



STUDENT FIRST RESPONDERS LEAD THE WAY

Photos and Text by Sam Prue

It's a Friday afternoon and the St. Michael's College campus in Colchester, Vt., is buzzing with excitement for the weekend. The local bus stop on Route 15 is packed with students waiting for a ride into Burlington, while the academic buildings stand vacant. The dining hall hums with energy as people eagerly make plans for the night ahead. But for a certain group of students on campus, the weekend isn't about hanging out with friends, or having a few drinks. It's about saving lives.

The St. Michael's College Fire and Rescue (SMFR) program began in 1969 after a student tragically died on an athletic field while waiting for limited emergency services to arrive. Many college community members believed that his death could have been prevented by access to faster emergency services, and through the assistance of former dean of students, Donald Sutton, St. Michael's Rescue was born. The small squad of student volunteers responded to their first call on December 19, 1969.

Throughout the first few years, SMFR also worked closely with the Winooski Fire Department in Winooski, Vt., which acted as the first point of contact for any on-campus fire emergencies. However, after a number of years, and an agreement that the college was located in Colchester, the group began working with the Colchester Center Volunteer Fire Company, Inc. On April first of 1970, The St. Michael's College Fire and Rescue department was unified as a two-unit department.

Today, SMFR is exclusively staffed and run by the students of St. Michael's College. The department boasts only two paid employees, Rescue Chief, Leslie Lindquist, and Fire Battalion Chief, Eric Haversang, both alumni of the program. The two chiefs primarily take care of administrative work, while students participate in the hands-on first response activities. For Shaun Griswold, a junior at St. Mike's, and a member



(Top) Student fire gear hangs in assigned lockers at the Robert E. Sutton Fire and Rescue Station in Colchester, Friday, Dec. 2, 2016.

(Middle) Engine 9, one of SMFR's pumper trucks, sits in the bay at the Robert E. Sutton Fire and Rescue Station in Colchester, Friday, Dec. 2, 2016. Engine 9 can hold up to 1,000 gallons of water, and is the primary apparatus used for motor vehicle accidents and medical assists.

(Right) Luke Woodard, of Kensington, Md., a junior at St. Michael's, waits to put his gear into the cab of Engine 9 at the Robert E. Sutton Fire and Rescue Station in Colchester, Saturday, Nov. 19, 2016.



of the rescue squad, SMFR is unique because students are willing to put in the time and energy to be successful. “Although we are students we are very dedicated to what we are doing, and strive to be the best of the best,” said Griswold. “No one is inconvenienced by [the calls], and there’s a clear difference between us and other volunteer services.” For sophomore, rescue unit member, Hannah Mishriky, SMFR offers unique opportunities for competition. “I think what makes us different is the fact that there’s this interesting competitive edge,” Mishriky said. “We’re young and going through the same things, but you always want to improve yourself.”

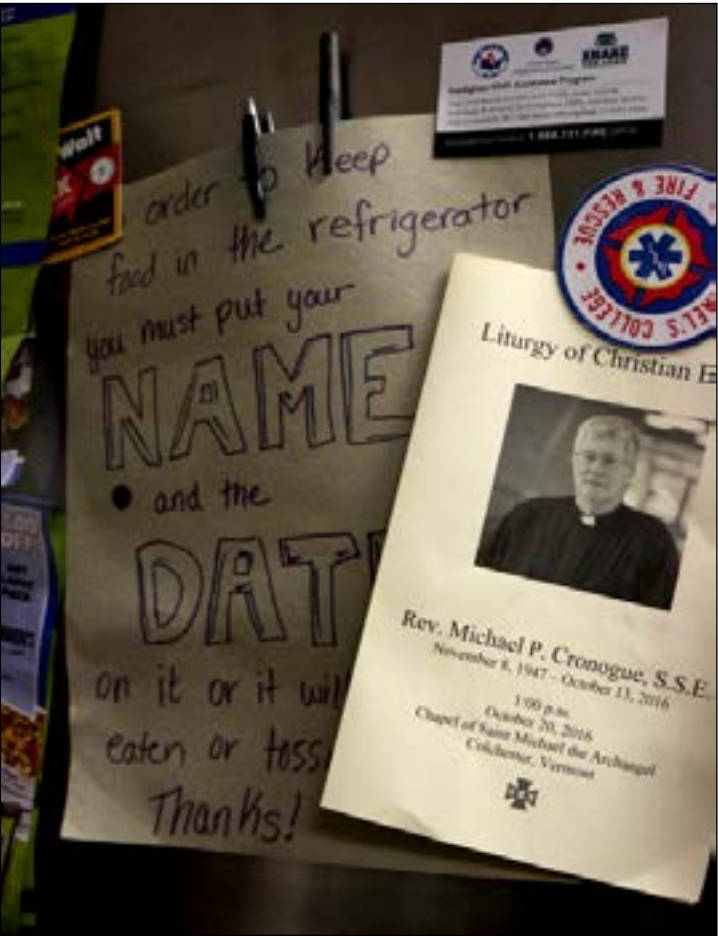
SMFR’s program is one of only a handful in the country. While many colleges may have a rescue unit that responds to campus calls, few have a student run combined unit that responds to such a large service area. Today, the St. Mike’s rescue unit is responsible for a large portion of Vermont’s Chittenden County, including Winooski, Williston, St. George, and Hinesburg. SMFR also sees a higher call volume than most volunteer departments in the state with a combined total of 2800 calls in the past year for both fire and rescue.

Students on the rescue unit are primarily responsible for all aspects of emergency response including a wide variety of medical incidents such as respiratory, cardiac, and diabetic issues, as well as motor vehicle accidents, and intra-hospital transports. The rescue unit also runs crews with a variety of skills including Advanced-EMT, EMT, and CPR certified individuals.

The fire unit operates alongside the Colchester Center Volunteer Fire Company, which is the state’s busiest fire department. The unit responds to approximately 650 calls per year, and students experience a wide variety of emergencies including structure fires, brush fires, car fires, motor vehicle accidents, medical assists, utility emergencies, fire alarms, and carbon monoxide alarms. SMFR was the first college-affiliated fire department in New England, and has become a model for many colleges across the country. However, it is important to note that while these students are responding to emergencies in the community, they are also earning a four-year degree at St. Michael’s College. While many individuals enjoy the work that they do, sometimes juggling the responsibilities of being a student can be a balancing act.



(Above) Rescue unit member, Hannah Mishriky, helps a rookie review the equipment on the ambulance at the Robert E. Sutton Fire and Rescue Station in Colchester, Friday, Dec. 2, 2016.



(Left) A funeral program for the late Father Michael Cronogue, S.S.E. hangs on the refrigerator door in the kitchen of the Robert E. Sutton Fire and Rescue Station in Colchester, Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2016. Father Mike was an important figure not only to members of the SMFR program, but for the entire St. Michael’s College community as well.

(Below) Fire unit member, Luke Woodard, participates in a driver training session in Engine 9 while his colleague, Michaela Foody, converses with fellow members in the back of the truck, Saturday, Nov. 28, 2016.



MEET SHAUN GRISWOLD

Rescue Unit Member

Hometown: Randolph, Mass.

Graduation Year: 2018

Major: Religious Studies

Minor: Biology

(Above) Griswold rides in the back of the ambulance on his way to a call in Hinesburg, Vt., Saturday, Nov. 19, 2016. Although Griswold primarily acts as a driver on most calls, he also works in the back of the truck when he is needed.

(Right) Winter jackets, and additional layers for rescue members hang in the ambulance bay of the Robert E. Sutton Fire and Rescue Station in Colchester, Friday, Dec. 2, 2016.

(Below) Griswold and fire unit member Michaela Foody share a moment while poking fun at another member’s microwaveable dinner, Saturday, Nov. 19, 2016. SMFR members frequently share meals together while on duty.



For Shaun Griswold, the draw to emergency response work has been present since he was a kid. Griswold originally wanted to be a firefighter, but after working as a lifeguard throughout high school, he realized that EMS (Emergency Medical Service) was his calling. Although the SMFR program didn’t directly influence Griswold’s decision to attend the college, it was the first extra-curricular activity he became involved in. For Griswold, juggling the responsibilities of a student and a first responder can be challenging. “You have to prioritize,” he said. “You’re always a student first, always.” Griswold says that sometimes you have to remember your responsibilities as a student and prioritize studying for an exam, rather than going on a call. However, Griswold believes that sometimes rescue can impede on his ability to be a “normal” student. “I never not wish I was a student because I understand the importance of education,” he said. “But there have been times when I wished I wasn’t on rescue and could have done more normal student things.” In addition, Griswold believes that fire and rescue members carry a lot on their shoulders in terms of their ability to relate to others. “The way I explain it is there’s very few people in the world that are doing what we are doing,” he said. “We are 18 or 19 years old and receiving a four-year degree from a good school; not many people can relate to that.” Griswold believes that many SMFR members carry a lot because they may have a tough time speaking about their experiences. “You carry a lot, but I think it’s a special kind of baggage,” he said.

Today Griswold works as a driver for the rescue unit, and although he hopes to continue working on the ambulance voluntarily, he wouldn’t want to make a career out of it. “EMS or fire fighting is taxing on the body,” said Griswold. “It gets to a point where you cannot physically do the job anymore, and that’s either when you move up in the ranks, or you just can’t do it anymore.” After graduation, Griswold hopes to become an emergency nurse, and believes that the degree he receives from St. Michael’s will be extremely important for his future. He says that it will allow him to continue working as an EMS volunteer, while also having the qualifications for a successful career. “Being an EMT teaches you how to speak to people, and that’s something that not many nursing schools or med schools can teach you.” When Griswold isn’t running duty with rescue, you’ll find him in his room in Quad Commons watching You Tube videos and playing Play Station.

For rescue unit member Hannah Mishriky, helping people has always been a priority. Mishriky was originally attracted to St. Michael's because of the MOVE program, but found that rescue presented a more unique set of opportunities "In all honesty if you know anything about Glastonbury, it's a very privileged town," said Mishriky. "I had been living in a pretty secluded bubble and I was trying to find a way to truly get outside of it." Mishriky feels that rescue has helped to soothe some of the white guilt that she has felt throughout her life. "Going into people's homes and seeing them in their weakest moments really opens you up to an understanding of other cultures," she said.

Mishriky has always seen her dual roles as a student and first responder as an ability to "kill two birds with one stone." While she believes that not having a college degree in today's world is perfectly fine, it's also something that can be beneficial to fall back on. "You're working in this really reputable service, and I think sometimes people will put fire or rescue before school, but getting the degree is never something that falters away," she said. In addition, Mishriky feels that her roles as both a student and first responder have never been particularly difficult to juggle. "Every problem I have ever had in school is just me procrastinating," she said. "It's not necessarily rescue that's affecting me, it's just me." However, Mishriky has experienced situations where it was more important for her to put rescue before her schoolwork. "There are definitely times when I will dedicate more time to rescue in terms of what I need to memorize," she said. "For example, if I mess up some Spanish vocab words, I get two points off, but if I mess up these medicine dosages someone will die."

For Mishriky, the best part about rescue is the patients. "I love the patients. I love them," she said "I don't care if I get one single call all day, if I can talk to a patient and learn one cool thing about their life, then I'm okay." Mishriky says that elderly patients are her favorite people to work with. "Sometimes they are sad, but sometimes they are happy and giddy and they'll talk to you about their life, and I love that." Mishriky also says that the coolest part for her is working with different refugees in nearby Winooski. "You learn to communicate without words, and it's really powerful," she said. "While it's taxing, it's beautiful, because you see all these different aspects of life."

When Mishriky isn't helping elderly patients on the ambulance, you'll find her in her room in Alumni doing homework or watching Netflix.



MEET HANNAH MISHRIKY

Rescue Unit Member

Hometown: Glastonbury, Conn.

Graduation Year: 2019

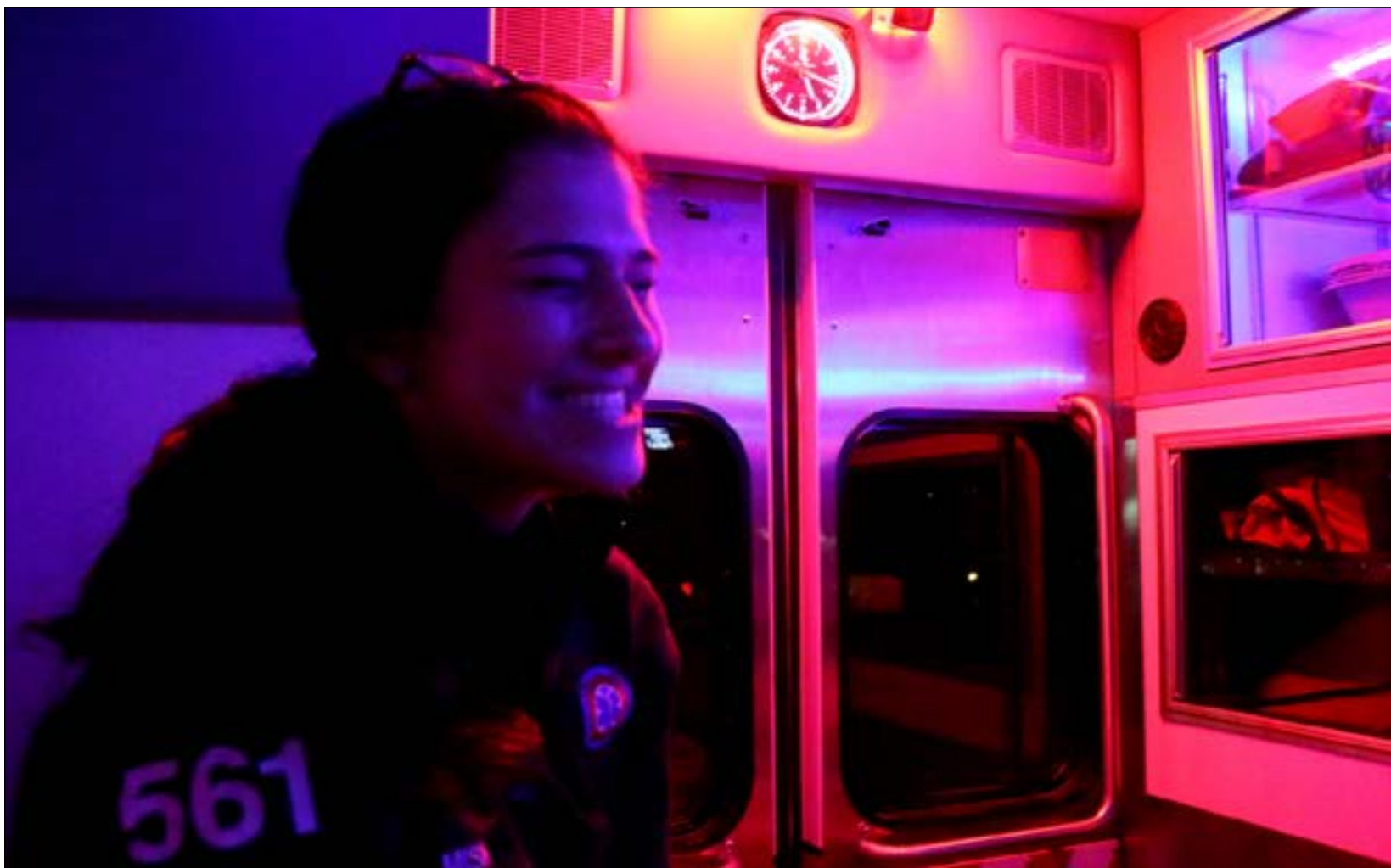
Major: Psychology



(Top) Mishriky smiles while getting ready for her afternoon shift on duty at the Robert E. Sutton Fire and Rescue Station in Colchester, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2016.

(Middle) Mishriky's model ambulance sits on her desk in Alumni Hall in Colchester, Friday, Dec. 2, 2016. After missing rescue over the summer, Mishriky's parents sent her the toy while she was at camp.

(Left) Mishriky rides in the back of the ambulance as her crew heads to Alliot Hall to grab some dinner together on Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2016.



MEET LUKE WOODARD

Fire and Rescue Unit Member

Hometown: Kensington, Md.

Graduation Year: 2018

Major: Sociology



Luke Woodard never intended to join fire and rescue. As a prospective student at St. Michael's, he heard about the program, but didn't think much of it. But after a few months of being at school without a sports commitment, Woodard felt that he needed to meet new people, and find a group with a focus. The St. Mike's Fire and Rescue program was perfect.

Today, Woodard works as a both a fire and rescue unit member. Not only does he fight fires, he also rides in the ambulance when he is needed. While Woodard doesn't feel that his calls impact him emotionally, he has had a few experiences that have stuck with him. "Last spring was my biggest fire, and it was the most work I've ever done," said Woodard. "There was heavy fire pushing out [of the building], and those kinds of calls are definitely few and far between." SMFR responds to a wide variety of calls, but structure fires like the one Woodard experienced are rare. "Being inside a fire to that extent is not something you experience every day, he said. "That level of intensity is pretty exciting."

In terms of his responsibilities as a student, Woodard feels that fire and rescue can sometimes make schoolwork a little more challenging. "It doesn't impair my ability to function in the classroom, but it definitely makes it harder to succeed in school," he said. "Its not impossible, it just takes that extra bit of work that it wouldn't for someone else." In addition, Woodard also sometimes struggles with the dynamic of his fellow colleagues on the department. "The social dynamics can be hard because it's a very interesting balance," he said. "You have to switch from acting as a friend to acting as a professional." However, many students are grateful for the community aspect, and SMFR members are often seen as a tight unit on campus. "We are a family for sure," said Woodard.

In terms of the future, while Woodard doesn't think he'll make a career out of his experience, he hopes to continue volunteering in some capacity. Woodard hopes to use his sociology degree from St. Michael's to become a social worker. "I've envisioned myself going to grad school for a master's degree in social work," he said. "So my degree is going to be the most important thing."

When Woodard isn't running duty on the fire truck, you'll find him in his room in Quad Commons jamming on his electric guitar.

(Top) Woodard waits to board Engine 9 to respond to a motor vehicle fluid spill in the Tarrant Lot of St. Michael's College in Colchester, Wednesday, Nov. 19, 2016.

(Middle) Woodard hangs out with his roommate and fellow SMFR member, Brian Eldridge, in the common room of their suite in Quad Commons, Sunday, Dec. 6, 2016.

(Right) Woodard takes a break from studying to play his Les Paul electric guitar in his room in Quad Commons, Monday, Dec. 7, 2016.

Michaela Foody didn't really know what she was getting herself into when she first joined St. Michael's Fire and Rescue her freshman year. "I originally decided to join to get a different college experience," she said. "It's different than joining any other club on campus, and it's a lot more time and effort, which I didn't know going in." But today as a junior at St. Michael's, Foody is happy to be a part of the SMFR community. "The main thing I'm going to take away from it is the leadership skills," she said. "While I'm not in charge of anybody, the department has taught me a lot about what it takes to be a leader and a role model."

Foody recalls that when she first started running duty, the calls would make her extremely nervous. "I was always worried that every call would be a massive structure fire and I wouldn't know what to do and I would royally mess up," she said. "But now it's kind of become a routine where there's always the possibility that it might be a structure fire, but now I'm prepared to handle it if it is." Foody says that she always feels prepared for any call thanks to the training she's received from the department. "I don't get as nervous, and I'm more confident in my abilities to handle the situations," she said.

However, Foody admits that sometimes it's hard for her to deal with the intense situations that she's experienced. "I don't cope with things very well," she said. "I just try not to think about them." Yet, Foody's difficulties don't stem from the fires she's fought or the people she's saved, they come from seeing her colleagues struggle. "I've seen people really affected by something that they have seen while on duty," she said. "I think it effects me more than being in the situation myself because the people that I care about are so much more affected than I am." Foody believes that a lot of SMFR members carry a lot on their shoulders because they have a hard time letting people know when they need help. "There's this mentality that some people have that asking for someone to take something off of you is showing weakness," she said. "But I think as a department we are a family, and you shouldn't be afraid to ask for help in certain situations."

Foody describes herself as a caring and compassionate person. "It takes someone who is very determined and courageous to do what we do," she said. "I can't believe anyone off the street would want to run into a burning building, I can't even believe that I want to do that." In the future, Foody hopes to use her sociology degree from St. Michael's to continue helping people in a different way, however she still feels that her first-responder skills will come in handy. "The skills that I have learned through SMFR will help me a lot in that aspect," she said.

When Foody isn't running duty with her fire company, you will find her in Townhouse 113 watching TV on her couch.



MEET MICHAELA FOODY

Fire Unit Member

Hometown: Westborough, Mass.

Graduation Year: 2018

Majors: Sociology and Anthropology



(Top) Foody laughs at a fellow member as she puts on her uniform to respond to a call in the Tarrant Lot at St. Michael's College in Colchester, Wednesday, Nov. 19, 2016.

(Middle) Foody smiles at another member in the engine bay at the Robert E. Sutton Fire and Rescue Station in Colchester, Wednesday, Nov. 19, 2016.

(Left) A picture of Foody and a few other SMFR members hangs on the wall in Townhouse 113 at St. Michael's College in Colchester, Sunday, Dec. 8, 2016.