

## NEWS FROM THE ELLSBURG VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT 20200401

Our April meeting was held on Wednesday, April 1, at 6:30pm at the Bass Lake Firehall on Mink Road. Our May meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 6, at 6:30pm at the Bass Lake Firehall. The April meeting was our first one held under the Covid-19 social distancing recommendations and stay-at-home mandate. Our board members were present at the meeting, as well as 3 other members who had business to discuss. One member was present through Zoom. While we certainly missed all of our members being present as usual, and contributing their opinions and recommendations, we strongly support social distancing and stay at home policies. We want our members and their families to remain healthy. Issues that members need to be aware of are sent via email, and topics discussed via phone. Our Wednesday night work nights are changed also. We no longer get together to do the work. The vehicle and maintenance needs are posted, members sign up for what they do, and then they can complete the work on their own time. We do miss the camaraderie of getting together, but these are different times. Things will get better again, and then we will get back to life as usual. For our May meeting, we will continue to practice social distancing. Maybe it will be a nice evening and we can take the vehicles out of the bays so that we have more room for more members to spread out!

A few months ago, I wrote that we needed more members in the northwest area of our township along the Melrude Road corridor. We only have two responders who live in this area and respond to the Melrude Firehall. The Melrude Firehall houses three vehicles: an engine, a tanker, and a rescue vehicle that is also equipped for wildfires. Well, wouldn't you know, we got a new member! We are happy to welcome Joe Caple to our department! Joe lives very close to the Melrude Firehall. Joe was a firefighter in this department back in the 1980's. He was even fire chief for a while before moving out of the area. Joe is of the age that he will not go into a burning building anymore, but he will be a great help at a fire scene. Joe is being trained by our Assistant Chief, Lee Voigt. Although Joe is able to drive any of our vehicles, his primary assignment will be Engine 1 in the Melrude Firehall. He and the Engine have already gone for a ride around the township and stopped at the Speedway in Cotton for fuel. Joe is practicing getting water into the engine and pumping water out of the engine. The Engine will roll for every fire and also for vehicle accidents on the highway. An engine is great for blocking off a lane of the highway to protect the first responders that are working there. Joe and Lee are also responsible for any vehicle maintenance that is needed in the Melrude Firehall. Another duty that Joe and Lee have is setting up a landing zone in this area for when we need air medical services. Welcome to our team, Joe!

Our department responded to six calls in March, and no calls, as of this writing, in April. None of these calls were related to the coronavirus. We hope that our township can avoid this virus. However, that may not be realistic. Are you wearing masks? Are you practicing social distancing? Are you staying at home? These measures do help to break the chain of transmission of this virus. By now, everyone knows the symptoms of fever, cough, and shortness of breath. The difficult thing is that not everyone experiences the same symptoms and not everyone is affected to the same degree. For some, this is a fatal disease, while others may not even know that they have it. The uncertainty is what is most distressing to everyone. It is like we are the prey that is trying to elude the coronavirus predator. Will we be able to? Will we fall victim to it? Combine this thought process with the changes in our routine brought on by staying at home, working from home, not being able to work, having children and spouses at home all the time, isolating ourselves from family and friends, being unable to participate in exercise classes or hobby gatherings, wearing masks and gloves to go shopping, difficulty finding certain foods and staples, cancelling vacation and travel plans, being unable to participate in life events such as births, graduations, weddings, funerals,...These changes in our lives can take a psychological toll. We can hear more calls on our radios now for mental health issues than before this pandemic started. There is an increased incidence of domestic violence and abuse. Post-traumatic stress is prevalent in quarantined workers and children, as well as in virus survivors. Depression, stress, fear, and anxiety can be overwhelming for some people. These conditions will last beyond the pandemic.

There are things that you can do to maintain your mental health. While it is important to keep current on what is happening in the world, try to avoid too much exposure to the news. Minnesota provides statistics on the incidence of the virus which includes how many have it, how many have died from it, and also how many have recovered from it. Focus on the recovery statistic. Recognize that millions of people worldwide are experiencing the same changes in lifestyle as you are. You are not alone, yet you are not responsible for everyone's experience. Focus on yourself, your family, your friends, and your community. That is enough responsibility. Keep in touch with family, friends, clergy, and other important people in your life by phone, text, email, and video services. Try yoga, meditation, or practice mindfulness. If you have trouble sleeping, limit the amount and type of news that you are viewing before bedtime. Exercise regularly. Taking a walk or run outside when you feel stressed is great for mental health. We are fortunate that

we have much open space in this township that allows us to recreate freely. If you can't engage in your hobbies, find new ones. Eat well balanced meals. Get enough sleep. If you feel like you cannot cope, please do not be afraid of asking for professional help.

Children can pick up on stress in the family even if they don't understand what is going on. They may seek more attention or become demanding. Be understanding. Explain to your children what is going on in a basic, honest way. Let them ask questions and express their feelings. Let them know that you will face this together. Involve them in family projects and entertainment. Let them help cook, rake, organize...Encourage them to stay in contact with their friends by calling or using social media. Remember that children's lives are also affected by the change in their routines.

Now is the time to get to those projects that you always wanted to do when you had time. Pick a different room of your house to clean and reorganize each day. Clean and reorganize your sheds and storage buildings. Pay attention to storing your flammables properly. Prepare your home for wildfire season. Clean leaves and needles out of your gutters and landscaping shrubs, and off of your roof and deck. Clean out the area under your deck also. Prune all tree branches and shrubs that are within 15 feet of your chimney or stovepipe. Remove branches that extend over your roof. Rake leaves, dead limbs, and twigs away from your house. Clear a 10 foot area around propane tanks. Stack firewood at least 100 feet away and uphill from your home. Remove all plants, shrubs, and mulch that are within 3-5 feet of your home. Spread gravel or decorative rock in this area to create an attractive, nonflammable ground cover. Extend the gravel to the area under the deck. The first 30 feet around your home is called the Intensive Zone. Plant only vegetation that has a low growth habit in this area. Keep grass mowed short. Ideally, all conifer trees should be removed from this zone. If not, they should be spaced with at least 10 feet between their crowns and pruned up at least 8 feet. Remove any "ladder fuels", which are tall grasses, small shrubs, trees, tree limbs, and other materials that allow fire to climb into the crown of the tree. Hopefully, our township can avoid any serious wildfires this season. Our department is prepared to respond to wildfires and medical emergencies. Call 911 and we will be there!