

New Generation of Firefighters Strengthens Ellenville Fire District's Future



Left to right: Devon Burburan (class of 2023) Jadecil Krom, Cayden Wardynski, Jody Krom (Chief), Xavier Maldonado, Bruce Santiago, Eddie Cruz (2nd Asst. Chief), Jose Guzman, Daviyan Parra (class of 2025), Paul Heisler (Captain/Training Officer) and Tyler Damms (not pictured)

ELLENVILLE, N.Y. — As the Ellenville Fire District looks toward constructing a modern fire station to serve the community for generations to come, it is also investing in the people who will answer emergency calls from that facility for decades ahead.

That commitment was on full display as six members of the Ellenville Fire District—**Jadecil Krom, Cayden Wardynski, Xavier Maldonado, Bruce Santiago, Tyler Damms and Jose Guzman**—along with **Landon Cruz** of the neighboring Napanoch Fire District, graduated from the Ulster County Summer Firefighter Training Program after completing one of the region's most demanding firefighter academies.

The intensive academy consists of **129 hours of Firefighter I instruction delivered over 22 days**, providing recruits with the knowledge, practical skills, and confidence required to begin serving as interior firefighters in their communities.

Students completed comprehensive instruction in Basic Exterior Firefighter Operations, Interior Firefighter Operations, firefighter self-rescue, the Incident Command System (ICS), First Aid and CPR, and extensive hands-on training using self-contained breathing apparatus. The program also included live-fire evolutions inside Ulster County's Flashover Fire Behavior Lab, where recruits learned to recognize rapidly changing fire conditions and safely operate in extreme heat.

Unlike traditional weekend firefighter training programs, the summer academy also incorporates advanced instruction in Engine Company Operations, Truck Company Operations, water supply

management, ventilation techniques, and modern firefighter cancer prevention and decontamination procedures—reflecting the increasing emphasis on firefighter health, safety, and long-term wellness.

For Captain and Training Officer **Paul Heisler**, watching the graduates complete the academy represents the beginning of careers built on service to others.

"I'd like to express how proud I am of all of our newly graduated firefighters. It's really great to see so many of them have the drive to serve their community and start their journey in the fire service. I can't wait to help them going forward in this journey."

Fire Chief **Jody Krom** said the graduates represent far more than a successful training class—they represent the future of volunteer firefighting in Ellenville.

"The future of the Ellenville Fire District depends on dedicated volunteers who are willing to answer the call when their neighbors need them most. Watching these firefighters complete one of New York's most challenging Firefighter I programs gives me tremendous confidence in the future of our district. They have demonstrated the commitment, discipline, and selflessness that define the fire service. As they continue to learn and grow, they will carry forward the proud tradition of volunteer firefighting that has protected our community for generations."

First Assistant Chief **Pat Wardynski** said the graduation ceremony highlighted the strength of the department's tradition of family service and the importance of attracting the next generation of volunteers.

"Watching this new generation of firefighters graduate was a proud moment for our department and our community. Seeing my son, Cayden, earn his Firefighter I certification was especially meaningful because he is continuing a family tradition of service. He follows in the footsteps of both of his grandfathers—one a former chief of the department and the other a 58 year member.

It's incredibly encouraging to see so many young members stepping forward to answer the call. Their commitment gives us confidence that the future of the Ellenville Fire District is in good hands."

Second Assistant Chief **Eddie Cruz** also recognized the accomplishments of the graduates while reflecting on the importance of family traditions within the fire service.

"To all the members who graduated FF1, congratulations on your achievements. To our group, we are very proud and honored to have been your support throughout this chapter. And another shoutout to my nephew, Landon Cruz, from the Napanoch Fire District—a third-generation Cruz to become a firefighter. I am beyond proud of you and grateful that you will keep the torch alive and running for our Cruz family."

District leaders say the graduation class arrives at a pivotal time in the organization's history. While recruiting and training the next generation of firefighters remains one of its highest priorities, the district is simultaneously working to secure funding for the design and construction of a new fire station that will support those volunteers well into the future.

The proposed facility is designed to meet the operational demands of modern emergency response while addressing significant firefighter health and safety concerns. Plans include apparatus bays designed for today's larger emergency vehicles, dedicated decontamination areas to reduce firefighters' exposure to carcinogens after fires, improved training space, secure equipment storage, emergency power capabilities, and accommodations that will allow the building to serve as a community resource during natural disasters and extended emergencies.

District officials continue to aggressively pursue grant funding and other financial opportunities to reduce the cost of the project to taxpayers while ensuring that the new facility meets the needs of both firefighters and the community they serve.

The connection between recruiting new volunteers and planning a new fire station is no coincidence, district leaders say. A modern emergency services organization depends on both well-trained personnel and facilities designed to support today's emergency operations safely and efficiently. One investment without the other would leave future generations at a disadvantage.

Together, the graduation of these new firefighters and the district's long-term planning efforts illustrate a shared vision—preserving Ellenville's proud volunteer firefighting tradition while preparing for the challenges of tomorrow. It is a commitment not only to maintaining emergency response capabilities but also to ensuring that residents continue to receive professional, highly trained volunteer service for decades to come.

As the newest members of the Ellenville Fire District begin their careers in the fire service, they become part of a legacy built by generations of volunteers who answered alarms without hesitation. Their graduation marks more than the completion of a training program; it represents an investment in the future safety, resilience, and well-being of the entire Ellenville community.