Director Vest Retires, First Deputy Director McKown Appointed as Interim Director

It is with mixed emotions that the Montgomery County Department of Public Safety announces the retirement of Director Michael O. Vest, effective May 1, 2024. Director Vest came to the Department after a 20-year military career in the United States Army in the fields of intelligence and aviation. He served in various roles as interpreter, strategic debriefer, liaison officer, flight operations officer, battle captain, and instructor pilot. Among serving in various locations worldwide, he served two combat tours of duty in Iraq.

In April 2009, Director Vest decided to embark on a new career as a 9-1-1 Telecommunicator. After quickly rising through the ranks, he was promoted to Deputy Director for Emergency Communications in February 2016. In January 2021, upon the retirement of former Director Thomas Sullivan, he was named Interim Director of Public Safety. The interim designation was removed in June 2021 when the County Commissioners confirmed his appointment as Director.

Director Vest provided 15 years of dedicated service to Montgomery County, leading the Department of Public Safety through much of the COVID-19 pandemic, a critical staffing shortage of 9-1-1 Telecommunicators, the historic flooding and winds of Hurricane Ida, the construction of a new garage and warehouse complex, and the design and build of numerous specialized response vehicles. During this time, Director Vest was a tireless advocate for his employees and for the Department, never failing to support, encourage, praise, and fight for his team of public safety professionals.

On May 1, 2024, Brian McKown, First Deputy Director – Emergency Operations Center, was named as Interim Director. Interim Director McKown, a Navy veteran, has been with the Department of Public Safety since 2010. He started as a 9-1-1 Telecommunicator before being promoted to Assistant Director for Professional Standards in 2016, Deputy Director for Technology in 2019, and First Deputy Director – Emergency Operations Center in 2023.

"I am humbled, and excited, to step into the Interim Director role for the Department of Public Safety until a permanent Director is named," said Brian McKown, Interim Director, Montgomery County Department of Public Safety. "On behalf of all of my colleagues and the entire Department, I wish Director Vest a very happy, healthy, and safe retirement and thank him for his many years of service to Montgomery County.”
A Note from the Interim Director of Public Safety, Brian McKown

In light of Director Vest’s retirement earlier this month, I am honored to step in and fulfill the roll of Interim Director until a permanent Director is named. During this transition period, I am confident that the team of dedicated professionals whom I work alongside every day will stay committed to assisting the County’s public safety partners in any way possible. Our mission remains the same and we will work tirelessly to ensure all of you have the DPS services and resources you need to do your jobs safely and effectively. I consistently encourage the DPS team to consider outside-the-box solutions to traditional problems and am a strong advocate for utilizing technology to make our jobs safer and more efficient. I look forward to engaging further with each of your organizations as we constantly look for better ways to serve our partners in the field. If we can ever be of further assistance, do not hesitate to reach out to myself or anyone on the DPS team.

For those who may not be familiar with my background both inside and outside of the County’s Department of Public Safety, a brief biography is provided below:

I served in the United States Navy for six years prior to beginning my career in Montgomery County in 2010 as a 9-1-1 Telecommunicator. In 2014, I joined the QA/QI team as a Quality Analyst, before becoming the Emergency Communication Division’s Assistant Director for Professional Standards in 2016. I then held the Deputy Director for Technology position from 2019 to 2023 and was promoted to First Deputy Director for the Emergency Operations Center in early 2023. I currently serve on the Executive Board of the Pennsylvania State Chapter of the National Emergency Number Association (NENA). I am also a lifetime member of the Tylersport Volunteer Fire Company, in Salford Township, where I currently serve as a line officer and on the board of directors. I hold a Bachelor of Science in Nuclear Engineering Technology from Thomas Edison State University and a Master of Science in Emergency Services Management from Columbia Southern University.

Brian McKown
Interim Director
Montgomery County Department of Public Safety

Department of Public Safety Publishes 2023 Annual Report

This month, the Department of Public Safety published its 2023 Annual Report. Formatted as an ArcGIS StoryMap, the Annual Report provides partner agencies and community members with the opportunity to learn about the Department’s work and revisit some important activities and statistics from the past year.

“Thank you to all the stakeholders, responders, and others for your support and assistance during 2023,” said Michael O. Vest, Director (Ret.) of the Department of Public Safety. “MCDPS will continue to strive to be a national model in the public safety community, driven by our dedication to professional service, our core values, and our commitment to the people we serve.”

The 2023 Annual Report is available for viewing by the public at https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/67c5f8a61e2f4ea5969640f9399e19a8. Check out past reports at https://www.montgomerycountypa.gov/3465/Past-Reports. With questions, comments, or feedback, contact Todd Stieritz, Deputy Director – Public Affairs, at Todd.Stieritz@montgomerycountypa.gov.
US&R’s Surf Certified as FEMA Live Find Canine

In early 2021, Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) Canine Specialist Tom Brown, handler of Memphis, began working with his veterinarian and breeder for his next dog. Outside of his duties for Montgomery County US&R, Tom is also the canine manager for Pennsylvania Task Force 1 (PA-TF1) and is widely respected in the US&R world. Tom has a proven record of developing high-level search dogs in the FEMA system.

In response to the tragic Surfside, Florida condominium collapse in June 2021, Tom, accompanied by K9 Memphis, was among the select few from Montgomery County US&R deployed for search and rescue operations with PA-TF1 and New Jersey Task Force 1. Upon his return, his breeder notified him that the litter he was waiting on had been delivered while he was deployed, and his new Labrador Retriever pup (named Surf, in memory of the Surfside collapse) was healthy and ready to meet her sister Memphis!

Earlier this month, Tom and Surf braved the rain to travel to Lakehurst, NJ and successfully tested to become certified as a FEMA Live Find Canine, the highest level of certification in this discipline. At just two years old, this is the fastest that Tom has had a dog certified to this level, a testament to both Surf’s remarkable abilities and Tom’s exceptional training. Most dogs in the FEMA system don’t pass until they are 2.5-3 years old.

The Montgomery County US&R Team is fortunate to have such a dedicated and hardworking individual like Tom and dogs like Surf and Memphis. Their commitment is unparalleled, evident in their daily training sessions in the backyard as well as weekend travels to various sites in New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, and elsewhere. Tom’s relentless efforts ensure that when the call comes, Memphis and Surf are always prepared for the task at hand.

NOAA Predicts Above-Normal 2024 Atlantic Hurricane Season

On May 23rd, NOAA forecasters issued their outlook for the 2024 Atlantic hurricane season. They predict an 85% chance of an above-normal season, with 17-25 named storms, 8-13 hurricanes, and 4-7 major hurricanes. Note that this is not a landfall forecast.

Montgomery County Recognizes Emergency Medical Services Week

Earlier this month, the Montgomery County Commissioners issued a Proclamation in recognition of the 50th anniversary of Emergency Medical Services Week, which took place on May 19-25, 2024. The Proclamation reads, in part:

WHEREAS, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) is a vital public service in Montgomery County; and

WHEREAS, Career and volunteer EMS providers remain at the ready to respond to emergencies 24 hours a day, seven days a week, regardless of weather conditions; and

WHEREAS, On average, EMS providers in Montgomery County respond to a call for assistance every 5 minutes and 38 seconds; and

WHEREAS, EMS providers engage in hundreds of hours of initial training, as well as thousands of hours of continuing education throughout their careers; and

WHEREAS, EMS professionals provide care during the critical first few minutes of a patient’s injury or illness, dramatically improving the patient’s chances for survival and recovery; and

WHEREAS, EMS professionals often risk their own health and safety to provide care, exposing themselves to infectious diseases, combative patients, and dangerous traffic hazards; and

WHEREAS, EMS providers save lives and it is essential to recognize the good work that they do in the community; and

NOW, THEREFORE, We do hereby proclaim the week of May 19-25, 2024 as EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES WEEK

In recognition of and in gratitude for the outstanding EMS professionals who serve Montgomery County every day.

Then, on Thursday, May 23rd, Department of Public Safety staff partnered with the Montgomery County Ambulance Association to provide a bleeding control demonstration at the County Commissioners' Meeting. The Thursday of National EMS Week is National Stop the Bleed Day – a day on which everyone is encouraged to get trained in lifesaving bleeding control skills.

The Department of Public Safety would like to thank the County Commissioners and Paramedic Al Davey of Narberth Ambulance for assisting with the demo. To learn more about Stop the Bleed and to get trained, visit https://www.stopthebleed.org/.
Department of Public Safety Personnel Changes

Tess Giordano recently accepted the position of Emergency Preparedness Specialist – Critical Infrastructure in the Emergency Management Division. She started her career with the Department of Public Safety during the COVID-19 Pandemic as part of the Mobile Integrated Health Team that was responsible for the first responder vaccine clinics. Tess most recently worked for Limerick Township as the Assistant Zoning Officer and Assistant Emergency Management Coordinator. She is excited to be working full-time in emergency management and lending her passion for planning and response to projects within the County. Outside of work, Tess has been a volunteer firefighter for the past several years, most recently with the Limerick Fire Department. In her free time, she enjoys kayaking, photography, and supporting the Philadelphia Union.

Mary.Giordano@montgomerycountypa.gov
Emergency Operations Center
(610) 631-6520

Department of Public Safety Staff Serve as Conference Presenters

On May 1st, two Emergency Management Division staff attended the National Radiological Emergency Preparedness NREP Conference in Dallas, TX (below, left). Deputy Director Jason Wilson and Assistant Director Jake Frye served as panelists in a presentation about lessons learned from the 2023 Limerick Generating Station Hostile Action Based Exercise. Other panelists included representatives from FEMA, PEMA, the Pennsylvania State Police, and Constellation Energy.

Then, on May 16th, School Safety Coordinator Beth Sanborn and School Safety Specialist Carli Ducko presented “School Resource Officers and Facility Directors: Creating Safer Environments Together” at the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit’s third annual Facility Directors Conference (below, right).

The Department of Public Safety would like to thank the host organizations for these opportunities and everyone who attended. Great work by Jason, Jake, Beth, and Carli!
Special Operations Responders Stay Busy in Spring

Over the past month, members of the Department of Public Safety’s two Special Operations teams, the Hazardous Materials Response (HazMat) Team and Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) Team, stayed extremely busy training, responding, and standing by on a special detail to protect the community.

April 25<sup>th</sup>: US&R spent several hours training on the Schuylkill River, building rope-based rescue systems. During the drill, members utilized ropes to build an MCP (movable control point). While not commonly used, this technique allows boats to operate in conditions that a motorized craft cannot due to underwater obstructions such as rocks, fences, or guard rails.

April 30<sup>th</sup> and May 1<sup>st</sup>: US&R and the UAV Team deployed to the Schuylkill River to assist first responders in Upper Merion Township and surrounding jurisdictions with a search for a missing boater. US&R personnel spent approximately 12 hours over two days carefully searching the river and shoreline.

May 7<sup>th</sup>: HazMat conducted their monthly training at the Public Safety Training Campus using their pipe tree prop. Members had to address multiple leaking pipes, fittings, and valves using clamps, wrenches, and blank flanges. While water was used during the exercise, the scenarios helped Technicians hone their skills and prepare to control the leak of a real hazardous substance at a fixed facility (above, left).

May 8<sup>th</sup>: HazMat and US&R stood by on a special detail in Cheltenham Township while Vice President Kamala Harris visited Montgomery County for a campaign event. Both teams were proud to be staged and at the ready to protect the elected officials, event attendees, and community at large (right).

May 13<sup>th</sup>: US&R and the UAV Team partnered with the Upper Dublin Township Police Department and Fort Washington Fire Company to conduct a scenario-based wide area search drill in Twining Valley Park. Agencies worked together in a unified command structure to search an 80-plus-acre area of operations, utilizing various search strategies and managing multiple resources.

May 19<sup>th</sup>: US&R brought six of their Swiftwater units to the Delaware River to conduct emergency boat handling skills. Members worked on navigating standing waves, subject pickups from fixed objects (e.g., trees), and rescue of subjects that were swept away and floating down river (left).

Never a dull moment for the Department of Public Safety’s Special Ops personnel!
Emergency Communications Center Adds Location Tool

The Department of Public Safety’s Emergency Communications Center recently adopted a new application called “what3words” as an additional tool to locate individuals in an emergency and relay that information to responders. what3words divided the world into 57 trillion 3-meter squares and gave each square a unique combination of three words as an identifier. For example, the American flag outside the main entrance to the Emergency Operations Center is located at ///advised.remove.infants.

If an individual calling 9-1-1 is having difficulty portraying where they are and the cellular data isn’t accurate enough to provide a location, the three words can be given to the 9-1-1 calltaker to help determine where the caller is located. In turn, this will allow the appropriate resources to be dispatched in a timely manner. From time to time, dispatchers may also provide these three words to responders in the field to help them pinpoint an exact incident location.

Since adoption, the Emergency Communications Center has already had a few success stories using what3words. Most recently, Department of Public Safety dispatchers were able to direct first responders to a brush fire on the Overlook Trail in Evansburg State Park in Lower Providence Township. The agencies involved were able to type ///saying.margins.grow into the what3words website or app, get a precise location for the caller, and formulate their best access to the incident. To learn more about what3words, visit https://what3words.com/about.

Disclaimer: what3words does not take place of and will not be used prior to the Emergency Communication Center’s traditional call handling and location verification methods.

Interoperability Established with Pennsylvania Turnpike

The Department of Public Safety has been working with the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission on an interoperability project that will allow first responders in Montgomery County to communicate directly with the Traffic Operations Center in Highspire using County radios. This will eliminate the need for fire and EMS agencies to maintain additional Turnpike radios and equipment in apparatus. The County’s Emergency Communications Center and field personnel will have separate dedicated talkgroups that are interconnected with PTC District 4 and PTC District 5 for regular operations, as well as PTC OPS_3 which can be assigned for major incidents.

Over the next few weeks, Department of Public Safety staff will be reaching out to the fire and EMS agencies contracted for response on the Turnpike in order to program the new talkgroups into their radios. As other agencies throughout the County have maintenance or reprogramming done, the PTC talkgroups will be added to those radios as well, with the eventual goal of having Turnpike interoperability in all radios in Montgomery County.
Fire Chiefs’ Association Produces Tanker and LDH Engine Water Supply Report

Recently, the Montgomery County Fire Chiefs’ Association has been working on compiling a water supply report regarding fire companies participating in the Tanker and Large Diameter Hose (LDH) Strike Teams. For tankers, the Chiefs who produced the report compiled the tank capacity (in gallons), the tank dump time, and average fill time. For LDH engines, the pump size (in gallons per minute), hose capacity (feet of supply line), and number of 6”x10’ sections of hard sleeve hose carried are listed.

With questions, contact New Hanover Township Fire Marshal William Moyer at firemarshal@newhanover-pa.org. The document is included in the May Monthly Notices and can be downloaded at www.montgomerycountypa.gov/tankerLDH. The Department of Public Safety is not responsible for the accuracy of the information contained therein.

US&R Team Creates Informational Flyer for Collapse 20-1

Recently, the Montgomery County Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) Team developed a Collapse 20-1 informational flyer to highlight the new truck’s capabilities and all-hazards nature. Collapse 20-1 was designed following the US&R Team’s deployment during Hurricane Ida in 2021. The Department of Public Safety identified the need for a truck that, at a moment’s notice, could respond to any technical rescue incident, from flooding to a tornado. The flyer is included in the May Monthly Notices.

Department of Public Safety Career Opportunities

The Department of Public Safety is seeking qualified applicants for the following vacancies. For more information about the roles or to apply online, visit www.montgomerycountypa.gov/jobs or click on the links below. With questions, email publicsafety@montgomerycountypa.gov or call (610) 631-6500 during business hours.

Mobile Integrated Health (MIH) Program

The Mobile Integrated Health (MIH) Program works collaboratively with multiple offices and departments throughout the County to address the issues of complex patients who use the Emergency Department for the treatment of substance use and behavioral health disorders. The program uses mobile resources to deliver care and services to patients in an out-of-hospital environment in coordination with healthcare facilities or other healthcare providers. This program additionally focuses on substance use disorder patients to prevent unnecessary emergency department visits and establish a clear referral pathway from the field to long-term rehabilitative care. MIH specialists shall be certified PA Dept. of Health EMS workers or RNs with prehospital experience and approved for unrestricted medical command authorization by the DPS Chief Medical Officer. Available positions:

Full-Time EMT | Full-Time Paramedic | Part-Time Paramedic