

Salem Lakes Fire/ Rescue Department



By Daniel Gaitan

Photography by Fred Loomis

Although the Salem Lakes Fire/ Rescue Department is one of southeastern Wisconsin's smaller fire divisions, it operates like a well-oiled machine covering much of Kenosha County's western communities.

The department includes nine full-time personnel, 14 part-timers and 39 volunteers that operate three stations covering 39.5 square miles. Their service area includes some 19,000 people in Salem Lakes - which includes the communities of Fox River, Salem, Trevor and Wilmot - along with the southern half of the town of Brighton and the village of

Paddock Lake.

The village of Silver Lake annexed the town of Salem through mutual agreement and became the village of Salem Lakes in 2017.

“It's had its challenges, of course, but we believe that we have the support of the Village Board and the Zoning



Board. So we now run our own zoning processes with assistance from the county,” said Chief Mike Slover. “It’s been O.K. but we have taken on the additional responsibilities of Silver Lake.”

The Salem Lakes Fire/ Rescue Department boasts 20 paramedics among their combination force.

Before incorporation, the town of Salem’s rescue squad was a paramedic system with advanced life support (ALS) capabilities.

In 2004, three emergency service departments - Salem, Trevor, and Wilmot - merged with Salem to create the town of Salem Fire/ Rescue Department. After incorporation the

department became the Salem Lakes Fire/ Rescue Department. It still has ALS capabilities.

“We’re a fire-based EMS system,” said Chief Slover. “About 80 percent of our calls are EMS. We are a paramedic provider.”

The department’s current operating budget is about \$2.2 million.

DEPARTMENT PROFILE

“Our call load has increased even with the pandemic - it slowed down for a while because everyone was staying home - but we had about 1,660 calls last year,” Chief Slover said.

The department often partners with the Kenosha County Sheriff’s Department for critical incidents and is MABAS Division 101.

“We’re not unlike any other fire department in the country with staffing concerns during the daytime and evening,” he said.

“We have automatic aid agreements with the Bristol Fire Department, the Antioch, Illinois, Fire Department, the Randall Fire Department and Wheatland Fire Department. We also assisted the City of Kenosha during the (summer) unrest and worked with the Kenosha County Chiefs and Captains Association closely and Division 101 to assist with staffing and any equipment the city might have needed.”

Chief Slover said the local Chiefs and Captain’s Association is crucial.

“We participate with the Chiefs and



Firefighter and Rescue personnel gather for push in of new ambulance 5844

Captain’s Association’s technical teams. We have members in the dive team, the technical rescue team. We don’t have anyone participating right now in hazmat, but we utilize the Kenosha County Hazmat Team if needed. We train with them and try to support them. If we have any members who want to join any one of those teams we fully support them and help them get their training.”



*Front row l-r: EMT Liz Gorka, Capt. Jason Witte, FF/EMT Andrew Werve, Chief Mike Slover, A/C Jim Lejcar
Back Row l-r: FF/EMT Roger Pattie, FF Martin Alessi, FF/Paramedic Kyle Tobias, FF/Paramedic Eric Epstein, LT DC Schroeder*

Because there are nine bodies of water in his service area, including Fox Lake, the department also participates with the county’s Marine Unit & Dive Team. The department boasts a rapid deployment craft, a sled and ice rescue suits.

“We are the initial responders for any body of water within the village and rely on MABAS and our technical teams,” he said, adding some of the staff are also trained in high-and-low angle rescue and structural collapse response.

“We have a very well organized system within our county,” he said. “Regionalization has become very important in the fire service because we don’t have enough resources and funding to operate these teams alone. We have been working with and talking to other fire departments outside of Division 101 - such as Divisions 102 which is Racine and Division 103 in Walworth County. They come to our trainings and we depend on them a lot for resources.”

For example, Salem Lakes doesn’t have an aerial device or ladder truck in its arsenal “but we have them all around us and they respond to us when needed,” Chief Slover said. “Years ago, it seemed like you didn’t need mutual aid unless you had a

very large fire or multiple incidents going on at the same time. But today, mutual aid is routine.”

All calls for service are funneled through the county’s Kenosha County Joint Services located in the city’s Public Safety Building.

Public Outreach

Chief Slover said the department works to educate the public through the village’s children.

“We’re part of the community and throughout the whole month of October - Fire Prevention Month - we go to the schools and talk to all the grades. We feel like adults are trained by the kids,” he said. “They bring things home from school that we provide them such as literature on smoke devices and how to have an escape plan.”

Chief Slover’s also proud of their “burn rooms.”

Firefighters set a small structure on fire during county fairs and school events to show how fast fire can spread.

“We don’t show them how we set it on fire, but we narrate what happens and how smoke detectors can provide

early warnings,” he said. “It’s a great tool.”

The department is also more than happy - post-COVID-19 - to allow folks to tour their facilities and experience their trucks.

The department has five engines, three ambulances, three water tenders, two grass rigs, two ATVs and two boats.

“We do not have municipal water except in one location, so any structure fire or any fire that requires a lot of water - we need our tenders and we depend on the MABAS system,” he said.



Chief Mike Slover

Finding the Right People

Chief Slover, who retires in June after almost 19 years with the department, aims to recruit passionate firefighters.

“I believe a first responder works off an adrenaline high they won’t get anywhere else,” he said. “If you’re standing upright and you walk through our doors, I’ll do anything in my power to bring you in here and get you to join. We provide all their training, all their equipment, and moral support they might need to get through the hard times. We can’t operate without them. ... It’s our responsibility to train them.”



FF Allison Bistry works on Bleeding Control simulator.



Fire Prevention 2019 showing the effects of early warning to ignition.



FF/Paramedic Steve Redlin working with a Firefighter Candidate cutting rebar.



Captain Jason Witte (right) reviews critical elements of donning PPE with Lt. Lucas Buzzel (left)



FF/Paramedic Dr. Anne Ptaszynski, performing annual PPE inspection.



EMT Sabrina Moran obtains supplies to restock ambulance following an EMS call.

PHOTO GALLERY

Salem Lakes F.D. submitted photos

