

OPINION & Editorial

Following in Dad's footsteps:

Local firefighters carry on family tradition

Jake Speicher

Dads have earned a solid reputation for giving their kids guidance and direction, but for the firefighting dads of Bucks County, they have given their kids much more: The vision and courage to follow in their footsteps – oftentimes into burning buildings.

In celebration of Father's Day, the Bucks County Fire Chiefs and Firefighters Association is paying tribute to dads who volunteer and the generations they have inspired by sharing their stories and encouraging others to volunteer.

"Volunteering for fire service is one of the most important things you can do," said Bucks County Fire Chiefs and Firefighters Association Recruiting Committee Co-Chair Rob Kay. "It allows you to show the importance of service to the community through actions instead of words, and often times it turns into a family tradition – a legacy."

Jerry Barton joined the Langhorne-Middletown Fire Company in 1975 to continue that tradition because he was proud of his dad.

"I joined when I was 16," Barton said. "I wanted to be just like my dad."

Barton's father, Jerome, had moved the family from Philadelphia in the mid-'60s, and he quickly joined the fire company where he rose to the level of deputy chief.

Barton said, "It was great serving with my dad. There were times where he would be driving the truck, and I would be the officer."

Jerry eventually moved on to the Parkland Fire Company in Pennell, and then a few years later, his son Dave became the third Barton to join the fire service.

"I couldn't be prouder," Jerry said. "He serves at a fire company in Delaware."

Unlike Barton, **Alyssa Lake** restarted that legacy for her family at the Plumsteadville Fire Company. Her desire to volunteer eventually bubbled up on her dad who'd been away from the fire service for years.

"A lot of my friends were already firefighters," Lake said. "A lot of them said, 'That's awesome. We're happy to have you.'"

Still, Lake is a senior in high school, and like kids everywhere, sometimes she needed a ride.

"I would drive her to the fire station," said Alyssa's dad, John. "She started to get really involved, and pretty soon I got back into it."

John Lake started firefighting

when he was 16. He took a break when he started having a family. Now, he's back at it with his daughter.

John got his dad involved in firefighting after he started training as a junior, just like Alyssa got him involved again.

"I have a cousin who does this at Chalfont," Alyssa said. "Then there's my dad and my grandpa. Being a firefighter is a lot of hard work, but there's a real adrenaline rush when you're getting to a scene, and the rush continues when you get there, and you know you can help someone."

Alyssa just graduated from Fire I training, and her dad is back helping the community.

Throughout Bucks County, fathers have passed the tradition of volunteer fire service down to their sons and daughters ensuring a legacy that, in some cases, goes back several generations.

Here are several firefighters across Bucks who are continuing their family's tradition.

Kyle McCallister (Lyndal Fire Company): Kyle McCallister is 18, and he runs his own landscaping business. His dad is a firefighter, and he's known since he was a kid that he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps.

"My dad was a fire chief in New Jersey, and I knew ever since I was 6, sitting in the lounge of the firehouse with him, that this is something I wanted to do," McCallister said.

Mark Stanford (Langhorne Fire Company): Mark is 19, and a third generation firefighter. His grandfather joined the fire service in the mid-'60s after two children died in a barn fire outside of town. Mark's grandfather said that nothing like that would happen again in his town if he could help it.

"It's important to pass down that service to community," Mark said when asked about what it means to be a third generation firefighter.

Hayes Hissin (Riegelsville): Hayes started as junior firefighter at age 13. He's now 18. His dad has been a firefighter since before he was born, and Hayes just kind of fell into it.

"It kind of just happened. I would be at the fire station for the monthly breakfast, and it just kind of progressed from there." Hissin loves working with his dad who also serves as the deputy chief.

"It's great to see. It's great to watch him do it for all these years and then to be able to do it with him means a lot." Hissin also thinks that firefighting is pretty much fun.

If you're interested in continuing your family's tradition, or starting one of your own, visit bucksfire.org for more information about volunteer opportunities available in Bucks County.



A dark room made bright by Miriam Ansell, interior designer. She has closed her New York office to live and work in a style tuned to the Bucks County environment.

Bridget Wingert: Happy to Be Here An expert's eye can see what's needed

Sit with Miriam Ansell for an hour and you'll wonder, "Is this a comedian or an interior designer?"

"Designer" is her claim to fame but her gift is the one-liners she utters, one after another.

"You can't have a husband and a white carpet too," she said during a visit to the Herald. Sometimes she's like a marriage counselor, a psychologist, a humorist. "They had a fight over color. I solved the problem."

"He's absolutely right," Miriam told one wife. "Let me tell you, if you put a black rug with light mauves, it won't work." Husband and wife settled for a deep plum carpet. "He lives here too," she reminds spouses.

She hates flowers; she loves flowers. "You're right," she tells the husband "but she loves them." The pillows are part flowers, part solid lavender and both are content.

Her work is not all compromise. One man wanted a pool table in the living room. "See a lawyer first thing in the morning," Miriam told him.

One woman in Manhattan wanted to buy a dust ruffle for \$2,250. "Is it going to last 300 years?" the designer asked. She tries to be practical, even for the high-price customers she left behind in New York and Connecticut.

Until six months ago, Miriam had an office and apartment in New York, but she tired of the city's hubbub. After 30 years of being centered there, she closed her office, moved out of the apartment, and escaped to the weekend house in New Hope that she and her husband had bought in the 1980s. "We bought the house from the car," Miriam said. "Never went inside."

She has moved to that house for good; she did not close down.

Miriam founded an affordable service she hopes will bring good design to people, mostly women, who never considered hiring an interior designer. She built a web site – with help from Joshua Woodroffe, and she taught some local courses.

"Every woman wants to decorate," Miriam said. She met a few at Dress For Success, the nonprofit that supplies appropriate work clothes for women who need clothes to enter or return to the work force. Miriam joined that organization recently as a volunteer. Other volunteers have told her they wish they could afford her services. "We can't go to New York," they said, and they have limited resources.

Volunteering and helping others, she said, "started to make my heart pump with joy."

Through the courses she taught, Miriam began to get calls for help. One day, after advising a local woman, she was driving away, down a highway, when she felt, so good, she asked herself,



MIRIAM ANSELL

"Did I want a facelift?" Then it dawned on her: "Happy Housefit," a service she could give to women who wanted advice on decorating but couldn't afford the kind she provided in New York. "I want the girl who washes my hair to use me," she said. "I want people who are downsizing, and love their things, to use me."

Miriam encourages people to use what they already have. "Keep the things your grandmother had. Keep that pink lamp," she said. In a visit to an old Bucks County farmhouse recently, Miriam went through the attic and the basement.

"We bought nothing," she said, just used some things that had been stored away. "That chair that Jean Harlow used to sit in – bring it upstairs. Reupholster it."

The first Happy Housefit visit is complimentary. According to the Happy Housefit web site, "Ansell shares her years of decorating experience (as well as her wit) with her client. Working together, she and the client use what they have in their home to recreate a room into a thing of beauty! There is never a requirement to buy new furniture or accessories."

The fee for the next visit, with more explicit design recommendations, is \$150, and Miriam feels it's a bargain compared to the thousands of dollars that would be spent in the New York area.

"It's not always about money," she said. "People are nervous, not sure about using a designer."

But advising people who can't afford to pay a high price is what she wants to do most. And she recommends local businesses to do the work that's needed if the process reaches that point. She does not charge commission on their services as she did in her former life.

"There are so many things I want to say to people and I want help businesses here," she said. "We have sophisticated shops here."

"Need to give your wife a gift?" Miriam asks men. "For \$150 you can get her off your neck." It's a gift well worth the price and it will last a long time.

Miriam Ansell (ASID Certified Designer and Professional Member of IIDA) can be found at the Happy Housefit web site.



For Father's Day

James P. Melson, the late owner of Melson's Service Station, recorded tales of growing up in New Hope in the 1950s. His daughter turned his notes into a book, "Smile Because It Happened," which is now available at the station on West Bridge Street, and on Amazon.

Val Sigstedt: A Citizen's Voice National Guard is under attack

Four National Guard units including one in Sellersville, Bucks County, are threatened with closing by the United States Army. But exactly how did the U.S. Army get the power to decide how many National Guard posts can be in Pennsylvania?

The National Guard, once called the state militia, is and should be a state's way to protect its citizens from the unexpected severe emergencies we all know life has in store for us.

It is the duty of Pennsylvanians to take this seriously. If we suffer another wave of floods swamping our first responders, or a regionwide tree-downing crash of our power lines like the ones we experienced this awful winter

only 10 times worse we will thank our leaders for putting trained people on the streets facilitating crews, preventing looting and establishing order.

Sadly, America doesn't always reward its citizen soldiers well when they return to civilian life. This time we might even realize that the unacceptable ex-soldier suicides are individual protests against the country's indifference and our personal failures to become sensitized to just what modern warfare does to those who fight in them.

It's up to the core to think of the sincere volunteers in the state militia being told by the Army to disband because there just isn't enough interest in their service to keep them supplied. Multiple floods have happened right here in the Delaware Valley, and Hurricane Sandy was only one

way the global changing weather patterns can suddenly gather and hit us. Nobody can say things can't go terribly wrong, and when, not if they do, someday we will thank our decision-makers for supporting the National Guards at their present levels.

In the recent news, Pennsylvania is suing the Pentagon to keep the 11th Fighter Wing of the Air National Guard at Willow Grove Naval Air Station. In my opinion, the state needs to enlarge its suit to include the Sellersville National Guard unit, and those three others threatened with termination.

Historically, the concept of there being a military system directed by each state's governor derives from the way the original Masonic lodges, on whose constitutions the U.S. Constitution was modeled. Each had a standing committee called Templars, who protected the lodge from intruders and unexpected threats. Long ago, when a governor was elected he automatically became the head of that state's Masonic mother lodge, and he retained his ordered militia. Nothing is that simple now, but the National Guard is a state citizen army pledged always to defend its people.

In 2005, state leaders in Philadelphia and the Department of Defense were overstepping its bounds in recommending deactivation of the 11th Fighter Wing. The governor is commander of the Guard, so only he can recommend the dispersal. Gov. Ed Rendell said at the time. We need to support our state

leaders to enlarge their suit to also defend the four Pennsylvania National Guard units marked for termination, on exactly the same grounds. Pennsylvanians certainly all have standing in this fight. Those people stood up for us honorably and bravely in terrible situations. So let's each write at least one letter to someone in office or running for an office in November.

I have not supported the incessant wars America has embroiled itself in, but I strongly support our service men and women. My son recently retired as a chief from in the U.S. Navy, my grandson is in the U.S. Air Force, and I am an Army veteran. I believe there is a right for citizens to be protected by local people from emergencies by a regionally governed, well-managed state militia.

And if the U.S. government wants to decide how safe I and my neighbors want to live, maybe we need the government to develop a rational national water policy, riparian river policies, an American privacy act, universal voting privileges, public education not based on local real estate, progressive income taxes, publicly-owned banking ... and while we're rethinking boldly, let's put a lot of people to studying the Capital in the 21st Century," by Thomas Picketty.

I am hopeful that will define what is a realistic economic order and, decide how to make a future world economy that isn't modeled on a Las Vegas casino.

Val Sigstedt lives and works in Point Pleasant.