



CAPITOL UPDATE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE MAUREEN E. MADDEN

Representing the 115th Legislative District

Spring 2022

324 Main Capitol Building • P.O. Box 202115 • Harrisburg, PA 17120-2115 • (717) 787-5811
354 Memorial Blvd., Room 4 • Tobyhanna, PA 18466-7786 • (570) 894-7905
18 S. Ninth St., Suite 105 • Stroudsburg, PA 18360-1714 • (570) 420-2850

SERVICE SPOTLIGHT:



Coolbaugh Township Volunteer Fire Company

Near the end of Echo Lake Road sits a building colored in a soft yellow occupying a small plot in our wide-reaching community. This building is where local heroes gather to practice drills and train for common and unpredictable fire-related emergencies. It's where a family of Coolbaugh Township volunteer firefighters begin their service to our community.

Within the Coolbaugh Township Volunteer Fire Company, it is rare to find a member who plays a solitary role. To name a few, George Dobson is the newly elected chief and purchasing agent of the Relief Association Board; Tomas Keane and Steve Baker serve as assistant chiefs,

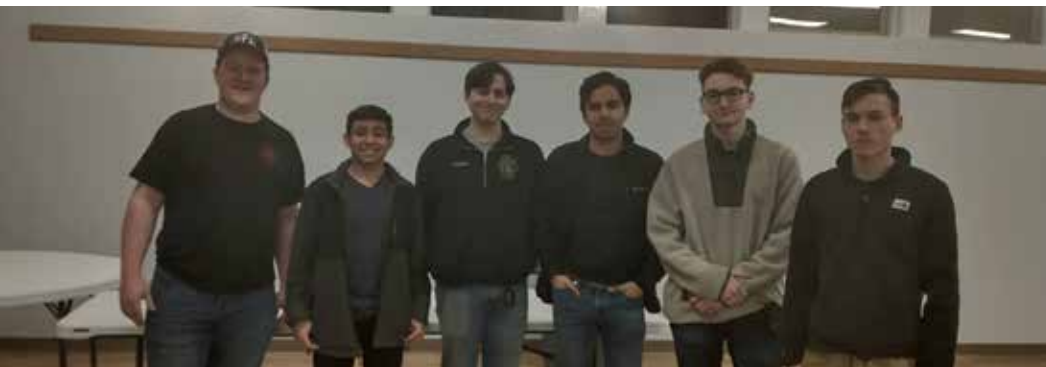
and Keane is the president of the Fire Company Board, while Baker is a trustee and serves as the president of the Relief Association; Kelly Wiemer is a fire lieutenant, Relief Association board member, and Fire Company Board trustee. Through regularly scheduled drills, training coordinators Christopher Ambrogio and William Weimer Jr., who is also a captain and the treasurer of both the Fire Company and Relief Association, prepare the team to answer these emergency calls.

Additionally, the junior volunteers are an ambitious group of students. A few of them are legacy volunteer firefighters, and some of them aspire to join the

United States Armed Forces or become paid firefighters as they near the end of their secondary education. It's not easy to manage attending school, participating in extracurriculars, and fulfilling responsibilities at home while being a volunteer firefighter, but the juniors excel in every aspect.

Since education is a priority, the CTVFC requires the juniors to maintain excellent grades to remain volunteers at the end of each marking period. Likewise, their roles as juniors are restricted but are of the utmost importance for helping the senior firefighters prepare for emergency calls. This includes evaluating, organizing and preparing the fire truck's equipment inventory for each emergency call. The juniors are motivated to respond when duty calls because of their passion for helping others. From their experience in the field, they have learned an important life lesson: ***Never take anything for granted as it could instantly be gone.***

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SEE INSIDE: Erasing the Stigma of Addiction at We Have a Choice Justin's House for Men; Waste Not Technologies; Working for Safer Schools; PACENET Update

Coolbaugh Twp. VFC continued...

Funding needs to come from several sources to keep the trucks, equipment and facilities in top shape. Stipends from the municipality help pay for the station's utilities, and legislative grants help upgrade the facilities. One crucial renovation was the warming station/meeting room, which now includes new ADA-compliant bathrooms and a monitor-controlled HVAC system.

Over the years, the firefighters have initiated independent funding sources by holding rummage sales to sell a plethora of non-perishable items donated by local distributors. During the 2020 and 2021 sales, the firefighters raised about \$100,000, which goes directly toward the costs of building a new firehouse. The materials not sold are donated to nearby fire companies and nonprofit organizations. Independent funding can also be collected from ticket sales of a spaghetti dinner or from letter requests mailed to residents and commercial businesses. The fire company said it also plans to rent out its modern warming station to gain additional funding.

On top of the simultaneous roles, these volunteer firefighters are also active members of the community, participating in fire-prevention programs with local organizations, schools and older residents to install and check smoke alarms.

But as volunteer firefighters, the work doesn't end here. The company has at least 40 active volunteer firefighters, and many are constrained by the amount of time they can give. For instance, during 2021, the volunteers responded to 542 calls, and in January 2022, they've already established a record with 63 answered calls!

Even when duty calls, volunteers are 24/7 spouses and parents who hold other full-time jobs to provide for their families. The weight of prioritizing these roles can make it difficult for members to recruit and retain volunteers, who are expected to respond to 50 calls to remain an active member of the fire company. Volunteer recruiters have devised creative avenues of gaining new members, such as impressive skill demonstrations like cutting up a car



or the "Cleaning the Fire Hydrant" campaign during the wintertime, which rewards individuals who have removed snow from a covered fire hydrant.

These recruitment efforts have drawn volunteers who have become a part of this self-described "dysfunctional family" of firefighters. Being a Coolbaugh Township Volunteer Firefighter is rigorous but rewarding, and, as Keane says, "It doesn't cost anything except your time, but you can't put a price on it." For more on CTVFC, visit <https://www.coolfire25.com/>.

Working to Keep our Schools Safe

Very recently, Rep. Maureen Madden had the incredible honor to meet and even visit with some amazingly inspiring advocates.

Four years ago, a school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, devastated not just that community but the entire country. Since that tragic event where 17 lives were lost and another 17 were injured, parents of some of the victims have taken their immense pain and heartbreak and have worked tirelessly to make schools safer, not just in Florida but throughout our nation.

That list of devastated parents includes Max Schachter (Alex's dad), Tony Montalto (Gina's dad) and Lori Alhadef (Alyssa's mom), each of whom connected with Rep. Madden and other PA legislators to share their stories and explore how to prevent similar tragedies from happening in Pennsylvania.

Rep. Madden also visited the still-heartbroken community in Parkland in mid-February as it marked four years since the massacre. Rep. Madden said she is all in to do whatever it takes to stop similar tragedies from occurring in Pennsylvania schools. Under-reported incidents of bullying and violence in the commonwealth's schools show there is a lot of work to do, but these heroic Parkland parents have shown others the blueprint to make Pennsylvania schools safer in a pragmatic, nonpartisan fashion.

Stay tuned for updates on how Rep. Madden is working in Pennsylvania to implement laws similar to legislation supported by parent-advocates and passed in Florida and other states.



ERASING THE STIGMA OF ADDICTION

'We Have a Choice Justin's House for Men' in Tobyhanna is the first officially licensed recovery house in PA



Millions of Americans are touched by substance use disorder every day. With SUD comes a slew of challenges: jail time, lost jobs, shattered families, overdoses and deaths. When a person with a substance use disorder seeks treatment, they most likely will find themselves in an inpatient facility to overcome their addiction. But when their time in the facility comes to an end, where do they go?

Recovery homes are an option for people with a history of addiction. These sober-living homes provide a place for those in recovery to ease back into society without temptations surrounding them.

In Tobyhanna, "We Have a Choice Justin's House for Men" is run by Kenny Ramirez, who was featured in a 2018 Monroe Matters newsletter. We recently spoke with Kenny, his wife, Amanda, and his mother-in-law, Kathy, to follow up on their journeys and how recovery has transformed their lives. A sampling of our Q&A follows:

KENNY RAMIREZ

Q: Since we spoke in 2018, what, if any, changes have the recovery home undergone?

KR: We have continued to serve clients in Monroe County and surrounding areas by providing safe, sober living to individuals. We help anyone who we can when we can.

Q: What personal or professional changes, if any, have happened in your life?

KR: This year, our family suffered major losses. My brother-in-law overdosed on fentanyl, and it devastated our family. This makes it more real for us and our dedication to helping

others. We looked to expand our services by seeking Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs recovery home licensure and are the first recovery home to be officially licensed in our commonwealth. We are also certified through the Pennsylvania Alliance of Recovery Residences and continue to work with the executive director Fred Way, who always gives us excellent guidance in maintaining safe recovery home living that meets national standards. We are also in the process of contracting with Jamie Drake, who is the executive director of the Carbon-Monroe-Pike Drug and Alcohol Commission's Single County Authority to expand recovery home services to residents of Monroe, Carbon and Pike counties.

Q: What does DDAP certification mean for the recovery home?

KR: Our goal is to get more DDAP licensed recovery houses in the future because people in recovery need safe places to live. We are forever grateful to be of service to our community today and to be part of the solution.



AMANDA RAMIREZ

Q: Can you tell me about yourself, your years of addiction, your path to recovery, how you met Kenny, and your journey to opening the recovery home?

AR: I began experimenting with drugs when I was 11. It started with cigarettes, alcohol

and weed when I would get together with friends at parties. I graduated to other drugs such as ecstasy, opioid pills and cocaine and was eventually introduced to heroin. This is really where my addiction journey took off as I was consumed by the feeling heroin gave me. I would do anything to keep that feeling, which led me to start stealing from my loved ones, lying and manipulating people. I continuously hurt myself and everyone around me. Relapse is a part of my story. I would get some clean time and do all of these things all over again. It was a torturous cycle. Inside, I would be screaming that I wanted to stop. I didn't want to continue how I was living but physically was unable to do so. By the time I was 21, I had been arrested multiple times for possession and shoplifting, been to detoxes and outpatient services, and inpatient and residential treatment. Finally, I went away to a facility for a year, and during this time is where my recovery journey began. About 6 months into it, I woke up one day with a different set of eyes. I looked around at my surroundings and said to myself, "I never want to come back to a place like this again." I wanted to live a good life where I didn't wake up in pain. I had the desire to change. From there I went to a sober living home for women, which was a slum house with no heat and bed bugs.

But I knew if I left and went back home, I would most likely use. I continued on and went to meetings and IOP programs and got a support group and took all the suggestions everyone gave me. I met my husband during this time, as he lived a few blocks away from where I was living. At this point, we each had a year clean and helped each other continue our recovery journeys.

Q: Recently, you became a certified recovery counselor. What motivated you to do this?

AR: I became a certified recovery specialist in August. I had just been thinking about all the recent overdoses because of fentanyl and thought to myself I wanted to do more. I had 11 years clean at that point and just felt like I needed to share my recovery with others, so I enrolled in school. Let me tell you, God makes no mistakes because on my second day of class, I got the devastating news that my brother overdosed on fentanyl and died. He is part of the 100,000 lives lost due to overdoses in 2021. This has forever changed my family. We will do whatever we can to save lives because addiction is killing people from all walks of life and backgrounds, different ages and races. It does not discriminate. Most people won't seek help due to the shame and stigma that comes along with being addicted to drugs. We are here to kill that stigma and say everyone is worth recovery!



KATHY MOLES

Q: What are the challenges of being the parent of someone with substance use disorder?

KM: One of the most challenging parts of being the parent of an addict is being helpless to the fact that your child is harming themselves and trying to get them to accept that they need help. It's also very challenging to not enable your child because, as a parent, you want to help them, but you cannot allow their addiction to become your addiction even though you aren't the one using. As a mother who lost her son to an overdose, it's heartbreaking to accept the fact that you cannot always help and to realize that you did everything you could possibly do. If love was enough, no one would die from addiction.

Q: How has your daughter and your son-in-law's journey in recovery affected your relationship with them?

KM: My daughter and son-in-law's journey in recovery has helped to flourish our relationship in many different ways. We are able to communicate openly and honestly with each other.

Q: Why was it important for you to partner with Amanda and Kenny on the recovery home?

KM: I wanted to open the recovery house with Amanda and Kenny because all of us have lived each side of addiction – as addicts and as the loved one of addicts. Together we could build a community of experience to help others.

For more on Justin's House, visit www.facebook.com/WeHaveAChoiceRecoveryHouseForMen.

MORE RESOURCES: Find drug and alcohol treatment by calling 1-800-662-HELP or by contacting the Carbon/Monroe/Pike Drug and Alcohol Commission at 570-421-1960 or by visiting cmpda.cog.pa.us.

A Sign(post) of the Times

The aptly named **Waste Not Technologies** is improving our environment — one yogurt cup at a time.

With locations in Saylorsburg and Tobyhanna, these recycling plants take recycled plastic and turn it into fencing. Rep. Maureen Madden recently had the pleasure of touring the Tobyhanna facility. During this tour, founder Patrick Kelley described in detail the recycling processes. WNT has been buying yogurt cups and turning them into low-maintenance fencing mostly used for farms, vineyards and signposts.

In addition to the positive impact on the environment, this process brings positives to the consumer. Unlike wooden fencing, plastic fencing holds up against the elements of nature, does not need to be painted, and ultimately retains their aesthetic appearance for a long amount of time. WNT has test fence posts in their Saylorsburg plants that are 21 years old and have not rotted!

As its products have stood the test of time, so does WNT's practices. The act of recycling is a key player in the quest for sustainability of our environment.

WNT recently applied for a Local Share Account grant to aid in the installation of a loading dock and outside storage space at the Tobyhanna plant for the receiving of full tractor loads of recycled plastics. Growth is imminent for this recycling plant in Monroe County. Learn more at www.plasticfencing.us.

LEARN MORE ABOUT RECYCLING



**Remember:
Recycling Works
in Pennsylvania!**

Contact Page

To learn more about Recycling in Pennsylvania, visit:
<https://www.dep.pa.gov/recycling>

To learn more about recycling in your county and get involved, contact your County Recycling Coordinator: dep.pa.gov/countyrecycling, or the DEP Recycling Coordinator in your region.

Find your DEP Regional Office here: dep.pa.gov/regions

Visit the DEP website at <http://www.dep.pa.gov>





STATE REPRESENTATIVE
Maureen E. Madden

P.O. Box 202115
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2115

RepMadden.com

RepMaureenMadden

@RepMadden

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PACENET income limits increase by \$6,000



Rep. Maureen Madden voted to increase income limits by \$6,000 for the PACENET prescription drug program under a new state law.

The law increases enrollment for the state's Prescription Assistance Contract for the Elderly Needs Enhancement Tier, known as PACENET, by about 20,000 people and raises the income limits to \$33,500 for a single person and \$41,500 for a married couple.

The new law provides financial incentives for PACENET enrollees to also sign up for federal Medicare Part D prescription coverage. Additional funds generated by increased participation in the federal prescription program will be used to pay for the increased PACENET income limits.

My offices can help you with:

- PennDOT issues – vehicle registrations, special tags, disability parking placards, titles, driver's license applications
- Information on financial assistance for higher education
- Obtaining and completing state forms
- Voter registration and absentee/mail-in ballot applications
- Unemployment compensation, worker's compensation
- Birth and death certificates
- Issues with Department of Human Services (food stamps, medical and income assistance)
- PA income tax questions or problems
- Renewal of state-issued licenses or certifications
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate
- Tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups

thank you!

Rep. Madden would like to thank members of her staff – Marina Purcaro, Latisha Griffith and Geoff Morrow – for their collaboration on this newsletter.