

Firefighters to rebuild ladder tower

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Village Board approves using contingency funds so training facility will be ready for use this year

Members of the Saukville Fire Department will be put to work at something other than battling fires, after the Village Board last week authorized purchasing materials for a new ladder tower.

Trustees unanimously approved a request for \$2,500 to purchase building materials. Department members will volunteer their time to construct the training structure.

The tower gives firefighters the opportunity to train in the proper use of ladders and techniques for hauling equipment when battling second-floor fires.

Fire Chief Gilly Schultz told trustees that the current tower, which is on the Department of Public Works grounds, is in disrepair.

"I recently red lined the tower because in its present condition it is unsafe to use. Using it could lead to serious injury or worse," Schultz wrote in a memo on the project.

"With the tower out of service, we are not getting the same ladder practice that we would on a high structure. Since we don't have an aerial (truck), we need to be proficient at ladder work so we can do it safely and properly when needed. There are right ways and wrong ways to raise a 35-foot ladder."

Up until it was pulled out of service, the tower was being used regularly, especially as new members joined the department and equipment was updated.

Schultz said purchasing a training tower would cost about \$800,000, a figure the department could never afford.

As an alternative, he said department members offered to build a simpler structure similar to the one the department currently has.

Schultz said the current tower was erected about 15 years ago, when Glenn Dickmann was fire chief.

"It was determined at that time that there was a need for a tower to practice ladder work, high-level search and rescue and other situations found at a fire," Schultz said.

Before the tower was erected, the department used the Immaculate Conception School and the old fire station on North Mill Street for the high-elevation training.

Because of the emergency nature of the replacement project, Schultz asked trustees for the green light to do the work now rather than waiting until the 2013 budget is prepared.

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“The use of the training tower is just as important to us as any other fire department tool. It provides an opportunity to practice skills learned in outside schools,” the chief said.

“We need to keep training, just as a musician needs to practice to maintain and upgrade skills.”

The board agreed the new tower should be made a priority, saying the money needed for materials and supplies should be taken from the village’s contingency fund.