

## With prisoners' help, local fire department gets mobile classroom

18 HOURS AGO • [DON LEHMAN - DLEHMAN@POSTSTAR.COM](mailto:DON.LEHMAN@POSTSTAR.COM)

GREENWICH -- The Greenwich Fire Department has a new fire prevention program vehicle, thanks in part to state prison inmates.

The department received a school bus that has been transformed into a mobile fire prevention unit by state prison inmates in the work program at Hudson Correctional Facility.

Kevin Shephard, a coordinator of the fire prevention program and past chief of the department, said the bus was donated by Schuylerville Central School after it was taken out of service.

The prison work crews rebuilt its exterior and frame, and gutted its interior to create a living room, bedroom and kitchen that can be used in fire prevention and safety instruction.

The rooms have smoke detectors, electrical outlets and other interactive features, and visiting children are quizzed on what they've learned and what they see in each room.

"The kids are asked to pick out what's wrong with it and figure out how to fix it," Shephard said.

They are also taught how to leave a smoky room (stay low) and to check doors to see if they are warm to the touch when seeking a way out, he said.

The department had a fire prevention bus in the past that was also built by prison inmates, but it fell into disrepair after suffering water damage.

The department spent about \$10,000 for the materials, much of the money coming through donations, and got a bus worth \$100,000 when the inmate labor was factored in, according to Shephard.

"It was a lot of labor," he said.

The bus will be used for fire prevention demonstrations for children around the region.

Linda Foglia, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Correctional Services, said prison staff members helped inmates with the project.

The work helps inmates build skills such as welding, she said.

"They've been working on this for a few years," Foglia said. "It's a nice collaboration for a good cause."

About 25 inmates worked on the project over the years, five or six of them for a year or more, said John Fabrizio, the prison's director of mechanical services. The entire bus was rebuilt, with only the roof and a few side panels salvaged, he said.

"We've had it in our garage for 2-1/2 years," Fabrizio said.

The Fire Department picked up the bus Tuesday from the prison in Columbia County.

It will be formally dedicated at a ceremony and demonstration scheduled for Oct. 13 in the Kmart parking lot in Greenwich. The event is scheduled to start at 11 a.m.