

Meet ATFD Volunteer Firefighter Ed Wagner

Watching Firefighters Help His Neighbors Inspired Him to Volunteer

In May 2019, Ed Wagner heard sirens and saw smoke coming from his neighbor's house. "I was feeling absolutely helpless," said Ed, an English teacher at Philadelphia's Samuel Fels High School. "There was nothing I could do to help."

Then the people who could help arrived. "Firetrucks from Edge Hill, the other Abington Township Fire Department (ATFD) companies, and nearby towns were coming in. I watched the crews hop off the trucks, and they knew exactly what to do. Everyone had their assignment. It was amazing to watch," Ed said. "That's when I decided to become a firefighter."

Three months later, Ed, who is now 23, was a member of Edge Hill Fire Company. When he joined, Ed didn't really know anyone at the firehouse and he knew almost nothing about fighting fires. He was surprised at how quickly that changed.

"I remember sitting in the office after I signed my volunteer application. There was a meeting that night, and the firefighters spoke to me as if they had known me for so long. They were all going out of their way to say hi, and ask where I grew up what house in town is mine, what brought me to the firehouse – everyone was so welcoming."

Ed enrolled in the Firefighter I course - ATFD has its own training facility - and became a certified firefighter in 2020. Some of the most valuable lessons have been taught by other volunteers, he said. "I feel so lucky to work with this amazing crew, where people are 100 percent willing to be mentors," he said. "I learned so much on the way back from calls, talking to the other people in the back of the truck."

One memorable lesson came after he was certified, inside a burning building. "I had to check for fire in the walls, and I was using my hook and pulling down with all my might to pull that wall apart," Ed remembers. "Another member came up and showed me a better way that was faster and didn't require so much of my energy."

Ed learned to use his hook to puncture smaller holes in the wall, outlining the section of wall he wants to remove. "This way, it all comes down in one big piece," he said.

Ed loves being a teacher, and he loves volunteering in a completely different, adrenaline pumping way. "Nothing can match the rush you get when a call goes out," he said. His student knows he serves his community as a volunteer, and he's always happy to answer their questions.

"Being helpful is the overall goal I wanted to meet, and firefighting has given me that ability," he said. "I've also met so many new people and learned so many new things. I never stop learning." Ed continues to take advantage of the free training ATFD volunteers receive to learn additional skills. "I'm going back to fire school to learn vehicle rescue and water rescue, so that I can be as useful as possible."



Ed no longer feels helpless when someone in North Hill or elsewhere in the township needs help. “Having the knowledge and the tools, and being part of a crew that knows how to minimize damage and prevent loss, that’s something I value a lot,” he said.

Abington Township Fire Department and its five fire companies – Abington, McKinley, Weldon, Edge Hill, and Roslyn - are 100% volunteer organizations. They – and your neighbors – need you to Gear Up, Get in the Action, and Volunteer! It’s the experience of a lifetime. Learn more, ask a question, or take the first step toward becoming an ATFD firefighter at abingtonfd.org.

