

March 2021

NEO Newsletter

Dear Prevention Bureau Staff,

In this edition, you'll find details about the NEOFPA and NEOSSEN meetings in March as well as additional virtual training opportunities. Be sure to check out pages 3-5 to learn about awesome community outreach programs in the area!

Save the date – next month - NEOFPA and NEOSSEN will meet on Wednesday, April 7, 2021 at 9:30am for a presentation from Rudy Ruiz on DISC Personality Profile Assessment.

Sincerely,

Angela Potter

Northeastern Ohio Fire Prevention Association (NEOFPA)

Private Fire Mains – Installation and Inspection
Assistant Chief Shaun Lutz, Beachwood Fire Department



Join NEOFPA on Monday, March 1, 2021 at 10am on WebEx, for a virtual presentation about Private Fire Mains.

Visit **North Eastern Ohio Fire Prevention Association** at NEOFPA.org and [NEOFPA on Facebook](#)

Upcoming Events

March 1

NEOFPA Virtual Meeting on WebEx 10am – 12pm

Private Fire Mains Installation and Inspection

March 3

NEOSSEN Virtual Meeting on MS Teams 9:30am – 11:00am

Safety Town in your Community

Virtual Training

March 18, 2021

[Ohio Fire Incident Reporting System \(OFIRS\)](#)

April 1, 2021

[Public Safety Education for Frontline Firefighters](#)

April 28 – 29, 2021

[Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist, NFPA 1035, 2015 edition](#)



Northeast Ohio Safety Educators' Network (NEOSEN)



General Overview – Developing a Safety Town Program in Your Community

Officer Vickie Yendriga – Aurora Police Department

Officer Yendriga started her law enforcement career in 1977 as a police officer in the United States Air Force. During her four years in the Air Force, she was stationed at Hickam AFB Hawaii and was at Eglin AFB Florida during the Cuban Refugee Crisis. Her next career move took her to Pennsylvania and a job at Allegheny College Security Department where she started as an officer, and within a year, moved up to be Deputy Director of the department. Working during the day and going to school at night, she got a degree in Criminal Justice at Edinboro University.

In 1986, she moved back to Ohio and continued her law enforcement career at Mantua Police Department, where she convinced the chief to let her go to become DARE certified. In 1989, she became the first DARE Officer in Portage County, dividing her time between Mantua and Aurora Police Departments and teaching DARE in both school systems. She served a number of years as District Representative for the DARE Association of Ohio and was President of the Association in 2002.



As Juvenile Officer for the department for several years, she served as a board member of the Ohio Police Juvenile Officers Association and was awarded the Philip B Huss Memorial Friendship Award.

Officer Yendriga was part in starting the Portage County None 4 Under 21 & Choices Beyond program, which in 2019, its 17th year, educated close to 2,000 high school seniors annually on the importance of not drinking and driving, as well as how deadly distracted driving can be. She served on the Ohio Crime Prevention Association Board of Directors, was President for two years, and was awarded the Association's highest honor with the Michael Blankenship Memorial Service Award. She currently does a statewide training – Developing a Safety Town Program in Your Community.

“Officer Vickie,” as most of the kids and adults know her in Aurora, has been with the department for 31 years. Settling in as the current Crime Prevention Officer, she is the supervisor and coordinator of their local Safety Town Program, which has been in Aurora for 48 years and is responsible for a number of the department's safety education programs and events throughout the year. In 2019, she was awarded the department's Exceptional Service Award.

Officer Yendriga will share a *general overview* of her statewide training – Developing a Safety Town Program in Your Community – during the March NEOSEN Meeting.

Visit **Northeast Ohio Safety Educators Network** at NEOSEN.org and [NEOSEN on Facebook](#)

Northeast Ohio Safety Educators' Network

Making a Difference – Community Outreach

Akron Fire Department

Akron Fire Department is meeting the needs of their community through a variety of programs. Lieutenant Sierjie Lash provided the following details about two of their programs:

Voluntary Home Educational Inspections – Community Services personnel take appointments from Akron residents to check private homes for fire hazards. Personnel follow a basic home safety checklist which is left with the occupant. This allows for an educational opportunity for residents without the burden of mandated corrective action and provides the entire family with fire safety tips to engage fire prevention behaviors and tasks. Often, the voluntary home education inspections can be added to smoke alarm installations, but families are welcome to set up an appointment even without other fire department services needed. Residents can contact the Akron Fire Community Services Bureau at (330) 375-2197.



R.E.A.C.H. Program – Resources, Education, and Advocacy for Community Health Program, is the Akron Fire version of community paramedicine. The program was launched in the summer of 2019 and is still expanding to meet the needs of the older population in Akron. Fire personnel assigned to the R.E.A.C.H. unit are paramedics, and they work alongside an intern from the University of Akron to install grab bars, bed rails, handrails, and raised toilet seats in homes as a result of the assessment and evaluation. The program has

recently begun to include follow up visits to homes after older residents have been transported to the hospital with breathing issues. R.E.A.C.H. personnel ensure medications are accessible and patients are compliant with taking the meds in order to decrease future ER visits. If older residents have smoke alarms that need batteries changed, AFD personnel will handle this task for them to avoid potential fall injuries. Families may contact the R.E.A.C.H. Program at (330) 812-7590.

Thank you, Akron Fire Department for Making a Difference!

Making a Difference – Partnership to Provide STICKS Program

Mentor Fire Department and Willoughby Fire Department

After 3 decades with Mentor Fire Department, Jerry Craddock accepted a position in public education, and shortly thereafter, started a program at the local library called *Story Time with Firefighter Jerry*. During this program, Jerry would read stories to the children, interjecting safety messages that the parents could reinforce at home. One day, after story time, Jenna Newman approached Jerry to tell him about her son, Tommy. Jenna explained that she was a parent of an autistic child and knew other parents of children with special needs. She asked if Jerry would be willing to read to these children, because, “our kids learn differently.” Of course, Jerry immediately accepted the invitation and was eager to begin.



Jenna Newman’s vision for the STICKS program, named for her son because of his obsession with sticks, was simple. She wanted everyone, regardless of their age, to feel comfortable around first responders and vice-versa. Jenna also wanted the group to learn safety lessons – so she began writing short social stories, which she describes as, “very quick, to-the-point books with lots of repeating,” to be read during the meetings.

Jerry remembers his first meeting with the special needs children as, “a bit overwhelming.” Initially, Tommy (non-verbal, but communicates using the LAMP app on the iPad), would just look at him, but wouldn’t smile. Jerry wasn’t sure if anyone was paying attention, or, if they even liked him? After he finished reading the book, Jerry was

blown away when he asked a question and the children yelled out the correct answer.

Eventually, Tommy warmed up to Jerry and their relationship continued to grow. Jerry remembers a special moment between the two of them and describes, “...Tommy, putting on my helmet and smiling...in that instant, it was the first time I had seen him smile and I felt an extreme sense of a bond.”

Jenna, reflecting on the early days of the program, said, “The firefighters have learned that it’s not their typical school program. They see lots of running around the room and stimming, sometimes lots of yelling and crying. We let the kids do it and make no judgements. My son hated the program the first 4 months, and now he asks to go, he sits and listens, he participates! He is not afraid of firefighters anymore!”

(Continued on the next page)



I CANNOT SAY ENOUGH HOW MUCH THE PROGRAM HAS MADE ME A BETTER PERSON. I HAVE JENNA, AND HER VERY SPECIAL SON TOMMY, ALONG WITH ALL OF THE OTHER CHILDREN AND PARENTS THAT HAVE OPENED MY EYES AND MY HEART.

Mark Leisure

Egg Hunt in the spring, cook-out at the end of summer, Trick-or-Treat around the station for Halloween, and a Christmas party for the kids in the winter.

The STICKS program has continued to be a hit! Since inception, STICKS has expanded to include Madison, Ohio as well. In addition to providing the stories, Jenna also puts sensory bags together. These bags include items to help facilitate conversation or interaction between first responders and those with special needs. Jenna is thrilled with the success of the program. She stated, "The firefighters have learned so much, they adjust so well when they need to – they are just amazing humans! The bond these three guys have with my son is the most amazing thing I have ever experienced!"

The firefighters, many of whom volunteer their time to help with events, feel honored to be involved in such an awesome program. Through STICKS, children have learned safety lessons and become comfortable around first responders. The impact this program has had on the firefighters is heartwarming.

"The special needs story time would not be possible without the support from the members of the department, the parents who bring their children to the station for the program, and the generous people and organizations that provide donations to make the program successful. To sum everything up, the special needs story time was designed for us to teach special needs kids about fire safety, but we were the ones getting a lesson on how to interact and deal with these amazing kids." - Ricky Stuart

If you would like more information about STICKS, please contact Jenna Newman at Heroeshelping@yahoo.com

Not long after starting the STICKS program in Mentor, Jenna approached Ricky Stuart at Willoughby Fire Department and asked if he would be interested in doing the same thing. Ricky knew immediately that he wanted to be a part of the program, but having no experience interacting with special needs children, quickly reached out to fellow firefighter, Mark Leisure for help. Together, they decided the program would be held once a month. The first night went very well - the families were excited that the program was specifically tailored for their children. In addition to the monthly safety lessons, Willoughby Fire Department also hosts four special events throughout the year – Easter

