

Volunteer fighters cool under fire

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

Being a paid-on-call volunteer firefighter in Farmington Hills has brought a lot of satisfaction to Mike Mansfield and Marie Schroeder, but often in ways they didn't expect.

Like the new recruits who will get hear about the Hills department at an informational meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 13, at fire headquarters, Mansfield and Schroeder came to a similar meeting in August of 1990, not quite knowing what to expect.

"I saw it (recruiting announcement) on cable TV," said Mansfield, 37. "I had several friends in Livonia who were full-time firefighters."

Mansfield, a truck salesman for Motor City Ford in Livonia and a Hills resident, was supported in his decision by his wife, Maureen. They have a daughter, Rebecca, 6. After a short time, it became apparent that the fire service was not quite what Mansfield had expected.

"I had had no previous training," he said. "I didn't know the Heimlich Maneuver from a bagel."

For Schroeder, 43, it wasn't a question of the wrong expectation. Firefighting was basically a mystery.

"I read about it in the Observer," said the Hills resident. "I wanted to do something within the community. But I didn't know

what you had to do."

After listening to what Hills firefighters presented, Schroeder went home and told her husband, Warren, and daughter Stacey, then 5, and asked if they would go along.

"They said go for it," she said. Schroeder runs her own court reporting business in Detroit, but finds that with her 9-to-5 work schedule, she can make most fire and medical runs.

"The training was a real challenge," she said. "The physical training kept you in shape."

Mansfield said the training fulfilled one expectation.

"I had always thought, what if something happened to someone and I didn't know CPR," he said. "I would feel helpless. Now I have that knowledge."

Mansfield said he expected physical strength and courage to be needed qualities for a firefighter, but hadn't anticipated the need for compassion and understanding required.

"You have the attitude, I didn't start this, but I'm here to fix the problem," he said. "Mostly I've been able to go home without taking (work) problems with me."

Both firefighters say having strong family support is essential for firefighters.

"I've gotten out of bed at night many, many, many times," Schroeder said. "Fortunately, my husband is available to (watch their daughter) 24 hours."

The two firefighters recommend their avocation to anyone who wants to help people.

"I'm very happy with this lifestyle," Mansfield said. "I can be putting around in the yard and be two minutes from a wonderful adventure at any time."

"I think you get more out of this job than you put into it," Schroeder said. "Every time you respond, it means you came when



STAFF PHOTOS BY ANN HEALEY

A happy volunteer: Marie Schroeder says she gets a lot out of being a paid on-call volunteer firefighter in Farmington Hills.

somebody really needed you." The Farmington Hills Fire Department invites anyone interested in becoming a paid-on-call firefighter to come to the informational meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 13, at department headquarters, 28711 Drake Road, between 12 Mile and 13 Mile roads.

Applicants should be at least 18 years old, in good physical health and have good employment and driving records.

Bob Rebtov, assistant to the fire chief for volunteer services, said prospective firefighters should understand that the job involves a large time commitment. He said about 25 percent of those who come to the informational meeting stay through the training and become paid-on-call volunteers. For further information, call 563-0740.

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