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Gunflint Fire Department loses Station #2 to fire

By Rhonda Silence, Cook County Star

On Monday, October 22 at 6:52, Cook County Law Enforcement dispatchers received a call from Gunflint Lodge, reporting a fire. The location of the fire was a shock - it was Gunflint Volunteer Fire Department Station #2. Firefighters rushed to the scene, and those whose gear was inside the burning hall could only watch helplessly as the fire grew. Firefighters from the MidTrail Fire Station #1 responded within minutes, but the building and its contents were a total loss.

Fire Chief Dan Baumann said it was a frustrating event. "All we could do was watch it fall. Everything we use as tools to fight fires was there - and we couldn't touch it." Firefighters concentrated on containing the fire, which started to spread to surrounding trees. Cabins within 200 feet of the blaze were evacuated. "Basically all we did was try to control it, to knock it down so we could figure out what started it."

Unfortunately the very equipment that puts out fires and saves lives, contributed to the flames. "There were so many accelerants, it just burned out of control," said Baumann. The State Fire Marshall inspected the ruins on Tuesday, October 23, and was able to determine that the origin of the fire was at or near the ambulance. The ambulance is continually plugged in, to be ready to operate at a moment's notice. Because of the damage of the intense fire, little else could be determined. Baumann said the aluminum in the ambulance melted, which happens at 1200 degrees. Copper wire in the building's walls also melted, a phenomena that occurs at 2000 degrees.

An emergency meeting was held Tuesday evening and volunteers inventoried the contents of the fire hall, estimating the loss to be approximately \$350,000. Destroyed in the fire was the only Gunflint Trail Ambulance, the newest Type 1 Fire Engine, a Fire-Rescue Boat, the Gunflint Trail's Jaws-of-Life, as well as most of Gunflint Trail Emergency Medical training equipment. EMS Chief Laura Popkes said items such as the defibrillator and the CPR training Rescue-Annies were destroyed.

Assistant Fire Chief George Carlson said, "We are grateful that no injuries were sustained in preventing the fire from spreading to other structures. However, our insurance coverage will only cover 25% of our loss."

The Gunflint Fire Department has been flooded with calls from other emergency organizations, asking what they need. However the most pressing need, and probably the biggest challenge, is to rebuild the Station before winter.

Until the Gunflint Ambulance Service gets a "loaner" ambulance, the Cook County Ambulance is providing mutual aid and making emergency runs up the Gunflint as needed. Baumann said the Gunflint Trail First Responders are all fully equipped and will still perform the initial assessments. There is a 250-gallon Type 6 engine parked at Gunflint Lodge to provide some protection.

Donations to assist the Gunflint Trail Volunteer Fire Department in replacing the building, vehicles and supplies can be mailed to: Fire Loss Fund, Gunflint Trail VFD, 60 Voyageurs Point, Grand Marais, MN 55604.

Baumann said it would probably take years to get the department back to the same level of service as before the devastating fire, but they are moving on. "We've all dealt with losses. The majority of us have medical training. We know the value of life over a piece of equipment."

Photos courtesy of Dan Baumann, Assistant Fire Chief



