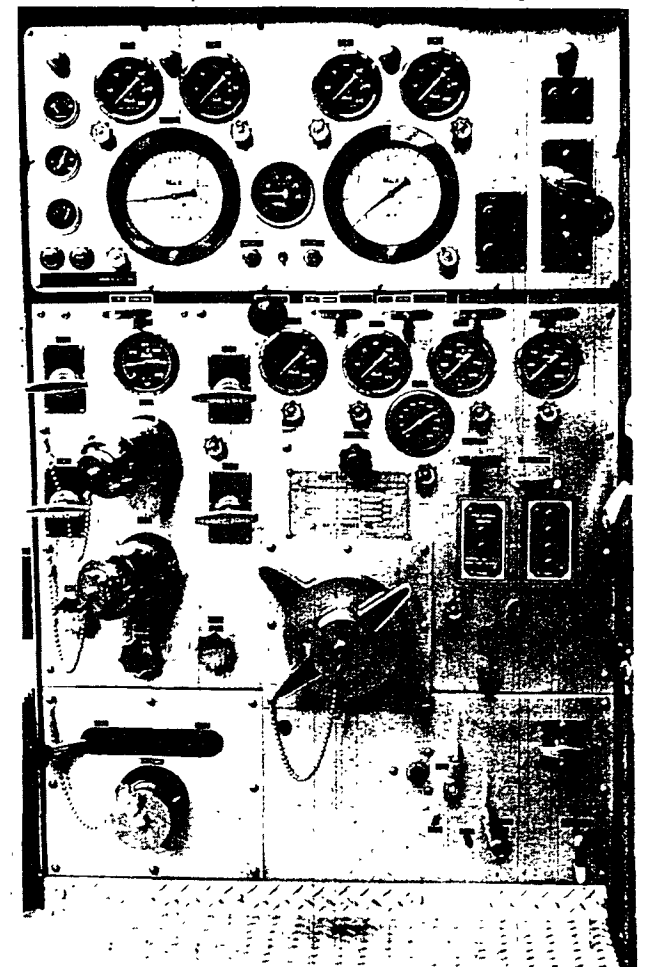
"Fire school is held once a year for rookies, but most other members go back for refreshers," Reigh said.

Ross said members are required to attend eight meetings and 25 per cent of all fires.

Ross said the University "allows all employees who are members to take time out to go to fires and drive ambulances without loss of pay."

He also said a member has "to be always on call and ready to help, and a lot of people really appreciate it."

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*And who says firefighting
isn't complicated?*

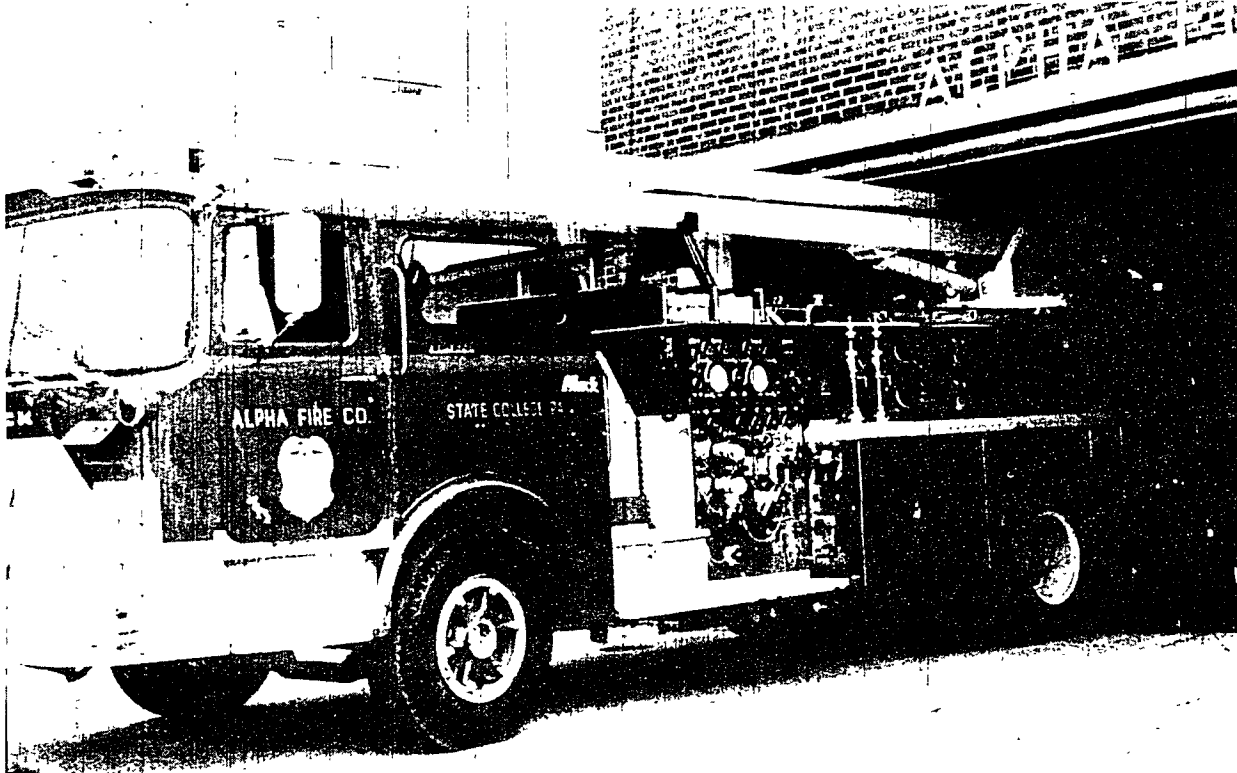
Most of the firemen expressed admiration for their job as volunteers. Jerry Ross said that he definitely enjoys his work. "It's a little bit of a thrill and excitement," he said.

Ross said the company now has nine pieces of equipment. These trucks are purchased and owned by the borough of State College.

Reigh explained that when equipment is needed, the company must get approval from the borough government, but the fire company designs the trucks. He said the townships also donate money for the purchase of equipment.

Alpha Fire Company operates three ambulances, one of

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Alpha's new remote firefighting truck

Photos by Ed Golomb

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