

# Tall order for a small village

*Clifton Springs' city fathers left the village with some unusually high buildings. But can the community afford a new ladder truck in the event those buildings catch on fire?*

By **LAUREL WEMETT**

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CLIFTON SPRINGS — If this village of 2,000 seems a bit larger-than-life, that's because it is.

Unlike most Finger Lakes villages, Clifton Springs has several four- and five-story buildings, the kind that firefighters need a ladder truck to reach should the unthinkable happen.

But a new ladder truck runs \$750,000 or more, and the local fire department can't expect too much more out of the 1949 model it bought for \$1 in the 1970s from Ontario County.

And the unthinkable does happen. In September, a fire broke out in the kitchen of an apartment on the fifth floor of the Spa Apartments.

"It could have been serious," said Ovid Randall, manager of the senior-citizen housing. He credits a maintenance employee, Eric Bengtson, for rescuing an elderly resident overcome by smoke.

The five-story Spa Apartments was built in 1896 as the Clifton Springs Sanitarium. Ironically, Henry Foster, who offered baths in mineral water at

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the sanitarium, built it of brick in an effort to make it fireproof, having lost an earlier wood-frame building to fire. Across the road is the four-story Foster Block, built in 1865 as a hotel. Now owned by Rural Opportunities, it consists of apartments above ground-floor businesses. At the east end of Main Street, the five-story Maxwell Hall is occupied by the Finger Lakes Addiction Counseling & Referral Agency (FLACRA).

Randall agrees it's time for a new ladder truck. "It's when you have an emergency that there can be problems" with old equipment, he said.

Clifton Springs Fire Chief Pat Curran and department President John Roth have asked the village to commit more than the \$250,000 it previously

offered for a firetruck. Earlier this month, Curran and Roth, who have been pricing used ladder trucks, showed the Village Board a payment schedule and suggested that the department could shift some budget items to cover additional debt. The firemen said they hope to have a replacement by 2010.

Mayor Bill Hunter said it would be fiscally irresponsible to buy a new vehicle. He asked Curran and Roth what the village could get for \$400,000.

Even so, the cost of the truck would not be spread evenly. About 43 percent of village property is tax-exempt, Hunter noted. For example, only portions of the Clifton Springs Hospital & Clinic are taxable. The churches, the YMCA, the House of John (a hospice), FLACRA, and the old Teft Avenue School are tax-exempt. The Spa Apartments makes a payment in lieu of taxes, as does the Foster Block.

Village Trustee Melissa Kumkey, the board's liaison with the fire department, agreed to go with a fire department representative to ask the larger tax-exempt organizations for financial contributions.

The mayor said he and Village Clerk Lori Reals will "look over the numbers" to see what "makes sense" for the village to pay before the January board meeting.

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