



SOUTH MOUNTAIN

OCTOBER 2017

Says

A SOCIAL MAGAZINE EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE RESIDENTS OF SOUTH MOUNTAIN

Aaron Bell

Gives Back to His Community

Read his story on pages 12-15.

Cover photo taken by Julia Maloof Verderosa Photography



**Millburn-Short Hills
Volunteer First
Aid Squad**

Volunteers Needed

Free Training

973-379-7969

info@mshvfas.org

Your photos. Your stories. Your community.



Aaron Bell:

Giving Back to the Community that Raised Him

by Stephanie Bai

Aaron Bell was at a bit of an impasse in his life when he was introduced to the Millburn-Short Hills Volunteer First Aid Squad, and he has never looked back.

A resident of South Mountain since he was one year old, he enjoyed growing up in a close-knit community where you knew your neighbors, could safely play catch with your friends in the street, and ride your bike to the park and town. Aaron dabbled in sports (in particular, the MSH youth baseball program) and afterschool activities, but nothing continued to engage him as he entered his teenage years.

A Millburn High graduate and criminology major now, Aaron reflects on how the decision to join the MSHVFAS has influenced him. He joined initially because he had always been interested in law enforcement and criminology (developing an interest from regularly watching cop and rescue shows on TV growing up), and he thought being an EMT would help train him as a first responder as he had seen on TV, but he couldn't know just yet the troubling scenes he would at times face in his community, as well as the satisfaction that he would discover with his volunteer work. "It was very eye-opening," he says.

To be an EMT, Aaron had to wait until he turned 16 so he could register, and then he was contacted and interviewed by Melissa, his captain. Coming in a



**Millburn-Short Hills
Volunteer First
Aid Squad**
Volunteers Needed
Free Training
973-379-7969
info@mshvfas.org



little late to the game, he was lucky to nick the last slot open for cadet training. By June of 2016, he was enrolled in EMT classes at Union County College, paid for by the state, for the next seven weeks. 200 hours in class, 15 hours in a hospital, and eight hours riding along and observing in an ambulance later, he finally saw some action in the field.

The very first case Aaron witnessed was a non-emergent call that summer where the EMT riding with him asked him to take the patient's blood pressure. Nervous, as he'd learned about it in class but never in practice, he complied.

"From that point on, I pretty much fell in love with it," Aaron recalls. "It was very hands-on, a very good way to help your community and see the difference you're making right in front of you. The impact is instant; there's no waiting."

After passing his final, he became a certified EMT.





From there, he was immersed in the full experience of working with the Millburn-Short Hills Volunteer First Aid Squad. He became co-captain of the cadets and also a CPR instructor. The members here are all volunteers – from the cadets to the president and the medical directors, the money that comes in from donations to the squad never finds its way to anybody’s pocket; rather, it all goes toward new equipment and training programs.

Aaron worked Friday afternoons from 3-7 p.m. and was always on call, ready to drop everything and bolt to the ambulance doors. On days off and during the summer, cadets picked up normal shifts that were 12 hours long, their Saturdays beginning at 6:45 a.m. and ending at 7 p.m. And when they weren’t out on calls, they were relaxing, laughing together, and bonding over video games and movies in the First Aid building. The crew at the squad becomes like family.

Riding in an ambulance was grueling work, both physically and emotionally. Some days, as Aaron remembers, weigh you down more than others. There were instances of people who couldn’t be revived, people who suffered from extreme trauma, and people who died in front of them.

“It’s always difficult when you are exposed to that, especially when there’s nothing you can do,” he says. “Unfortunately, the people we couldn’t save are the ones who stick with me the most. Luckily, I haven’t had to deal with too many deaths, but it comes with the job.”

And along with the job comes the burden of bearing witness to people’s most vulnerable moments. Calls aren’t just about broken bones or sick children in Millburn; you also encounter at times excessive drinking and drug overdoses. EMTs and police officers now carry Narcan, a drug to revive people from overdoses.

More typical are calls to the scene of car accidents as well as falls taken by the elderly or people with emotional disabilities who call for help. Sometimes,

these are elderly residents he knows who had fallen and needed a hand up. (There is an ethic EMTs must abide by not to discuss the names of the people they tend to.) And to him, helping his neighbors by being an EMT is the best (and most) he can do to give back to the community that influenced who he is today.

“I don’t let it get me down,” he says. “It makes me want to pursue this more and get to the people we can save.”

“Besides the fact that volunteering has changed my life for the better and is the best decision that I’ve ever made, I get way more out of it than I give,” Aaron says. “The thousands of hours that I’ve given don’t amount to the satisfaction that I get, the gratuity that I get, the happiness that I get from seeing people in my community who are in need, and I can help them. I was grateful to be honored this past year with the Mayor’s Award for Outstanding Civic Contribution for my dedication to the squad and the town.”

Now in a college away from the Millburn Short Hills First Aid Squad, he isn’t ready to hang up his uniform just yet.

“I plan to pursue this for as long as I can,” he says. “It’s not about being paid for me. I look forward to this more than paid work, to be honest with you. I look forward to getting up in the morning; I look forward to coming in. A lot of the time, when you have to go to these things, it’s somebody’s worst day, and you just want to be there for them. So, I plan to do this for as long as I possibly can.”

Currently, Aaron is looking forward to his interview lined up for a volunteer EMT position near his new school. While at college, he helps recruit people for the first aid squad back home, and whenever he comes back to Millburn for breaks, he can be found back in the building he spent two years’ worth of Friday days in, laughing with his crew, on call and ready to help his South Mountain neighbors and the broader MSH community.