

BROTHERHOOD IN ACTION: A Guy Named Denny Allen

By: Tiger Schmittendorf

Some people have character and others *are* a character.

My friend Denny Allen... he's both.

There are certain people in your life who are always in need of something – while others are always there when you need them.

My friend Dennis Allen is always there when you need him.

Certain people work behind the scenes but manage to find their way into the spotlight. Others do their work on the scene but manage to stay in the shadows.

My friend Denny Allen has been on the scene more times in his lifetime than anyone else I know, but he never stands in the limelight.

Let me tell you a little about my friend: Denny Allen.

Dennis Allen has lived in Angola all of his life. He grew up here, on Sunset Boulevard, across from what is now my back yard. He never really stood out from the crowd, just a good neighborhood kid in a good neighborhood.

He worked hard at the Engler Lumber Company during and after high school, and achieved the rank of Eagle Scout in Boy Scout Troop 528, sponsored by the Evans Center Volunteer Fire Company.

That was his first introduction to the fire service, his launch into what would become a lifetime of service to his community. That was 1971.

He left the area for a short time to study forestry at Paul Smith College in the Adirondacks. While there, he became a MET-Medical Emergency Technician, the precursor to today's EMTs-Emergency Medical Technician and paramedics.

Dennis Allen returned home and became a fixture in the fire company and the community. It wasn't long before Denny Allen was recognized as a leader and was made an officer almost immediately. He rose through the ranks of the fire department quickly, served for several years as an assistant chief and eventually was promoted to fire chief by his peers. He served two separate terms in that capacity, as recently as 2003.

To say Dennis has a certain way about him is being polite. Never one to boast, he's also never one to hide his feelings. A relatively quiet man, you never have to wonder where you stand with Denny Allen. Not the most tactful, not the most polished, just the most dedicated.

His strong, silent type is compensated for by his crass sense of humor and his signature smile.

It's not really a smile in the traditional sense of the word. His lips stay together while the corners of his mouth curl up ever so slightly. His eyes squint, his nose scrunches, he shakes his head and his eyes



well up and he starts coughing if you get him laughing too hard. The end result is a contagious smile that you just can't help laughing at. We affectionately call it a "pie face."

His typical approach is to sit back, quietly listen to a group of people and then, when you least expect it, he drops a bomb that puts everyone on the floor laughing.

Dennis also has a serious side and is never one to shy away from tough situations or hard decisions. He's always in the thick of it on an EMS call and has a long-standing reputation for being a sure-shot at starting IVs – a practice that earned him the nickname "Needles" many years ago. Dennis is always calm, cool and collected under pressure. Nothing shakes him in an emergency.

Denny Allen has been omnipresent at fires, rescues and first aid calls for 37 years in the Town of Evans community – responding to *every single emergency* he was physically available for. Now in his 50's, Dennis continued to make late night responses – even when the younger guys apparently needed their beauty sleep. Dennis responded to more than 350 emergencies in 2006 alone.

His fire company achieved many firsts under his direction, command or influence. Evans Center was the first fire company in our community to have a Hurst Jaws-of-Life rescue tool, the first water rescue unit, the first cardiac monitor; thermal imager and the first FAST-Firefighter Assist and Search Team. The fire department was also the first in the county to have its own on-site training facility and the first to promote their web site on their apparatus.

Dennis was instrumental in the design, planning and construction of the fire company's new Erie Road Firehouse#1 dedicated in July of 2001. He holds the fire department record for delivering the most babies in the field or in the back of an ambulance.

Dennis responded twice to Ground Zero following the attacks of September 11, 2001, providing EMS support to the first responders working the pile and covering calls for the FDNY while they tended to their brothers and each other. He served as the local representative to the Erie County Fire Advisory Board, as Code Enforcement Officer for Towns of Evans and Hanover; and as an EMT-I for Rural Metro Medical Services

As an EMT for more than 30 years, Dennis was instrumental in shaping the delivery of emergency medical services in the Town of Evans and is responsible for the town upgrading their level of pre-hospital care to paramedic.

But don't think for a second that his life is only devoted to the fire service.

Dennis demonstrates the unique ability to effectively balance family, work, play and fire department activities. I envy him for that.

Three of the reasons Dennis was so successful are his wife Marlene, a long standing and dedicated active member of the fire company's ladies auxiliary; and his sons Scott and Marcus. Both of them are Eagle Scouts just like their dad.

Always putting his family first, Dennis instilled his core values of community service in each of them, involving them in everything he did and being involved in everything they participated in.

Denny Allen knows the true meaning of brotherhood. He is the kind of guy who is always there to lend a helping hand, whether it's putting on a new roof, cooking a charity chicken barbeque, or just to have someone to listen to.

We're not talking a hollow hand shake or a one-armed hug or a pat on the back – kind of brotherhood. Dennis has never been outwardly affectionate, except with his family, and he's not big on formalities. I've never heard him talk about brotherhood; I've only seen him demonstrate it.

We're talking about real brotherhood that extends well beyond the firehouse doors and into our personal lives. To Dennis, brotherhood is not just a bold-lettered phrase on a T-shirt.

Dennis demonstrates brotherhood by helping to carry friends' furniture up flights of stairs into a new home. Helping each other strip and paint houses, chop fire wood, dig ditches or do whatever else required many hands to make light work. We work hard and we play hard too. That's the kind of brotherhood that he embodies.

Now Dennis Allen needs our help.

Dennis was diagnosed in 2005 with pulmonary fibrosis, a fatal disease that attacks the lungs and diminishes breathing capacity. It's the same disease that took his Brother Dave's life just seven years ago at age 49. Dennis is now 55.

Dennis is now on a waiting list for a double lung transplant at Cleveland Clinic. We anticipate that thousands of dollars will be needed to cover non-reimbursed medical and living expenses and the loss of income for both Dennis and Marlene, as she will most likely exhaust her paid leave to care for him for months following the surgery.

A testimonial celebration honoring Denny Allen is planned for September 6, 2008 at the Evans Center Volunteer Fire Company located at 8298 Erie Road in the Town of Evans. The event will feature live music, food and refreshments, indoor and outdoor activities and plenty of opportunities to get involved in supporting this great effort.

The committee sponsoring "Brotherhood in Action: The Dennis Allen Project" will also be scheduling raffles and other fund raising events leading up to the main event. One of the feature activities of the day will be a live auction of firefighter artwork and memorabilia. Much more is still in the planning stage.

It's estimated that Denny Allen has responded to more than 10,000 emergency incidents in his firefighting and EMS career that spans almost four decades.

One of the committee's goals is to create a "tree of life" that will hold one dollar for every one of Denny's 10,000 emergency responses. Contributors will receive a "life saver" card with a photo of Dennis and room to write well wishes or words of encouragement. The life saver cards will then be displayed in the firehouse and at the benefit in September and given to Dennis as a keepsake. One dollar is all we're asking for.

Help us put brotherhood in action. Join us in honoring this fine man who has unselfishly dedicated himself to serving his fire company and his fellow man.

Many people are consumers and some are contributors. Dennis Allen is a contributor.

I hope you'll consider contributing to saving the life of our brother Dennis Allen.

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For event tickets or other information, contact co-chairmen: Tiger Schmittendorf via e-mail: tiger5@firehousezone.com or 716-549-0022; or John Latimore: 716-549-3311 – cjlatimore@verizon.net. You can also contact the Evans Center Fire Company at 716-549-1221 or any Evans Center Firefighter.

To donate auction, door prize or other items, please contact Lynn Krajacic at 716-341-9853 or lmk.tax@utec.net

Visit: www.firefighternation.com/profile/DennyAllen and stay tuned here for more info and news of pre-event activities.