



## Greenfield Volunteer Fire Company Saves One of Its Own

By John Apostolakes

It wasn't on the fire ground or an accident, or even on the dangerous interstate highway— there were no warning signs— just a physical that the fire station requires.

The chief is always asking if everyone went for his or her physical; and the answer is normally, "yes" or "I have an appointment." I was one of the lucky ones.

I have been a volunteer firefighter for Greenfield Township Volunteer Fire Company for three years. Greenfield is a small town in northeastern Pennsylvania with a population just over 2,400. The coverage area is about 32 square miles including a small section of Interstate 81. The department has approximately 30 active members.

I am one who procrastinates as long as possible when it comes to doctor visits or physicals. I have always felt fine; I normally do what I do with the fire company; with no physical signs, no worries about going to see the doctor. I am probably like most people; I do not like seeing the doctor—but mostly, afraid of test results.

All my life I played sports. I was very active in ice hockey and I always felt like a 27-year old. I am 47 years old now and I have always thought myself to be in pretty-good shape, so I asked myself "what do I have to lose; going to see the doctor?" I went to see my family doctor, who ordered a blood test and everything looked good. Two days later, the doctor called and wanted to see me again. I thought, "Okay, I must have snuck in a snack during my fast before the blood test." Well, I was wrong. The doctor told me that my cholesterol was pretty high. Because of my family history, he wanted to schedule a stress test. I thought again, "no problem."

I took the stress test on a treadmill and my heart rate would not even go up high enough for the doctor to be alarmed and in the back of my mind, I was laughing. Well, pictures tell a different story. After going for an MRI, the pictures showed a blockage in my heart. My doctor told me I was on the verge of having a heart attack. I kept telling myself it was not true and I felt fine. Well, two weeks later and a heart catheterization, I'm feeling like a 27-year old again.

So here is advice from an average person: because of my department's requirement, my life was saved from a silent killer. A blockage in my heart could have ended my life—at home, or on the fire ground, trying to save another life such as a fire victim or one of my brothers.

What was really interesting to me was that while I was having the procedure done, one of the Physicians Assistants asked me what made me go to the doctor, and did I have symptoms? I told him there were no symptoms just a required physical from my fire department. The Physicians Assistant told me that he belongs to a fire department and they don't require physicals. About a week after I recovered, I did some research by speaking to my fellow firefighters around our community and even firefighters that I know from out of state. I was surprised to find that departments they belong to do not require physicals at all. If your department doesn't require a physical, it should. You will not regret it and it will save your life. It saved mine.