

Along the way, Lentz became involved with several fire companies, including Lower Providence, Faimount of Norristown, Jefferson Fire Company and Plymouth Fire Company, building experience and relationships throughout the local fire service. In 2001, he began his full-time career with the City of Coatesville Bureau of Fire. Over the years, his responsibilities continued to grow. He served as a firefighter and EMT before moving into leadership positions including fire marshal, emergency management coordinator and battalion chief. He also served as interim fire chief from 2011 through 2014.

Today, he is a senior command officer in a combination fire department serving the City of Coatesville, overseeing career, part-time and volunteer personnel and helping coordinate suppression, and administration. His work in Coatesville has included developing the city's first comprehensive fire inspection and fire code compliance program, strengthening fire prevention initiatives, improving accountability and command systems, and establish modern emergency management and Emergency Operations Center capabilities. He has also been deeply involved in labor-management relations, staffing, grants, operational planning and complex incident command. But even as his professional career grew, Lentz never left Lower Providence Fire Company.

Coming Home to Lower Providence

Lentz has been a member of the Lower Providence Fire Department since 1987 and became Fire Chief in 2020. Leading a volunteer department while simultaneously serving as a full-time battalion chief is not an easy task. Lentz describes the chief's role at Lower Providence as essentially more than a full-time job.

His career responsibilities require 24-hour shifts with the Coatesville Bureau of Fire. When he is not working those shifts, much of his time is devoted to Lower Providence. The demands are significant, but so is the reward.

Under Lentz's leadership, Lower Providence has embraced a different approach to maintaining a strong progressive fire service



in a changing world. The department serves approximately 26,400 residents across nearly 15 square miles. Its response force now includes 45 certified firefighters, 16 fire police and 14 probationary or junior firefighters and 17 support personnel. Those numbers represent a dramatic transformation.

In 2021 Lower Providence had 28 certified firefighters," Lentz stated. "That's a 60% increase in certified firefighters under the current administration." Chief Lentz added, "The Fire Department has also seen an increase in activity. We went from 659 calls in 2021 to 834 calls in 2025.

The growth in both personnel and call volume illustrates the changing role of the department and the importance of creating a sustainable response model capable of meeting today's demands.

Adapting to a Changing Fire Service

The fire service has changed dramatically during Lentz's nearly 40 years in it.

In 1987, the Montgomery County, PA Fire Service was nearly a 75% legacy volunteer delivery model. While there were some career fire personnel in our more urbanized areas, the balance were considered paid drivers in maybe 25% of the county's fire companies.

Since then, more organizations and/or communities have recognized the need for staffed fire stations and implemented programs to accomplish that. While several comparable communities have implemented staffing models with career personnel, LPFD (as well as a few others) have implemented several internal programs to meet the demands in a model we can afford.

"One big difference is that while Lower Providence Township has a

demand for fire protection, we do not have the same advantage economically as other communities of similar demographics forcing us to be more aggressive with a cost effective delivery model," Chief Lentz stated.

The traditional volunteer model—where firefighters responded from home whenever a call comes in is becoming increasingly obsolete, especially in our more urbanized regions due to a variety of circumstances including today's building features. The technology applied today in building construction and furnishings allow fires to accelerate faster and reach flashover stage sooner than ever before, demanding a modernized fire department response. Lentz believes fire departments and communities must recognize that reality rather than resist it.

At Lower Providence, that meant changing the department's delivery model.

Instead of waiting for firefighters to respond from wherever they happen to be, the department can have trained personnel already at the station and ready to respond.

This approach has helped Lower Providence build a dependable system while maintaining a far more efficient and cost-effective delivery model.

For a young firefighter, the arrangement can also provide an opportunity to earn money while receiving extensive training, career opportunities and learning skills such as leadership, teamwork all while serving and making a difference.

Firefighters can spend their scheduled shifts at the station, study while they are there and participate in emergency calls when they occur. The department provides the training and certifications needed to develop highly qualified responders, as well as an opportunity to earn incentives (cash stipends).

The firehouse itself has become an important part of that strategy, with facilities designed to make spending time at the station practical and comfortable, including a gym, full kitchen and private sleeping rooms.

For Lentz, recruitment and retention are not simply about asking people to sign up. It's about creating an environment where people want to be.

When firefighters are trained, equipped and given opportunities to use their skills, the firehouse becomes a place where members want to spend time—and where they can develop a sense of purpose and belonging.



More Opportunities to Serve

Another key element of Lentz's philosophy is that not everyone who wants to help has to become a firefighter.

Fire departments need people with a wide variety of skills, including administrative and accounting.

The department has also continued to develop its probationary and junior firefighter ranks, providing younger members with an opportunity to begin learning about the fire service and develop the skills needed to become certified responders.

Lentz wants prospective members

to understand that joining a fire department does not have to mean making a lifelong commitment on day one.

Try it. Learn about the organization. Find a way to contribute. And if it is not the right fit, move on.

That approach opens the door to people who might otherwise never consider the opportunity.

A Regional Approach to a Local Mission

Lentz has also helped lead a broader transformation in how fire departments work together.

He chairs the Montgomery County Regional Operations Committee, a self-organized coalition representing 21 volunteer fire companies and four municipal fire departments across nine municipalities. Together, the agencies cover approximately 83 square miles and serve more than 221,000 residents.

While regionalization of organizations may be beneficial in some of our communities, rarely will it provide sufficient resources to answer the call. However, the regionalized response does.

The availability of certified personnel and modernized fireground management has outweighed the ability of any local organization to handle our more serious incidents without outside assistance.

A structure fire, for example, may bring resources from several surrounding fire departments. Rather than each department operating independently, the response is coordinated so that the appropriate equipment and personnel arrive as part of a unified operation. This suggests that each local jurisdiction can have the flexibility in its staffing models and provide one fire truck with 4 certified firefighters, coming together to make up an alarm assignment, similar to a metropolitan fire department.

For communities, this creates a larger pool of resources without creating a financial burden on the taxpayers.

Promoting individual departments to build their own cultures and maintain their identities builds morale, creates family atmosphere, and drives retention that benefits both types of fire departments. This also provides opportunities to train and operate alongside neighboring departments.

For Lentz, cooperation is a practical response to the realities of today's emergency services environment.

Recruiting the Next Generation

Perhaps nowhere is Lentz's forward-thinking approach more evident than in his work with young people.

For several years, Lower Providence has worked with local schools and fire service partners to introduce students to emergency services. Students have opportunities to learn about firefighting and emergency response through assemblies, recruitment programs and hands-on experiences at the firehouse.

Lentz also serves on the Occupational Advisory Committee at North Montco Technical Career Center.

That involvement led to an even larger initiative.

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