

April 12, 2017

The future of the Ashland Fire Department's Ice Angel is in serious jeopardy due to the increase in operating and maintenance cost. The Ashland Fire Department is working with the Power-of-the-Purse for donations to help cover repair cost to ensure the longevity of the craft.

The Ice Angel was put into service in 2003 and has served the entire region for over 14 years. Repair and maintenance costs continue to escalate each year due to the increased age and normal wear and tear of the craft. A limited budget has made it difficult and nearly impossible to make needed repairs and upgrades.

We are looking to obtain funding to repair, replace, and upgrade several components on the craft. These repairs and upgrades include: Engine overhaul, upgraded fuel/ignition system, trailer overhaul including repairs to the failing deck and corrosion issues, additional exterior scene lighting on the craft, upgrade to aging electrical system, GPS with radar capabilities, and several other upgrades to improve the safety and reliability of the craft during rescue operations.

We believe these repairs and upgrades will not only increase the usable life of the craft, but will also ensure the safety and reliability for our rescue team members and the people that are rescued. These repairs and upgrades are paramount for the Ashland Fire Department to continue to provide reliable ice rescue services throughout the region for years to come.

The craft responds to an average of 3 calls per year and has saved 15 lives. These are three examples of rescues made with the craft.

- April 1, 2005: Two rescue personnel are rescued from a damaged and sinking hovercraft on the St. Louis River in Duluth, MN during the spring ice break-up while attempting a body recovery.
- January 22, 2011: Three fishermen clinging for their lives on ice floes smaller than a sheet of plywood in Saxon Harbor. Ashland Fire Department rescue crew members encountered 10 foot waves of water and broke-up ice. All three men rescued.
- December 26, 2016: Two separate groups of ice fishermen rescued from ice floes on the Chequamegon Bay. A total of ten people saved.

Rescue personnel operate the craft during periods of unsafe ice and harsh weather conditions. The age and use of the craft has limited the reliability for rescue use. The craft has experienced two mechanical failures while responding to actual rescue calls. In fact, a failure of the steering cable was imminent during the December 31, 2016 rescue, which would have been disastrous. The reliability of the craft is concerning and is putting our rescue members and the victim(s) at an increased risk. In the event of a failure, crew members and the victims may be in a situation where personal rescue will be difficult due to conditions and limited regional resources.

Again, any help would be greatly appreciated!

Thank you!