



# THE RURAL HITCH

APRIL 2007

A publication of  
Lakes Region  
Mutual Fire Aid  
Association

Serving:

Alexandria	Hill
Alton	Holderness
Andover	Laconia
Ashland	Meredith
Barnstead	Meredith EMS
Belmont	Moultonborough
Bridgewater	New Durham
Bristol	New Hampton
Campton/Thornton	Plymouth
Center Harbor	Rumney
Danbury	Sanbornton
Dorchester	Sandwich
East Andover	Tilton/Northfield
Ellsworth	Warren
Franklin	Waterville Valley
Gilford	Warren-Wentworth
Gilmanton	EMS
Groton	Wentworth
Hebron	Strafford



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Laconia, New Hampshire 03246  
603.528.9111  
[www.lrmfa.org](http://www.lrmfa.org)

## Welcome...

...to the first (in awhile) issue of **THE RURAL HITCH**. We are excited to once again be publishing a newsletter that will function as an informational news source for the communities we serve.

Each issue will feature a department within the Association, as well as educational opportunities, meeting and training dates, interviews with Communication Center personnel, promotions, retirements, appointments, etc., and an ongoing history of the Association itself.

We hope you will take advantage of **THE RURAL HITCH** to publicize your department's news. Articles may be emailed to [debbiek@lrmfa.org](mailto:debbiek@lrmfa.org). Photos are welcome also. Digital files should be of high quality. Original photos will be scanned and returned.

This issue features the **Alton Fire Department**. The next issue, which will appear July 1, will highlight Ashland. Additionally, you'll find an informative article describing a hydrant assist valve the Gilmanton Fire Department is using.

Remember: use **THE RURAL HITCH** to share your news! The Association is here to serve you and your department. 



Looking down on The Pavilion.

Photo courtesy of Bill Hemmel/LakesRegionAerials.com

## Fire Levels Local Landmark

On Thursday, December 14, 2006, a five-alarm fire destroyed a local landmark in Alton. The Pavilion, located on the water in Alton Bay, was nearing completion as a high-end condo development at the time of the fire.

The fire was reported at 6:25 with a first-alarm at 6:29 and a second at 6:31. Later in the morning, at 8:19, a fourth alarm was called and at 15:35, a fifth. All-in-all, sixteen departments plus Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid were involved extinguishing the blaze.

One of the difficulties fighting this fire was the fact that there were no fire boats available. In a normal winter, the lake would have

ALTON — CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

# Board of Directors

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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# From the Chief...

By Chief Douglas M. Aiken

Welcome to the first edition of the **THE RURAL HITCH**, the newsletter of the Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid Association. This publication has been in the planning stages for some time. The executive committee conceived the idea of publishing a newsletter and we are pleased to be able to bring it to you. If all goes well, we will publish four times per year. The primary means of distribution will be via e-mail. This will keep our costs down. We also plan to print limited copies for distribution outside our system. If you would like to add your e-mail address to our e-mailing list please send a message to [debbie@lrmfa.org](mailto:debbie@lrmfa.org). You will receive future issues directly.

The intent of the newsletter is to provide timely information to our members and their member communities. We will feature member departments, staff members, meetings, training opportunities, significant incidents within the system, statistics, photos and the history of how our association was formed and how it grew through the years. I suspect that some of our readers will be able to provide additional information on our history and we welcome that.

The most important thing to remember is that this newsletter is yours. I invite you to provide information for future issues and welcome your comments and suggestions on how we can improve as we go along. The next issue will be published in July so let us hear from you! You can contact the editor at [debbie@lrmfa.org](mailto:debbie@lrmfa.org) or you can reach me at [daiken@imsa.safety.org](mailto:daiken@imsa.safety.org).

## THE RURAL HITCH

is published quarterly by  
Lakes Region  
Mutual Fire Aid Association

Chief  
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Deputy Chief  
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Email all submissions to:  
[debbie@lrmfa.org](mailto:debbie@lrmfa.org)





**Chief Alan Johnson**  
Alton Fire Department

## Featured department...

# Alton Fire Department

### 01 – Alton Fire Department

**Fire Chief:** Alan M. Johnson

**Address:** 65 Frank C. Gilman Highway  
P.O. Box 472  
Alton, NH 03809  
603-875-0222  
Fax: 603-875-0226

**Office**

**Hours:** Mon.–Fri. 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

**Officers:** Assistant Chief Scott Williams  
Deputy Chief Richard Brown  
Captain Ed Consentino (also  
EMS Captain)  
Lt. Michael Caverly  
Lt. Gary Hannafin  
EMS Lt. Sharon Hannafin  
Ladder Lt. Chris Johnson

**Apparatus:** **Central**

pumper, tanker, heavy rescue,  
ladder, ambulance 1, 27' fire  
boat

**East Alton**

pumper and ambulance 2

**West Alton**

pumper and ambulance 3

The Town of Alton Fire Department consists of three stations: Central, East, and West. Originally incorporated in 1899, the original all-volunteer department was lo-

cated on Alton Bay. It later moved to the first floor of Town Hall and eventually was split up into three stations, which is its current configuration.

Chief Al Johnson, the present chief of the fire department, has been with the department since 1991. Prior to that, he worked fulltime at the Rochester, NH fire department for many years. He's been involved with the fire service since he was quite young and you could say it is in his blood: his grandfather and great-grandfather were both firefighters! Additionally, he has two sons and a daughter-in-law who are in the fire service. The "fire bug" skipped a generation — his father was not affiliated with a fire department.

The Alton Fire Department has approximately 35 active members. This number includes seven students, four seniors who are Level II firefighters and three freshmen who are at Level I. Four of the students live at the Central Station; the other three stay at the West Alton Station. The student program has worked out well in Alton as it not only provides additional coverage for the town, it provides excellent on-the-job training for the students. Seventy-five to eighty percent of Alton's students are placed in full time jobs upon graduating from the Fire Science program at the NH Community Technical College. Their education as well

as their training with Alton has allowed them to go on to jobs in the Concord Fire Department, Bedford F.D., and Tilton-Northfield F.D. Some have also gone on to four-year colleges, majoring in fire science.

Until 2004, the department was an all-volunteer operation. In 2004, Chief Johnson became the first full-time paid fire chief. Additionally, he is a first responder on medical calls. Currently, he and Mary Jane Dascoli are the only paid full-time staff. MJ,



as she is called, is the Chief's administrative assistant and is also an EMT.

The Town originally had a private ambulance service, which was taken over by the Fire Department in 1999. The ambulance service is currently self-funded as insurance payments cover the expenses. Capital reserve funds have been set up to fund future equipment purchases, using money from the insurance payments. During the peak summer season (Memorial Day through Labor Day) the ambulance is staffed seven days a week.

In 2006, the department handled 262 fire calls and 486 medical/ambulance calls. It also performed over 160 inspections. Calls in 2006 were up 11% from 2005. Alton is the last department in New Hampshire handling almost 1,000 calls per year that is not full time. It faces the same problem every town in the state does: growth. As the "good" land runs out, homes are being built in previously "unbuildable" areas. This means long, narrow and/or steep driveways and access roads, all of which equal difficulty accessing a building in case of fire or other emergency. And even though a great deal of the town centers around the largest lake in the state, access to water for fighting fires is often an issue — except, of course, for the eleven inhabited islands it must also cover!

The Chief feels it is inevitable the department will move to fulltime status. The year-round population of Alton is approximately 5,100. However, during the summer months that number swells to 22,000! Coupled with several major highways converging here and increased commuter traffic, the department finds itself very, very busy. And staffing becomes more of a problem as membership decreases and more members work outside the town so are unable to



**Scenes from a November 22, 2006 fire on Route 28 in Alton. Additionally, the following departments responded: Barnstead, Belmont (2nd Alarm), Gilford, Gilmanton, LRMFA (2nd Alarm), New Durham, and Tilton-Northfield (cover).**

respond quickly, if at all, to emergencies. Chief Johnson asked for three fulltime staffers in this year's budget but was not able to get it past the town's administrator.

Other issues the department is facing include outdated equipment and a lack of space. Several pieces of apparatus are in tough shape but with funding of capital reserves cut or eliminated in recent years, it is doubtful much can be replaced in the near future. Alton is no different than other New Hampshire towns: money is tight, taxpayers are tighter! The ladder truck needs to be replaced, but a new truck will be seven feet longer than the building that will house it. Space inside the building is cramped.

In spite of these problems, the department maintains a professional and well-trained group of paid call firefighters. It has faced several

difficult fires in the past year, including the well-publicized fire at the historic Pavilion building and recurring fires at a local tire dump. The tire fires have proved to be very expensive: \$10,000 worth of foam was needed to extinguish the fires and was "borrowed" from all over the state! This impacts the budget in a big way and is not an expense that can be planned on.

The Alton Fire Department holds its business meeting on the first Tuesday of the month; an officers' meeting on the last Tuesday of the month; and training sessions on the remaining Tuesdays. The third Wednesday of the month is reserved for EMS training. The Department also has an Explorer program, which frequently meets on training nights. If you are interested in joining the department, please contact them directly at 875-0222. 

been iced in by then, so all boats had been stored for the winter, making access to the waterfront side of the building extremely difficult.

The building renovations also contributed to the difficulties. Fire-fighters were unaware of a double roof — the new roof had been built on top of the old roof. Fortunately, builders were on site and helped by sharing blueprints and their knowledge of the building's construction.

The fire was declared under control at noon and at 18:13 command was terminated and all companies cleared the scene.

The following departments were involved:

- Allenstown
- Alton
- Barnstead
- Belmont
- Farmington
- Gilford
- Gilmanton
- Laconia
- Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid
- Meredith
- New Durham
- Pittsfield
- Rochester
- Sanbornton
- Strafford
- Tilton/Northfield
- Wolfeboro

If you are interested in obtaining a print of the aerial photo on page 1, please contact Bill Hemmel at Lakes Region Aerial Photo, 524-0771. We appreciate him allowing us to use this photograph in **THE RURAL HITCH**. 🚒

## From the Past...

# The History of Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid

Compiled by Debbie Kardaseski, LRMFA

### IN THE BEGINNING...

In the early 1950s, many New Hampshire fire departments were recognizing the need — and the advantages — of combining their resources. Most fire departments were staffed by volunteers and community funding for equipment varied widely between towns. Small towns were not equipped to handle a major fire on their own.

Discussion began about forming mutual aid associations throughout the state, including the Lakes Region. The first meeting of what would come to be known as the Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid Association was held on March 28, 1951 at the Winnisquam Fire Department. Merle Sargent was made the temporary president, with A.S. Francis selected as the temporary secretary and treasurer. Meetings would be held on the last Thursday of the month at various

locations. Funding was through voluntary collections at each meeting! The expenses of the first meeting totaled 82 cents. After a collection totaling \$6.50, it left a balance on hand of \$5.68.

The early bylaws of the organization, created on May 31, 1951, stated "The purpose shall be to promote cooperation between the member departments in the extinguishing of fires and saving property in the communities in the Lakes Region." Membership would be open to any community that had accepted the state mutual aid law or to any community who later voted to accept it. Expenses would be met through voluntary contributions. Also discussed at the May meeting was the major reason for forming a mutual aid association: an inventory of equipment available.

It wasn't many months before annual dues were being discussed.

By October 25, 1951, the cash on hand had dwindled to \$1.82. At the October meeting, it was decided to institute dues of \$16.00 per annum.

Late in 1951 maps began to be organized and assembled to create a comprehensive overview of

HISTORY – CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



**Dispatch was located in Laconia Central Station until the early 70s. If you know who this is, please send the information to [debbiek@lrmfa.org](mailto:debbiek@lrmfa.org) and we'll publish it in the next issue.**

#### HISTORY – CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

the area. Towns began talking about how they would respond to their neighboring towns and discussions were begun regarding radios.

In March of 1953, the first official slate of officers was elected: Chief Chester Brickett, Winnisquam, president; Chief Boomhower, vice president; and Gus Francis, secretary/treasurer.

Through the years discussions were held at meetings to address issues such as cars following or interfering with fire apparatus; dealing with insubordinate volunteers; keeping maps and contact information up to date; getting folks off party telephone lines during a fire emergency; and pumps freezing up in the winter. Some of these items continue to be discussed, fifty-four years later! Funding for items such as radios and apparatus were also ongoing topics for discussion – and continues to be.

Minutes from the 1950s reflect a different lifestyle. Each year, an evening was set aside as “ladies” night. Cost for an evening of dinner and dancing in 1956 was \$2.50! Movies and slide shows on topics such as fishing and travel were routinely shown after meetings. Training videos were also watched.

It wasn’t until May 1956 that enough maps were finally turned in to create a master map! In some cases, people had to wait until mud season was over to retrieve maps. Jokes were made about the amount of paper amassed by the map committee and every now and again, maps got lost only to resurface a few months later. Creating a master map was a monumental task then and keeping maps up to date remains a sizeable job even now in the electronic age.

Radio traffic became problematic with each department having radios and firefighters not identifying themselves when speaking on the air. Calls from as far away as California could be picked up and confusion sometimes reigned supreme! Procedures were put in place to avoid this problem.

## THE 1960s

LRMFA began the 60s with \$226.59 in its savings account. Dues to the Federation of Fire Mutual Aid Associations of New Hampshire continued to be \$16.00 per year. Work was continuing on obtaining lower insurance rates for member commu-

HISTORY – CONTINUED ON PAGE 7



**Fire fighting apparatus circa 1950. Most trucks in this area were equipped by Farrar, a manufacturer of fire trucks in the forties and fifties. These used an International chassis.**



**Groundbreaking ceremonies at Lily Pond Fire Training School, early 60s.**

**HISTORY – CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6**

nities by proving to insurance companies the value of tankers. This work went on through the 60s, with some success being noted by early 1968. Decals denoting membership in LRMFA continued to be sold.

The February 25, 1960 minutes contain the first mention of the “gated Y” system, otherwise known as “the rural hitch.” Training on this was offered at the Glendale docks on Sunday, March 20, 1960. Throughout late winter and early spring 1960, the system was instituted throughout LRMFA.

The Association continued its battle to secure funding for a permanent fire training school at Lily Pond. In the meantime, volunteers began clearing the land with the help of an Army bulldozer. The first drill session was held on the site on Sunday, October 30, 1960 at 2 p.m. Instruction on hose laying, pumping, and oil fires was planned.

Color coding of equipment was instituted to make it easier to sort out hose, pumps, etc. after a mutual aid call. This had been under discussion for a number of years and the size of the Association had finally reached the point where something needed to be done.

In March, 1961, the Frequency Committee began the arduous task of getting communication between communities in sync. The committee was directed to go before the county delegation and request \$5,000 to be used to place a transmitter on Mt. Belknap, with a base station to be installed at Laconia Central Station.

In May, 1961, Sandwich was accepted into Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid. Also in May, spring training was held. About 50 men attended, averaging three men from each department. It was considered a poor showing and it was hoped in the future that more chiefs insist their “Indians” attend training! Later fire training sessions had better attendance, with 136 firemen receiving certificates at the end of their classes in 1962 and 235 in 1967.

Through 1961, work continued on the Lily Pond fire training site, while work toward obtaining state funding stalled. Work also began on the Mt. Belknap tower site. New England Tel. & Tel. and Public Service both gave permission to string cable on their poles. Clearance for the frequency was obtained, wire purchased to run up the mountain, and a building procured. As the

**HISTORY – CONTINUED ON PAGE 8**



**September 25, 1965. Unknown ceremony at Fire Training. Left to right: a Selectman from Gilford, Oscar Prescott, Basil Broadhurst, Edith Gardner, Merle Sargent, Ollie Hewitt, Almond Watson, Lorraine Rogers, and Audrey Robinson.**

**HISTORY – CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7**

summer progressed, funding for the transmission site also stalled.

Discussions were held about mutual aid calls. Apparently, some towns still were not utilizing the mutual aid dispatch center but calling adjoining departments directly when help was needed. And, some departments were hesitant to ask for help. Eventually, a procedure was drafted and sent to all member departments.

It was during the 60s that procedures were put in place regarding forest fires and who would call for mutual aid and how.

By fall of 1962, the tower on Belknap was functional and, after testing, it was determined there would be no further problems getting messages between departments. Communication had been an ongoing problem through the years and this was the first step in creating the extensive system in place today. It was during the 60s that regular radio checks were begun. Throughout the 60s, numerous repairs and adjustments were made to the tower on Belknap. Wires broke, access was impeded by the weather, electrical storms wreaked havoc, updates had to be made, and new cable laid.

An appropriation of \$35,000 was finally received from the state for the Lily Pond Fire School. Plans had moved forward on a building design and, once a contractor could be selected, work would begin. It had been a long wait. In September, 1963, another problem cropped up: The city of Laconia decided it didn't want to part with some of the land already cleared for the fire school and wanted to keep it for industrial development. The remainder of the land was not enough and another ten acres would be needed.

The Association continued to add training apparatus through the years, which made the construction of a building to house everything necessary. In 1969, preliminary planning began to plan and finance the project. The committee in charge looked into obtaining a large Quonset hut from government surplus.

Other changes made in 1964 included new running orders. New roads, including Interstate 93, Route 104, and the Laconia By-pass had forced the Association to take another look at the mutual aid system. Numerous changes were instituted.

**HISTORY – CONTINUED ON PAGE 9**

It was late in 1966 when a suggestion was made to record incoming and outgoing conversations at the dispatch center located at Laconia Fire Department. Evidently there had been some ongoing problems and it was felt this might be the best way to resolve them. Research was done and an expenditure of \$1,300 approved to purchase a “magnetic recording system.” However, funding could not be found and in March of 1969, an arrangement was made with New England Telephone to install a tape recorder at the central dispatch office for \$25.00 per month.

In 1968, an encoder was ordered with eight tones. Each town using a tone alert would be billed \$11.00 for their portion of the added expense. Just a year later, a larger encoder had to be ordered and shortly after that, another radio frequency had to be added. 1969 ended with a discussion about departments not using proper radio procedure — an issue that continues to this day.

**Next issue:** We'll take a look at the 1970s. 

## Sharing Ideas...

### Hydrant Assist Valve Modification

By Deputy Chief Kenneth G. (K.G.) Lockwood, LRMFA

#### PROBLEM:

Departments currently using or who want to utilize the Jaffrey “in-line relay” or “Z” valve have been faced with a dilemma since Jaffrey sold out to Harrington. The new company felt there was not a big enough market for it to continue producing the “Z” valves. Consequently, no new or replacement valves have been available.

#### SOLUTION:

Gilmanton approached this problem creatively, with a variety of ideas and “home-made” approaches. They then asked a local vendor about modifying a “hydrant assist valve” by simply changing one connection to storz, allowing all four sides to have storz fittings. The end product was a water handling device very similar to the familiar “Z” valve.

#### RESULT:

After testing this device and measuring both friction loss and GPM, it was determined that this modified hydrant assist valve is a very good replacement for the “Z” valve. It is somewhat more user-friendly than the “Z” valve and, with an adapter, can still be utilized as a hydrant assist valve if desired.

For further information: Contact Lt. Bryan Boyajian at 364-2500. 



# Employee Spotlight...



## Chris Harris

### Firefighter/Dispatcher Chris

**Harris** began his career here in 1998. In 2002, he left to pursue other interests, but returned to LRMFA in 2006. In addition to his position here as Firefighter/Dispatcher, he is a Lieutenant of

Company 1, Tilton-Northfield Fire Department, as well as President of the Tilton-Northfield Fire Dept. Fire-fighters Assn.

Harris enjoys working with the public as well as working with his shift partner, Lt. Bob Magoon, and the four-on-four-off schedule. He likes having a busy shift from time to time as it makes the days go by more quickly. The down-side to his job is the sometimes long 13-hour night shifts, especially when it is a quiet night. He also

does not enjoy the commute over the very busy Route 3/11 — a route no one likes to drive!

Chris has been married to Holly for over ten years. They have a four-year-old daughter, Savannah, as well as a five-month-old daughter, Addison, and one cat named Alcatraz. Holly is a Police Officer in the town of Gilford, and is currently assigned to the Detective Division as SRO in the elementary and middle schools.

During his time off, he enjoys vacationing with his family. They travel to Walt Disney World twice a year and to Destin, FL once a year, where they enjoy the beautiful beaches. The family also has fun camping in Wells, ME with friends.

Additionally, he works on fundraisers at the fire department and assists Holly with her fundraising efforts for the police department. He is also the owner/operator of Busy Blades Lawn Mowing.

## First Quarter Statistics...

From Jan. 1, 2007–March 31, 2007

<b>Incidents Dispatched:</b>	January 2007	1,693
	February 2007	1,526
	March 2007	1,676
	<b>Total First Quarter</b>	<b>4,895</b>
	<b>YTD Total</b>	<b>4,895</b>

### Resources Available:

Engines	102	Tankers	15
Ladders	9	Rescues	21
Forestry	32	Ambulances	38
Utilities	5	Fire Boats	14
Towers	3		

### Statistics:

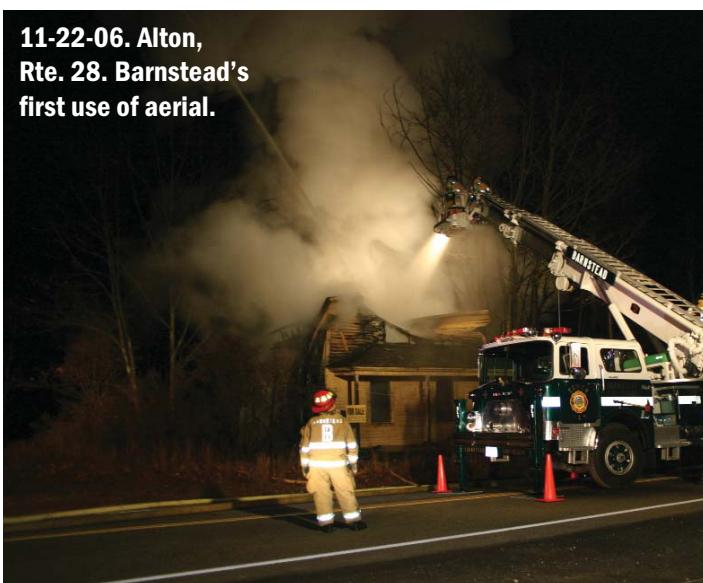
- Began operations in September of 1971. Moved operations to our current facility in June of 2000.
- Dispatches Fire and Medical Emergencies for 36 communities and 37 Fire and EMS Agencies.
- Serves a population of 117,518 residents (2006 Estimate).
- Is spread over 5 NH Counties, covering a geographical area of 1,494 square miles (16% of the area of the State of NH — 1.5 times the size of the state of Rhode Island).
- Protects over \$20.4 billion dollars of property (2006 Valuation).
- Has an operating budget of \$906,978 (2007 budget).
- Has 10 full-time and 8 part-time employees.
- Dispatched 21,295 incidents during 2006 (58.34 calls per day).
- Dispatched 21,441 incidents during 2005 (58.7 calls per day).
- 20,001 incidents during 2004 (54.7 calls per day).



# Around the System...

Please send us your fire photos, new equipment photos, new personnel photos, etc.  
for use in the section of **THE RURAL HITCH**

**11-22-06. Alton,  
Rte. 28. Barnstead's  
first use of aerial.**



**10-21-05. Weirs  
Beach, Crossroads  
Restaurant.**



**01-18-05. Belmont,  
Rte. 3 Strip Mall  
Fire.**



**03-27-07. Northfield,  
Hidden Lane.**



**12-05-03. Laconia,  
Union Ave. Apartment  
Building.**



**01-18-05. Belmont,  
Rte. 3 Strip Mall Fire.**





# Association Meeting Schedule

**MAY 24 @ 1900 @  
WATERVILLE VALLEY**

**JULY 26 @ 1900 @  
DANBURY**

**SEPTEMBER 27 @ 1900 @  
CENTER HARBOR, STATION 1**

**NOVEMBER 29 @ 1900 @  
SANBORNTON CENTRAL STATION**

Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid Association  
62 Commnications Drive  
Laconia, NH 03246

