

# Mount Holly imports new fire chief from New York

BY YVONNE NELSON

Last month, the Town of Mount Holly welcomed Dale D. Oplinger as its new fire chief. Chief Oplinger replaces Captain David Stevens who served as interim chief for four months after Chief John Calder passed away on Jan. 21 of cancer. Interestingly, Oplinger comes to Mount Holly from his previous post in Lansing, N.Y.

Oplinger was selected as the new fire chief after the city staff reviewed 50 to 100 applicants. In search of a full-time position, Oplinger heard about the opening from his father, a six-year resident of Harrisburg, N.C. Oplinger says he visited Mount Holly "four or five times" before making his decision.

When Oplinger accepted the position he moved in with his father and is now searching for a home in Mount Holly for himself and his family, who are still in Lansing. Oplinger and his wife Heather have a two-year old son Christopher and another child due in March.

"I am here to stay," he says.

Mount Holly City Manager David Kraus is excited to have Chief Oplinger on board.

"His personality will provide the leadership that our department needs," Kraus says.

Kraus interviewed the five finalists for the position. An objective panel, separate from Kraus, was also selected to evaluate the final candidates.

"He has the right combination of experience and education (in fire safety to be) the best fit" for the town's needs, Kraus adds.

Mayor Bryan Hough echoes Kraus' sentiment.

"He (Oplinger) brings a wealth of experience with volunteer fire departments." Mount Holly's department consists of two and 1/2 stations and a mixture of full-time and volunteer staff.

Oplinger acquired his leadership skills and fire safety knowledge through exposure to fire departments at a young age.

"Ever since I was seven or eight, I remember going to calls with my grandfather and riding with him when he was a chief," he says.

"And as a firefighter, I lived at central station for three or four years."

That part about living at the station is not just a figure of speech. Oplinger actually lived in the station.

Oplinger joined the Lansing department as a junior firefighter at 16 and at 19 became what he called a "full-time bunker."

"When you're young and all you want to do is be a firefighter, living at the station can be a preferred option," he says. "There are no regular bills such as rent and electricity, but you have to go on every call any time of day or night."

A third generation fire chief, Oplinger has 21-and-a-half years experience with fire departments. He says the desire to help others and following in the family footsteps created his sense of leadership. When asked about the differences between Mount Holly and Lansing, NY, Oplinger says, "Things happen in a different way down here."

The most obvious difference is each town's size. Compared to Lansing's 74 square miles, Mt Holly has just 7.8. The way the fire department's operate differs as well.

The most significant difference is that Oplinger's Lansing department was part of a fire district. The district is run by a group of elected fire commissioners. While the chief of the district answers to the commission, he also has more leeway in purchasing equipment and direct authority over structural changes within the district.

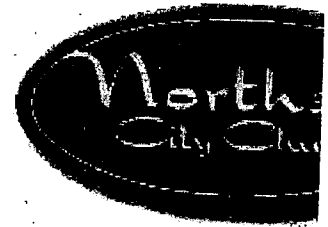
In Mount Holly the fire chief reports to the city manager and city council. As a result, the city has more control over the department's funding.

"When you change states, a lot of the laws change," Oplinger says.

He adds that while Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) laws remain the same (as they are federal regulations), fire laws and job processes vary from state to state.

Oplinger has a great deal of experience with OSHA's regulations, which city officials say was one of his strengths as an applicant. Lansing is less than 10 miles from Ithica and Cornell University and he served with

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the environmental health and safety department as a Fire Protection Specialist II.

"We had Cornell (University) up there, so we would have things like a lot of chemicals that are high hazards," he says. "We had a lot of rural community, a lot of commercial tourism — and a lot of laboratories."

Priorities

Oplinger says his top priority is to stabilize the leadership throughout the department.

"When there's an unsettledness to the department and you don't know who your chief is, it's really difficult," he says.

With Chief John Calder's illness and passing, Mount Holly's fire department has been without a full-time chief for several months.

"We've got some analyzing to do — in trying to provide the best safety for these guys — because of the

limited staff on first shift," Oplinger says. "The first five minutes on the scene (of a fire) are the most important."

Because of Oplinger's experience with volunteer fire departments, he is especially understanding of the volunteer staff and their role. But he also wants to blend the volunteers and the full-time firefighters to make a more efficient department.

"How the firefighters are perceived and making sure they're professional are big to me," Oplinger says.

Although most of his time right now is being spent asking questions and studying North Carolina state fire ordinances, the new chief has many ideas to bring together the town and keep it fire-safe by creating more community involvement in fire safety. Within Lansing's Fire department, the chief help to create and manage several community fire prevention parades, fundraisers, and other events. "I'm community-oriented. I care about the community," he says.

Beck wins Blue Fin



Pam Beck, left, accepts the Blue Fin award from Mountain Island Lake Marine Commission member Alice Battle.

The Mountain Island Marine Commission presented the Fourth Annual Blue Fin Award at its October meeting. The award was established in memory of Barbara Lockwood, the first chairperson of the Commission, to recognize people or organizations, whose work has benefited the lake, its residents and its visitors. This year's recipient is Pam Beck who lives on Nivens Cove Road in Mount Holly. Beck has worked for Mountain Island Lake for more than 15 years. She was a major force in creating the political will for Gastonia to purchase the Waters Edge property for conservation, saying it was important to protect Mountain Island Lake as a drinking water source.

Beck is on the executive committee of the Mountain Island Lake Association. She presently represents the interests of the lake on the Catawba-Wateree Hydro Relicensing Project.

Super Cross

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- 6 Palindromic pirogue
- 11 Mortarboard
- 14 Make a muumuu
- 17 Genesis peak
- 19 Salad veggie
- 20 Be obligated
- 21 Literary collection
- 22 FILE FILE
- 25 Diagnostic instr.
- 26 Bray beginning
- 27 Luau entertainment
- 28 Kind of mushroom
- 30 — Hari
- 31 Ecclesiastic
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- 36 Mathematician Khayyam
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- 44 Injured party
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- 48 Drink like a Dandie
- 49 Heredity Dinmont letters
- 52 SASE, e.g.
- 53 STRING
- 58 Antique auto
- 59 Disinfectant target
- 60 Compete
- 61 Quick-footed
- 62 Pyramid, e.g.
- 64 — kwon do
- 65 Gumbo thickener
- 68 Stephen King book
- 69 Brazilian kicker
- 71 Glowing
- 74 Congregational
- 75 The Fresh Prince's place
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- 105 Geometric calculation
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- 109 Throw a party
- 112 Fleeting
- 115 Christmas visitors
- 116 Slangy suffix
- 119 Yesterday's your
- 120 CHAIN
- 126 Cratchit kid
- 127 Bartok or Peron
- 128 Irregular
- 129 I specialist?
- 130 Humorist George
- 131 Costa — Sol
- 132 The Brainy Bunch?
- 133 Greases the wheels
- 6 Norton or Olin
- 7 Ginger —
- 8 Still
- 9 Word from a Weimaran
- 10 Former Japanese capital
- 11 Musical finale
- 12 Blew away
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- 14 Pacific islands
- 15 Register
- 16 Keen
- 18 Like some nerves
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- 24 Rhine siren
- 29 Attempt
- 30 Clubber Lang's portrayer
- 31 — Amboy, NJ
- 32 General's helper
- 33 Job openi
- 34 Biting
- 36 Public
- 37 Sal of "Giant"
- 38 Pull off
- 40 Novelist L.
- 42 Bunyan's villa

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- 5 Russian villa

