

## The Action-Hero, Rock-and-Roll Firefighters of Manassas

Flames and Sirens, Backed by Guitars' Wail: Volunteers Find Fans With Videos and a Web Site

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Jeff Lenard, Michael Lesnick and their fellow firefighters from the Manassas Volunteer Fire Company have been getting the star treatment at regional training exercises and refresher courses.

"People say, 'Wow, you guys are from Manassas,' " said Lenard, 26. "It's ridiculous the amount of comments we get."

The volunteer company's newfound celebrity is mostly a product of <http://manassasfire.com>, a Web site run by Lenard, and a series of action-packed, flame-snuffing online music videos compiled by Lesnick, 22. According to Lenard, <http://manassasfire.com> averages about 300,000 individual page hits per week, and Lesnick's most popular video has been screened nearly 70,000 times on YouTube.

Lenard uses <http://manassasfire.com> to chronicle the company's responses to incidents including house fires, car crashes and chemical spills, providing photos and play-by-play accounts. To set the scene and reconstruct the action, he interviews his colleagues, scribbling notes like a reporter.

"Our site has become really popular because of the way we write it, keep it updated and spend a lot of time creating videos and multimedia," said Lenard, who works as a firefighter in the District when he's not volunteering in Manassas. "It's a big morale boost for the guys."

In the videos Lesnick posts online, the action-hero image of the Manassas volunteer firefighter is boosted by a rock soundtrack. The videos have titles such as "Manassas Fire -- You Can't Stop Us Now" and "Engine Company 501 (Take 2)." The latter is Lesnick's most polished achievement and has been downloaded more than 7,000 times since its debut Feb. 25.

That video showcases Lesnick's signature technique, in which cameras mounted on the side of the fire engine, or "apparatus," show the vehicle barreling down city streets and county roads to an unseen emergency. The action jumps between multiple camera angles, and synthesizers and electric guitars wail and screech in the background as lights flash.

"All the fire guys like it; they eat it up," said Lesnick, who started a production company and Web site, <http://www.hookersandhose.com>, in hopes of landing contracts for

additional videos that could be used for promotional purposes. Volunteer fire companies in other states have contacted him, and praise for his work has poured in from as far away as Australia.

"Anytime I'm out [on a call], I mount the cameras to the apparatus, hit 'record' and let them go," said Lesnick, a graduate of Osbourn Park High School in Manassas.

Lenard said he and Lesnick refer to the videos as the "I love me files" because the other volunteers delight in seeing themselves on camera. At first, they started the Web site and produced the videos mostly for kicks, but they soon discovered that they were helping to boost the profile and the reputation of their fire company.

"They get you motivated to want to volunteer," said volunteer chief Donald Holman. "They get your blood going when the music starts up."

Holman said the camera work doesn't distract Lesnick, Lenard or any of the other volunteers from their more critical work. "It doesn't take the attention off firefighting," he said.

"The priority is always on the fire," Lesnick said. "If the camera craps out, then oh well."

Last week, Lenard said, the digital duo began experimenting with a "helmet cam" that he bought for \$129 from a skateboarding Web site, opening up possibilities for up-close action shots of burning buildings and smoky missions -- unless, Lenard said, the camera melts.