



PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 19, 2023

FOUR PROMOTED BY MUSCATINE FIRE DEPARTMENT

Promotions celebrated with badge pinning ceremony Wednesday at Fire Station 1

MUSCATINE, Iowa – A badge pinning ceremony was held by the Muscatine Fire Department Wednesday (July 19), celebrating the recent promotion of four firefighters to new positions. The four were joined in the Day Room of Fire Station 1 by family, friends, and co-workers as Fire Chief Jerry Ewers pinned the badges of rank on the firefighter's uniforms.

Joe Timmsen, a 23-year veteran of the Muscatine Fire Department, was promoted to Battalion Chief of Green Shift after having been the Red Shift captain for the past six years. Timmsen replaces Darrell Janssen who retired June 30 as the Green Shift Battalion Chief after 25 years of service.

Andrew McSorley, an eight-year veteran of the Muscatine fire service, was promoted to replace Timmsen as the Red Shift Captain. Timmsen was the Fire Lieutenant for Green Shift, a role now assigned to newly appointed Fire Lieutenant Jason Verschoore, a six-year veteran of the Muscatine Fire Department. Verschoore was the Fire Mechanic for the Muscatine Fire Department and a search is underway to replace him in that position.



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Joe Rymars, a five-year veteran of the Muscatine Fire Department, was promoted to Fire Lieutenant on June 1, 2023, after serving as an Acting Lieutenant for the past three months. He has been assigned to Red Shift and is the supervisor in charge of Fire Station 2 on Stewart Road in the south end of Muscatine.



Joe Timmsen was a volunteer for the Buffalo ambulance service but wanted to get into the fire service. Timmsen started to volunteer, got into a paramedic program, and, in 2000 was one of the first hires after the Muscatine Fire Department took over the ambulance service in Muscatine.

“It is what I wanted to do,” Timmsen said. “I wanted to be that go-to guy on the engine.”

Today a person who wants to get into the fire service could be hired right off the street as a high school graduate and be trained by the department. In 2000, however, if you were not a paramedic it was difficult, if not impossible, to get into the fire service.

“Ninety percent of our calls are for EMS (Emergency Medical Services),” Timmsen said. “So being a paramedic was your way into the fire service and then you could work towards your fire degree.”



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Leadership is a primary goal for Timmsen who is looking to pass that skill on. The succession in the fire department is important, he said, and he wants to help firefighters become lieutenants, and lieutenants become captains.

“We will be losing a lot of the top end of our staff over the next few years and I do not want to see a lot of firefighters come in and say what do I do know,” Timmsen said. “Ideally, I want to develop these young firefighters and those that are ready for the next step.”

For those who may have interest in the fire service, Timmsen advises them to just take a chance.

“People across the country have the opportunity to apply with little or no experience,” Timmsen said. “And they will be trained in house. If you have curiosity about the fire service then you should follow up on it.”



Some of that training has recently been led by Andrew McSorley as the Green Shift Lieutenant. McSorley and other staff members have been instrumental in the development of the Fire Academy training facilities at the old armory on Stewart Road next to Fire Station 2.



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McSorley started with the Muscatine Fire Department in March 2015 after working part-time on a county ambulance, working for Hoffman, Inc., in Muscatine, and working as a volunteer for the Riverside Fire Department for eight years. He knew he wanted to get into the fire service full time and tested around the area.

“Muscatine was the first to call and I took the opportunity,” McSorley said. “I remained a volunteer at Riverside through my probation and realized just how busy I would be so I stopped volunteering.”

McSorley admitted that back in 2015 he did not entertain any thoughts of becoming an officer for the Muscatine Fire Department or becoming too involved. However, with each passing year he took on more tasks and was asked to be a part of a variety of activities.

“I realized the kind of impact you could have around here and that was a big thing to me,” McSorley said.

His passion for the fire service only increased when he was put in charge of the Recruit Academy.

“Being able to train the new recruits coming in, that is what developed me and pushed my passion even further,” McSorley said. “Training people with no prior experience, building them into the kind of firefighter you want, watching them succeed through the ranks and in their careers, that is what inspires me.”

McSorley was promoted to Lieutenant on Sept. 20, 2021, and has worked hard to improve the training facilities and help educate the new recruits. McSorley remembers vividly when the old armory was nothing but junk and weeds, spending hours cleaning up the facility with the help of others, and developing a training regimen. He was on the committee that explored purchasing box containers and putting them together for a more permanent burn facility.



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McSorley will move to a different shift as he takes over as Captain of red shift and feels humbled to be in this position at this point in his career. But he is excited to see the new faces every morning and build a team that is a well-oiled machine when they get to a fire scene.

"I am excited about it," McSorley said. "A little humbled, though, as I look back. It really hit home yesterday about where my career has been, and where it is going."

For those who might be considering a future in the fire service, McSorley recommends just doing it because it is the best job in the world.

"You never know what you are going to do when the alarm rings," McSorley said. "You have no idea of what lies ahead, where you are going, or what you are going to do when you get there. That was one of the things about Muscatine that stuck with me ... the adventure of the unknown."



While McSorley will not be as hands-on at the training facility, that facility will be in the capable hands of Muscatine Fire's newest lieutenant. Jason Verschoore has worked side-by-side with McSorley in planning and implementing many of the new features of the training center.



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“I want to keep improving on what Lieutenant McSorley has already done, keep going with the process of the burn building, and getting more training props down there,” Verschoore said. “I look forward to continuing the progress we have made and improving the things that I see would benefit the department. I want to just keep making it a better place for training the entire department.”

Verschoore has a long history with the fire service starting as a volunteer with Blue Grass in 2006.

“I have been around it since I was a baby,” Verschoore said. “My dad was a Blue Grass firefighter until he passed away and then I took his spot. It is kind of a neat deal to transition into the fire service that way. It is also kind of neat that all three (Muscatine Fire) lieutenants are from Blue Grass.”

Verschoore also volunteers with the Walcott Fire Department where he also has a side business (424 Warning Systems) that upfits vehicles for use by various fire and police departments.

Verschoore joined the Muscatine Fire Department in 2017 and was promoted to Fire Mechanic in 2020, a position that not only works to keep the fire department vehicles running but also helps staff spec out requirements for new units.

“It has been a fun six and a half years,” Verschoore said. “Getting to see different sides of it (Muscatine Fire) as a firefighter and then moving into the mechanics role, working on the vehicles, and helping to spec out the different vehicles. I look forward to the next step and continuing to build on that.”

Verschoore said that the best way to learn about the fire service is to get out there, visit local departments, and see what they have to offer. Volunteer departments in smaller communities also have a lot to offer those interested in the fire service and a great way to determine if the service would be a good choice for a career.



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"It is also a great way to give back to your community," Verschoore said.



Joe Rymars began his career with the Muscatine Fire Department on Oct. 15, 2018. He previously volunteered for several years in Princeton, Iowa, but later moved away, became involved with EMS, and worked full-time in Scott County.

Rymars is the supervisor in charge of Fire Station 2 that covers the south side of Muscatine and is trained in Hazmat, as a paramedic, and, obviously, fire response.

"We are kind of a triple threat down here as far as response," Rymars said. "Depending on what type of call there might be, we are ready to respond."

The Muscatine Fire Department Hazmat (Hazardous Material) unit covers a five-county area or about 2,450 square miles.

"Definitely one of my goals is to learn more about the position," Rymars said. "That includes continuing that continuum of knowledge, and taking more certification courses along with attending conferences and seminars. Just increasing my knowledge in all aspects of the all-hazard response."



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Teamwork was one of the factors that inspired Rymars to become a firefighter along with the fast-paced kind of adrenalin stuff that comes with it. For those who might be interested in the fire service, Rymars to take that first step and apply.

And when you do join the fire service ...

“Just keep your head down, keep working and grinding, and attend classes,” Rymars said.

“Most importantly, don’t lose that drive you had when you first joined the fire service.”

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