

August 10, 2022

So let me take you back, one year ago on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, I was home with Carlene and we were desperate to get out of town for a couple of days. Our son Jack was graduating out of his Army program at Langley-Eustis and we wanted to go visit him and then head to the beach. Unfortunately for us, Covid was on the upswing and the base was closed to visitors, therefore we needed to change our plans fast or school would start and summer would be a distant memory with no vacation.

It was a Monday night and I found myself searching on the internet. It was late, when I finally came across a decent hotel listing on the Cape. It was pricey, but we had little-to-no other options (that Carlene wouldn't classify as a "dive"), so I gave the card and booked it. It was after 11pm and shortly thereafter I headed up to sleep. Just three hours later, LCD (Litchfield County Dispatch) called the house. The dispatcher said "a third alarm was struck downtown" and they needed me to get down there. I had a feeling in the pit of my stomach that it was the New Hartford House and that it was a real emergency. I looked at Carlene and said "have fun at the Cape, I've got to go to work. Chatterly's is on fire!"

I was there in roughly 2 or 3 minutes and the flames were already through the roof. My immediate thought was that the building was lost and it was going to take 4 Bridge Street (Koverage/Peticones) next door with it. My second thought was, if the building fell in the wrong direction, it could do heavy damage to Town Hall. Our worst nightmare was coming true right before my eyes!

I will never forget the events that transpired that night; who was there and what they did. Throughout that night I marveled at how well our First Responders performed. Chief Worsman and his entire team from the NH Village Fire Department were amazing - so organized under pressure...I almost want to say 'choreographed to perfection'. Backed up by Chief Diorio and South End Volunteer Fire Department and numerous surrounding departments (including awesome ladder trucks from Winsted, Torrington and Canton), too many others to name here, that showered millions of gallons of water - for hours upon hours - to slowly bring the fire under control. Their actions saved 4 Bridge Street and protected Town Hall from harm.

Sister agencies...NHVA (ambulance), Torrington Water, Eversource all on their game and giving it 110% for hours. The American Red Cross providing support to the victims. Everything worked the way it's supposed to and, when it was over, all of our people made it home to their families.

Days later we would be informed of the loss of Burlington Fire Fighter Colin McFadden who had come to help our town in our moment of need and collapsed at the scene (due to a pre-existing medical condition). He died helping us and for that we'll always be grateful. I always worry about our people both employees and volunteers. Making sure everyone gets home safely is always my highest priority. But a fire of this magnitude makes one stop and think about what can happen every time a call goes out - it's serious, and very dangerous business. We're fortunate to have a very skilled and talented group of volunteers looking out for our community.

This event, the fire and its aftermath have had a dramatic impact on our town and its people. The building is gone now and plans are being developed by the owner to rebuild (an expensive proposition in

today's climate). The fire is a reminder to all of us of just how fragile things can be, how quickly things can change, and most of all - how important it is to care for the things that you care about.

I continue to believe that small miracles do happen all around us and I believe that I witnessed one occur that night right before my eyes. Not the fire - the response - the people; our people and how they came together that night. Afterward we witnessed a second miracle of compassion as our residents and friends from near and far generously gave to those who had lost everything.

Our lives are cluttered with news...unfortunately, most of which is bad. Yes, we experienced a tragedy, but how our town responded to that tragedy was amazing and it's a good news story that will stay with this town for many years to come.

I look forward to the day, hopefully not too long from now, when I'm standing in the new, New Hartford House celebrating its re-birth with many of our First Responders and friends from far and wide.

I thought it appropriate, on this one year anniversary, to thank everyone who came to help in our time of need. Watching our small town pull together was a miracle and something I'll remember for many years to come.

Keep the faith everyone...and enjoy the rest of this long, hot summer!

Dan