

CLINTON TOWNSHIP, MACOMB TOWNSHIP

# School district, firefighters team up for bus crash simulation, training

C & G NEWSPAPERS

By Joshua Gordon✉



Clinton Township firefighters assess a school bus and car crash simulation during a training project Aug. 31 with Chippewa Valley Schools. (Photo by Deb Jacques)

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Firefighters used the the Jaws of Life to extract Dakota High School junior Alex Fogerty from a car trapped by a school bus during the simulation. (Photo by Deb Jacques)



Medstar Ambulance EMTs Ken Gross, left, and Nick Barry transport Fogerty. (Photo by Deb Jacques)

CLINTON TOWNSHIP/MACOMB TOWNSHIP — It took six Clinton Township firefighters to get the roof off a small compact car caught under an overturned school bus, and get the student who was stuck in the passenger's seat out.

The same firefighters had spent the previous 30 minutes getting the two other passengers out of the car, as well as tending to several Chippewa Valley Schools students who were passengers of the school bus.

When they were done, they were met with a round of applause from nearly 100 Chippewa Valley bus drivers and staff standing just feet away taking in the training.

Chippewa Valley partnered with the Clinton Township fire, police and EMS departments to simulate a crashed, smoking school bus on Aug. 31. About 15 students lent their time and made up their body to look like they were injured, to help in the training.

“We have never had a serious accident. I just think it is very important, if that were to occur, for our drivers to be prepared,” Chippewa Valley Superintendent Ron Roberts said. “We transport over 11,000 students a day and we do that very safely. But like anything in life, one can never be prepared enough in case the real thing occurs.”

Brendan Wagner, director of pupil transportation with Chippewa Valley, said the simulation training was born of out of an idea from new Transportation Coordinator Patti Brohl.

The district does in-service training at the beginning of every school year to make sure safety issues from the previous year are addressed and any new legislation is known, Wagner said. But Brohl wanted to do something bigger.

The first stage of the training involved a smoke-filled bus and helped educate the bus drivers on how to properly evacuate a bus in that situation.

The second part had Mount Clemens-based Ruehle’s Towing come and turn a donated bus that was going out of commission on its side and on top of the compact car. A few students got inside the bus, some inside the car and others laid throughout the parking lot.

The students used fake blood to rub on their arms, legs and heads and some even had more serious injuries, like glass in the head and in the arm.

“We talk often about what ifs, and we have things in writing about how to handle situations and we have been fortunate to not have had any instances,” Wagner said. “This gives the drivers an opportunity to be in a realistic situation with the smoke and learn how to handle it when and if the time comes.”

The district’s transportation department contacted the Clinton Township Fire Department to see if they would like to participate in the exercise. Training Chief Tom Stuck saw it as an opportunity to get his firefighters some “what if” training as well.

“I had to hijack this to train my guys,” Stuck said. “In a real situation, we would have a lot more people involved and more assets. We would notify people in all the nearby counties.”

The University of Michigan survival flight helicopter was scheduled to make an appearance and assist with the training, but the team was called to a real emergency and didn’t make an appearance.

Wagner said the district has 90 bus routes, and having the district, fire, police and EMS come together for the training was a positive for the community.

“This is my 18th year at Chippewa and I have had some experience with both the fire and police department, but it was fleeting and situational,” Wagner said. “I think we have really forged a great relationship, a working relationship, that will grow beyond what we are doing here.”

Getting the students involved was also important, Roberts said, as it goes beyond the basic evacuation drills done every year and shows them what the firefighters would do in a situation like a crash.

“I think this just magnifies the importance of what we are doing,” Roberts said. “People put their children in our hands and expect them to be safe, so we can never take for granted the safety of our students.”

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

*Josh Gordon covers Macomb Township, Chippewa Valley Schools and the Macomb County Board of Commissioners for the Macomb Township Chronicle. He previously wrote for the Woodward Talk from 2013-2016 and attended Central Michigan University. Josh won Society of Professional Journalist awards for his work with C &G Newspapers. He is an avid fan of the Green Bay Packers, craft beer and movies.*

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