

OCTOBER 11, 2023

# SALUTE *to* FIRE FIGHTERS

Seward County  
**SCI**  
Independent

**MT**  
Milford Times

## The unexpected: Mau shares journey to fire chaplaincy

BY EMILY HEMPHILL  
emily@sewardindependent.com

The Rev. Matt Mau knew he wanted to be a pastor. He had no idea he would follow his dream all the way to becoming a firefighter, EMT and chaplain of the Nebraska State Volunteer Firefighters Association.

"Sometimes we're put into situations we never expected," Mau said as he addressed the Utica Volunteer Fire Department at its Sept. 16 banquet.

Mau serves as chaplain for the Utica and Waco volunteer fire departments in addition to the association.

In his final year of seminary school, he took a class on police chaplaincy, not really expecting to follow that path.

"It completely changed some of my views," he said.

Then, he was called to serve at St. John's Lutheran Church in Waco, where he has preached since July 2013.

"I didn't know what to do with that class I had taken," he said.

Shortly after arriving, he learned the Waco fire department was in need of a chaplain.

Mau attended his first WVFD meeting



and joined the department 10 years ago. "For me, it became somewhat of a passion," he said.

He had only been a pastor for two and a half months at that point.

"I barely knew how to be a pastor, but I wanted to do more," he said.

The department sent him to a three-day Fire

Chaplains Corps training in St. Louis, Missouri, where he learned what it meant to be a fire chaplain.

"But my passion kept growing. I wanted to grow in what it meant to be a fireman," he said.

He advanced in his firefighter training and earned his Emergency Medical Responder

certification.

He then enrolled in an Emergency Medical Technician course.

While going through the class, he received a call to serve as pastor in Scott City, Kansas.

He had to make a decision: accept the call and move to Kansas, or finish the EMT course (CONTINUED ON 2)

EMILY HEMPHILL/SCI

**LEFT:** The Rev. Matt Mau speaks about his passion for firefighting at the Utica Volunteer Fire Department banquet Sept. 16 at the Utica Auditorium. Mau is the chaplain for the Nebraska State Volunteer Firefighters Association, as well as the Utica and Waco fire departments.

## Utica VFD honors members during banquet



**Coleman Outhet (right) receives the Firefighter of the Year award from Utica Fire Chief Curtis Deremer Sept. 16 at the department's annual banquet.**



**Utica Fire Chief Curtis Deremer (left) presents the EMT of the Year award to Wes Rhodes, who began his fire and rescue career in Gresham in 1998. Assistant Chief Travis Grantski (right) helped with the award presentation.**

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# Seward Volunteer Fire Department

DOUG CARROLL/SCI/MT

Members of the Seward Volunteer Fire Department are from left: (first row) Lisa Kimsey, John Singleton, Brent Tempel, Ian Finkbeiner, Tim Herron, Connie Languin, Jason Rasmussen, Landon Dirks, Colby VanDerslice, Johnny May and Dan Brumm; (second row) Thomas Suhr, James Kimsey, Bryan Niebrugge, Haley Goodman, Brady Johnson, Thomas Barnett, Zach Pifold, Mark Suhr, Emily Estes, Brad Park, Jeff Neihardt, Brian Albright, Eric Strole and Jose Castillo; (third row) Travis Pollak, Kelby Nitz, Dan Molsen, Kent Auman and Lucas Brettman; and (fourth row) Tyler Dickinson and Tayler Mifflin. Not pictured are Angela Dobrusky, Kelly Kumm, Brock Maloy and Tami Svehla.



# Beaver Crossing Volunteer Fire Department

KEVIN L. ZADINA/SCI/MT

Members of the Beaver Crossing Volunteer Fire Department 2023 include, from left: (front row) Becky Clark, Mike Stutzman, Bonnie Grantski, Heather Black, Marissa Pfile and Patrick Pfile; and (back row) Gary Grantski, Kris Kreutzer, Mark Kreutzer, Aaron Stinson, J.P. Black, Irwin Crawford, Brandon Allen, Jerry Zieg and Jeremy Craig. Not pictured are Scott Peterson, Chris Butzke, Robin Butzke, Wyatt Schoepf, Kent Smetter and Shannon Steckley.



# Bee Volunteer Fire Department

EMILY HEMPHILL/SCI/MT

Members of the Bee Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department include, from left, Robert Corner, Bobby Kozisek, Rick Craig, Sherri Slack, Caitlin Strauss, Jackie Corner and Tom Kouma. Not pictured are Lucas Brettman, Justin Hemphill, Dave Niebrugge, Danielle Shipley and Bob Viger.

# Mau

(CONTINUED FROM 1)

and stay in Waco. "I stayed," he said. As firefighters, Mau and his comrades are often thrust into situations where they have to make split-second decisions to save lives. "We have been called to what I think is one of the greatest jobs in the country. It's pretty cool what we get to do," he said. Mau read from a sticker he was gifted as he encouraged the Utica members to remember the "Big Four" of being a firefighter:

1. Do your job. "When the pager goes off, know you have a job to do. Do it to the best of your ability," he said.
2. Have an "all-in" attitude. "There is no perfect fire department, but your attitude toward the job is paramount," he said.
3. Treat people right. "Whether it's fellow department members or whether it's the people we're out there to serve...we are professionals. We are professional volunteers."
4. Give an all-out effort. "Go do it with a passion. Learn. Grow," he said. Mau said communities, especially rural ones, are in great need of volunteer firefighters. "There's not a lot of people signing up to do it anymore, and they're always going to need us," he said. He spoke to the handful of retired firefighters in attendance who no longer respond to calls but are still active in the workings of the Utica department. Among retired members alone, the department has 371 years of service experience. "What's an old firefighter's job?" he asked. "It's to teach the young firefighter how to be an old firefighter. You guys have the legacy. You guys have the stories. You have the learnings. Pass that on to the next generation."

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## Cordova Volunteer Fire Department

STEPHANIE CROSTON/SCI/MT

The 2023 Cordova Volunteer Fire Department includes, from left: (front row) Lars Larsen, Levi Weber, Lance Larsen, Duane Barnes and Darrell Peterson; and (back row) Blake Due, Darrell Eastin, Buzz Zastrow, Ryan Eastin, Kent Olsen, Rick Ricenbaw and Ryan Pavlish.



## Garland Volunteer Fire Department

STEPHANIE CROSTON/SCI/MT

Members of the Garland Volunteer Fire Department in 2023 include, from left: (seated) James Pliefke, Terri Schrad, EMT and medical lieutenant, Jason Swerczek, fire chief, Jake Bennett, assistant chief, Nicole Wegman, secretary/treasurer and EMT, Phil Hargis, president, Mike Luebbe, medical captain, and Nicholas Becker, trustee; and (standing) Cory Madsen holding Navy Madsen, Mitchell Bromwich, Amanda Schaefer, Toby Beckmann, Erinn Blasek, EMT, Jake Swerczek, Deb Robotham, EMT, David Wesely, Rod Bromwich, Chuck Luebbe and Mark Henning. Not pictured are D.R. Herrold, Tylor Jamison, Brian Johnson, Ethan Richter, Alyssa Richter, Austin Sayer and Seth Schaefer.



## Malcolm Volunteer Fire Department

COURTESY PHOTO

Members of the Malcolm Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department include, from left: (first row) Kelley Burianek, Melissa Wilcox, Lexi Gropp, Ginger Andrews, Corey Heidtbrink, Adam Benischek, Dustin Green, Ray Robotham and Kendall Hawthorne; (second row) Gary Heidtbrink, Shane Vetic, JJ Frink, Jack Tarr, Brent Nordmeyer, Shaun Donahoo, Justin Matthes, Barry Petersen, Logan Petersen, Lucas Stutzman and Rick Klauz; and (third row) Matt Bratrsovsky, Kevin Klink, Trevor Cotton, Dylan Mason, Vince Meyer, Steve Heidtbrink, Dave Wacker, Mike Hatfield, Jared Ritze, Aaron Schmidt, Doug Heidtbrink, Cliff Schweitzer, Kerry Fry, Jim Densberger and Milan Schweitzer. Not pictured are Dave Rohe, Jeff Schweitzer, Marcus Kallhoff and Cody Densberger.

# Smoke detectors, inspections keys to fire protection

Smoke detectors are a key component of fire protection, but there's much more homeowners can do to protect themselves, their families, their belongings, and their homes from structure fires.

- Routinely inspect smoke detectors. Smoke detectors can only alert residents to a fire if they're working properly. Battery-powered smoke detectors won't work if the batteries die.

Test alarms to make sure

the devices are functioning and audible in nearby rooms. Install additional detectors as necessary so alarms and warnings can be heard in every room of the house.

- Hire an electrician to audit your home. Electricians can inspect a home and identify any issues that could make the home more vulnerable to fires. Oft-overlooked areas like attics and crawl spaces pose a potentially significant fire safety threat, as data

from the Federal Emergency Management Association indicates that 13% of electrical fires begin in such spaces.

- Audit the laundry room. The laundry room is another potential source of home structure fires. NFPA data indicates around 3% of home structure fires begin in laundry rooms each year. Strategies to reduce the risk of laundry room fires include leaving room for laundry to tumble in washers and dry-

ers; routinely cleaning lint screens to avoid the buildup of dust, fiber and lint, which the NFPA notes are often the first items to ignite in fires linked to dryers; and ensuring the outlets washing machines and dryers are plugged into can handle the voltage such appliances require. It's also a good idea to clean dryer exhaust vents and ducts every year.

- Look outward as well. Homeowners can reduce the

risk of such fires by ensuring all items that use fire, including grills and firepits, are always used at least 10 feet away from the home. Never operate a grill beneath eaves, and do not use grills on decks.

- Sweat the small stuff. Never leave candles burning in empty rooms and make sure beauty and grooming items like dryers, straighteners and irons are unplugged and placed in a safe place to cool down when not in use.

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# Goehner Volunteer Fire Department

DOUG CARROLL/SCI/MT

Members of the Goehner Volunteer Fire Department are, from left: (front row) Matt Howe, Jamie Knisley, Jason Jarzynka, Jesse Meinberg, Jon Schulz, Matt Meyer and Clint Ostrander; and (back row) Jessica Anthony, Dustin Blecha, Dakota Fernau, Gabe Knisley, Jeff Schoepf, Fred Ulch, Shawn Nagel, Clinton Bialas, Jeff Luebbe and Billy Cronquist.



# Milford Volunteer Fire Department

DOUG CARROLL/SCI/MT

Members of the Milford Volunteer Fire Department are, from left: (front row) Yvette Yoder, Natalie Yoder, Stu Schweitzer, Trevor Plessel, Colby Kontor, Allissa Gurnsey, Karen Mundhenke and Jeremy Dinges; and (back row) Kyle Fastenau, Tyler Gingerich, Travis Keilig, Tim Stewart, Troy Pickerill, Shane Noble, Andrew Yoder, Ron Erb, Travis Fougeron, Brad Freeman and Alex Gurnsey.



# Waco Volunteer Fire Department

COURTESY PHOTO

Members of the Waco Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department include, from left: (first row) Jason Abel, David Norquest, Connor Wiese, Chris Farley, Kevin Butzke, Greg Heine and Aarik Naber; (second row) Keven Dye, Sam Hall, Justin Scamehorn, Renee Dinkelman, Todd Bauder, Wade Stephens, Randy Barnes and Jeremy Hogue; and (third row) Gale Dinkelman, Wayne Sackschewsky, Rex Heiden and Matthew Mau. Alex Lekai and Nick Wollenburg are not pictured.

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# PLEASANT DALE FIRE STATION



## Pleasant Dale Volunteer Fire Department

Members of the Pleasant Dale Volunteer Fire Department are, from left: (front row) Jason Klug, Jim Vance, Nick Dankers, Stephanie Meyer, J.J. Vance, Jeff Oehm, Larry Lawton, Leroy Trease, Duane Burd, Brittany Minnehan, Dave Ficke and Ernie Krent; and (back row) Travis Meyer, Michael Bridgford, Travis Fougeron, Michael Minnehan, Jeremy Seffron, Leslie Thomas, Loree Havlat, Tanner Smith, Malissa Sittler, Bobby Meyer, Colton Wehrs, Colby Yeackley, Nate Keller, Jonny Piening and Mike Dankers. Members not pictured are Brian Barnes, Mitch Bennett, Charlie Bennett, Joey Carder, Andrew Ficke, Austin Ficke, Joe Fillepek, Jim Kouma, Dustin Piening, Trevor Piening, Tyler Piening, Cody Rohrig, Jerry Rotschafer, Austin Stinson and Aaron VanAndel.

DOUG CARROLL/SC/MT



## Staplehurst Volunteer Fire Department

Members of the Staplehurst Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department include, from left, Jason Schaefer, David Wagner, Megan Emons, Jamison Fern, Colton Hood, Zack Vrbka, Shawn Kitzing and Tyler Strong. Not pictured are Shaun Benedict, Trey Brandenburgh, Bill Brauer, Jackie Corner, Ashley Douthit, Paul Duer, Justin Hemphill, Jeremy May, Amy Prochaska, Ben Sheehan, Mike Sheehan, Danielle Shipley, Colton Stava and Richard Steckly.

EMILY HEMPHILL/SC/MT

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# Tamora Volunteer Fire Department

STEPHANIE CROSTON/SCI/MT

The Tamora Volunteer Fire Department in 2023 includes, from left: (seated) Dave Payne, Ray Besse, Dave Scholl, Jon Propst, Gary Douthit, Adam Hladky and AJ Bapat; and (standing) Johnny Bapat, Tim Classen, Max Nordmeyer, Taylor Nuttleman, Josie Propst-Scholl, Mike Pflughaupt and Doug Cutshall. Not pictured are Bob Viger, Chad King, Nate Payne, Justin Crumley, Matt Miller, James Novotny, James Kratochvil and Adam Miller.



# Ulysses Volunteer Fire Department

KEATON BURGESS/SCI/MT

ABOVE: Pictured are the members of the Ulysses Fire Department, from left, Jim Klement, Randy Semin, Justan Wynegar, Mike Fiala, Jon White, Justin Fiala, Allison Zitek and Gary Zitek.



# Utica Volunteer Fire Department

EMILY HEMPHILL/SCI/MT

LEFT: Members of the Utica Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department are, from left: (first row) Bill Deremer, Gary Dittmar, Jerry Springer, Larry Barth and Loyd Erks; (second row) Jesse Harts-horn, Adam Simmerman, Travis Grantski, Curtis Deremer, Amanda Struble, Wes Rhodes and Jon Koski; and (third row) Shane Shandera, Coleman Outthet, Josh Struble, Lanette Simmerman and Eugene Hinze. Not pictured are Byron Kraus, Sarah Kraus, Tammy Sladek, Craig Wolf, Jim Avery, Andy Fehlhafer, Adam Fritz, Shawn Harroun, Gordon Luebbe, Todd Murphy, Cody Nuttleman, Colette Stelling and Jay Stelling.

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◀ Mark Suhr (left) &  
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