

Charles Winrow – Firefighter Engine 37



Firefighter Charles Winrow of Chestnut Hill Engine 37 is a true hero. It's his job to be ready and willing every day to put his life on the line, in very real ways, in order to save the lives of others. Firefighters are first responders. He may be called out to a medical emergency, a fire, or even to rescue an animal; he never knows what the day has in store for him. But, as Engine 37 lost one of their own to Covid, he knows first-hand that the risks he faces during this pandemic are greater than ever. Still, Winrow keeps his place on the front line, protecting and rescuing us from danger.

Winrow has reported to duty at Chestnut Hill's historic firehouse on Highland Ave for ten years, working twelve hours shifts: four days on, four days off. Winrow is part of a four person Engine platoon. An Engine Company has a truck with a water pump and hoses to put out a fire. When responding to a fire Winrow rotates between three positions: driving the truck, pulling the hose, and directing the nozzle that sprays the water. The fourth man in the platoon is the supervisor, who is always making sure that the team operates safely and comes out of the fire alive.

Engine 37 primarily covers Chestnut Hill, but they also provide support for Mt. Airy, as backup, if Mt. Airy firefighters are at another scene. Sometimes they are called to join larger firefighting efforts, like the six-alarm warehouse fire on Fox Street and Hunting Park Avenue that broke out early on the morning of Sunday, August 23rd. Over 300 city firefighters responded to the massive blaze. It was the largest fire Philadelphia had seen in years. Winrow said it is still smoldering now.

Winrow and other Philadelphia firefighters are used to putting themselves in danger, but now, any time they enter a house or interact with the public, there is an added risk. They take extra precautions at scenes they are called to, wearing masks, face shields, and gowns. Unfortunately, Winrow knows first-hand the reality and danger of the virus, as Engine 37 lost firefighter Eric Gore, a 24-year Philadelphia Fire Department veteran, to Covid in early June. It was a tragic loss for Winrow and the other firefighters, who are bonded through shared dangers and commitment to the lives of the public they serve.

Since the pandemic hit, Winrow is spending more time at home than he ever has in his career. He and his wife just celebrated an anniversary with a quiet dinner at home rather than going out to eat. He is not getting to see his daughter or grandkids as often as he would like, but this distance is a show of love and protection. Winrow is 63 this year, and now six months away from retirement. His age puts him at a higher risk for Covid, but Winrow is not stopping work, not yet. Charles Winrow feels the work is its own reward. He has always liked to help people, and this job, being a Philly firefighter, gives him an opportunity to help people everyday.