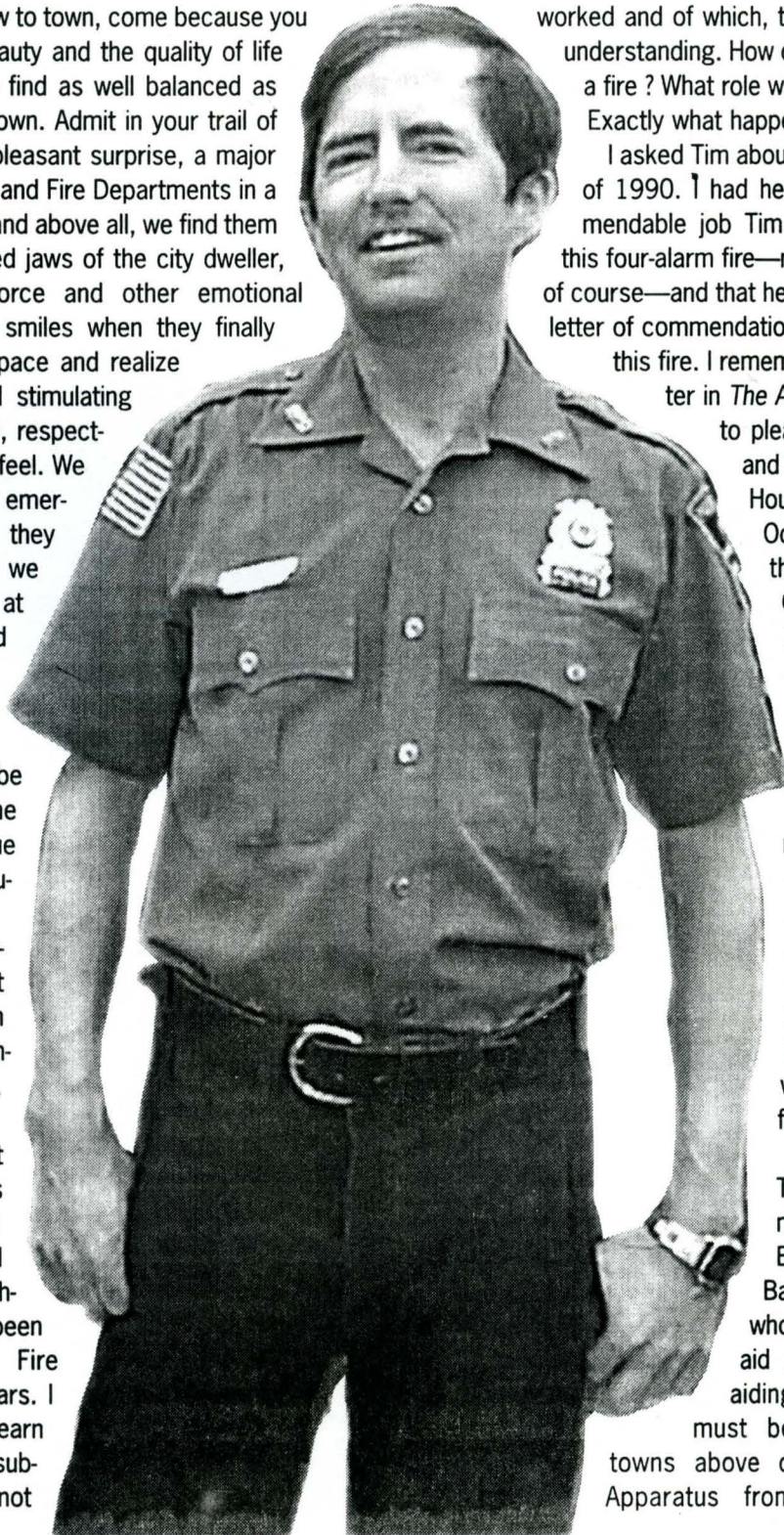


KELLY'S CORNER

by Jan Kelly

Those of you who are new to town, come because you realize that the natural beauty and the quality of life found here are difficult to find as well balanced as they are here in Provincetown. Admit in your trail of discovery that there is a pleasant surprise, a major bonus. We hold our Police and Fire Departments in a place of honor, in esteem and above all, we find them approachable. The clamped jaws of the city dweller, corporate world work force and other emotional refugees turn to relaxed smiles when they finally slow to a strolling-speed pace and realize how beautiful, playful and stimulating life here can be; how safe, respected and cared for one can feel. We experience high drama, emergencies and crises but they remain in our scope and we take care of them. Look at any of our publications and you will join in in our problem-solving—you will discover what works or doesn't work, what will be discarded and where the energy will go to pursue other, more workable solutions.

Emergencies are different. They demand instant action stemming from exact knowledge thoroughly learned and adaptable. Provincetown shines at its best when the darkest moments threaten. On this subject, I spoke with Tim Caldwell today. Tim is and has been a police dispatcher for ten years and has been a member of the Fire Department for twenty years. I find it ever interesting to learn the mechanizations of a subject within which I have not



worked and of which, therefore, I have limited understanding. How do firemen actually fight a fire? What role would a dispatcher have? Exactly what happens?

I asked Tim about the Pilgrim House Fire of 1990. I had heard often what a commendable job Tim did as dispatcher for this four-alarm fire—never from humble Tim, of course—and that he received an award and letter of commendation for his role in fighting this fire. I remember Georgia Coxe's letter in *The Advocate* and asked her

to please dig that up for me and she did. The Pilgrim House fire took place in October of 1990. It was the largest fire Tim Caldwell had seen in his 12 years as dispatcher. It was a four-alarm fire according to 1990 "running cards". "Running cards" was the method before computers. Old terms are kept because "there is a lot of tradition in the Fire Department". Tim used a typewriter when first on the job and they would call Barnstable for extra alarms.

One alarm entailed a Truro backup; anything more came out of Barnstable. It's the Barnstable County Sheriff who performs the mutual aid support. If towns are aiding Provincetown, they must be covered by those towns above or surrounding them. Apparatus from as far away as

Sandwich provided coverage during the Pilgrim House fire. The Pilgrim House was destroyed. That was where Thoreau stayed during his first visit to Provincetown, when he came by wide iron-wheeled stagecoach to splay the sand for even passage.

One house was severely damaged and many houses were singed. Many families and individuals were displaced. Since the dispatcher is a 24-hour answering service, Tim received many calls from residents and neighbors reporting the blaze. The Police Department responded immediately and pulled people out to safety. Jimmy Meads, Fire Chief at the time, immediately called in the 2nd alarm for Truro and the Wellfleet ladder and ambulances. Both Truro and Wellfleet would then have to be backed up, covered in case they had a fire of their own.

After the 3rd alarm the fire was contained but not out. The manpower was tired and thinned out, so the 4th alarm was called for additional men. All vehicles not presently active in the fire, were parked at Joe Duarte's garage at Bradford and Standish. That was the staging area and the men walked to the fire. Provincetown is unique in that all traffic is one-way. Most towns can receive traffic from 2 or 3 directions.

After the Pilgrim House fire, the mutual aid system was revamped. More engines and more ambulances on earlier alarms was the decision. By the next day most of the mutual aid had left, though some stayed behind through Monday. The Orleans ladder was stationed in that narrow alley off Center Street behind Margaret Roberts' house. The ladder pipe could direct a stream of water to any hot spots. When smoke is heavy and dark, it is freeburning. When it is attacked with water, the smoke becomes whiter, changing to steam.

The first alarm came in at 11:30 p.m., just as Tim Caldwell was finishing and leaving his shift. Rusty Russell came in for his midnight shift. Tim stayed on working two shifts in a row. Rusty Russell handled the police dispatch while Tim Caldwell handled the fire dispatch. I have been told by many how Tim was so calm, adroit and savvy. He knew which streets were one-way, how narrow, where all the fire hydrants were located and wind and weather conditions. A go-between for all communications, he was crisp, accurate and to the point. I have known Tim for more than 20 years. He has never praised himself or told me anything of his heroic role. A job well done, a job taken seriously, is his mission.

Timothy Winthrop Caldwell is a native son, a member of the class of '79 from Provincetown High School. As a student he delivered papers for *The Advocate* and washed dishes at Jack Donohue's *Everbreeze Restaurant*, now *The Mews*. Tim went on to study at Cape Cod Community College where he majored in communications. He was and is a ham radio operator and has a strong interest in electronics. He was a disc

jockey at the college radio station, WKKL. Tim also had his own show on WOMR in the late 80's "Pop 'n Rock". Tim's first town job was that of a "meter maid" which he did for three years, followed by two years working at the parking lot.

He finished that career in 1987, the year the World Series eluded the Red Sox because Bill Buckner missed the catch and the ball went through his legs. Yup. Tim told me that. After two years of working as summer dispatcher, he started September 1988 as full-time dispatcher. Basic computer knowledge is required and there is a lot of foot traffic and

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there are constant phone calls. People skills are important. "There is much aggravation and stress," Tim states, "but I have 10 years in and I make the best I can of it. There's medical coverage and retirements benefits. Some nights are so much trouble you just have to ask for a soda break and step outside for a few minutes. Tim doesn't smoke or drink.

He does love to fish though. Whatever is running, Tim is after it—Provincetown and Florida. Tim drives to Florida each year to visit his Dad and soak a line in warmer waters.

Tim Caldwell has become an integral part of our Fire and Police Departments. He's thorough and serious about his job and smart enough to keep an eye to the future. Right now he's waiting for the squid to show up at the wharf, his pleasant Massachusetts and Florida retirement and the next phone call.

While Tim does all that, we will wish him a Happy 10th Anniversary as dispatcher, a Happy 20th Anniversary as member of the Fire Department and a belated Happy Birthday which fell on August 7th.