

## **Local Fire Companies Praised for Heroic Response to Thruway Bus Rollover**

A few weeks ago, the New York State Thruway became the site of one of the region's most devastating mass casualty incidents in recent memory: a tour bus rollover that left every passenger injured, several ejected from the vehicle, and five tragically losing their lives.

While many reports have highlighted the accident's grim details, what also deserves recognition is the extraordinary response from local emergency services. Agencies from two counties and hospitals in three cities worked seamlessly to save lives. At the center of that effort were the Town of Clarence and Newstead Fire Companies, whose training, leadership, and courage proved invaluable.

The call first went to the Pembroke Fire Company in Genesee County, as the crash occurred in its jurisdiction. On arrival, responders immediately realized this was no ordinary accident. The officer in charge quickly summoned multiple ambulances and mutual aid companies.

Newstead Fire Company was dispatched with its Heavy Rescue unit, followed closely by the Clarence Fire Company. Both departments had recently trained together on advanced vehicle rescue tools, preparation that became crucial as firefighters worked to free passengers trapped in the wreckage—some wedged halfway out of windows, others pinned beneath the bus itself.

One of the most harrowing rescues involved a passenger ejected and discovered trapped under a rear wheel. Against immense odds, firefighters worked tirelessly to free and stabilize the victim. Clarence Fire Chief Ruth Work, alongside her sons, Assistant Chiefs Christian and Mackenzie Work, led teams through the chaos with precision and calm.

Support also came from Dadswell's Towing, which arrived quickly with heavy-duty crane trucks. Working shoulder to shoulder with firefighters, they helped carefully lift the bus to allow rescuers access to trapped passengers.

The effort extended far beyond Clarence and Newstead. East Amherst Fire Company provided paramedics and ambulance support, while Clarence Emergency Manager David Baumler ensured that other town fire companies maintained coverage for unrelated calls.

Agencies from across Erie County helped organize triage and patient transport. Physicians from UBMD Emergency Medicine were on-site, making critical decisions about patient prioritization and hospital destinations. Their guidance ensured that victims received care at facilities best prepared to handle their injuries.

The coordination across county lines, the integration of volunteer responders with professional medical teams, and the willingness of every agency to step up represented the very best of Western New York's emergency services.

### **A Weekend of Brotherhood and Reflection**

Just one week later, many of these same fire companies came together again - but this time for a far different reason: the Clarence Center Volunteer Fire Company's annual Labor Day Fair.

Held just blocks from the Flight 3407 crash site - a tragedy that saw over 17 fire companies respond in 2009 - the fair has long symbolized resilience and community spirit. This year, the event carried special meaning. For the firefighters, EMTs, and paramedics who had just faced one of the most challenging calls of their careers, it was a chance to reconnect, reflect, and embrace the brotherhood that defines emergency service.

The community responded in record numbers, supporting volunteers who not only answer calls at a moment's notice but also put their lives at risk to protect others. The fair's fundraising efforts directly benefit the Clarence Center Volunteer Fire Company, reinforcing the bond between first responders and the community they serve.

To all emergency service providers - firefighters, EMTs, paramedics, doctors, and support personnel - the community offers its deepest gratitude. Your skill, courage, and dedication protect us daily and provide hope in our darkest hours.

The Thruway bus rollover will be remembered as a day of tragedy. But it will also stand as a testament to what can be accomplished when communities unite in service to others. Thanks to events like the Labor Day Fair, we are reminded that behind the uniforms are neighbors, friends, and family members—ordinary people who step forward to do extraordinary things.