

Firefighter

When your father and two uncles are firefighters, it is probably no surprise that the son grows up hoping to be a firefighter too.

The goal was achieved late last year when Ben Coppes was offered a full-time position on the Sylvania Township Fire Department by Chief Jeffrey Kowalski.

The chief noted that Mr. Coppes has been a part-time firefighter for the township for about two years and said his commitment to the job and overall ability made it clear he would be an asset to the department.

The full realization of Mr. Coppes ambition, however, has been delayed. "Just days after I accepted the job, I got the papers that I was being deployed," said Mr. Coppes who is also a sergeant in the Army National Guard.

After less than a week on duty as a full-time firefighter, he had to report to Ft. Hood, Texas for about two months training before he and his unit report to Kuwait to support operations in the Middle East.

He serves as a crew chief on Blackhawk helicopters, but what his particular assignment will be unknown.

It's also uncertain when he will return, but he said assignments of this sort generally run for about a year.

Whenever it is, Chief Kowalski said, Mr. Coppes will have a job as a firefighter when he gets home.

The last time he was deployed, in Iraq in 2009, his return was less pleasant. He had been working in a hospital emergency room, but when he came back from active duty he was told his job had been eliminated.

They did offer a different position, but he said he did not like it and left. They told him to check the hospital website and apply for jobs when they became available. He said he applied for a number of positions, but the hospital never responded.

"I was pretty sure the chief would understand, but based on the last experience I was a little nervous when I had to go to him so soon to tell him I had been deployed."

He said the chief's reaction and the reaction of other members of the fire department has been heartening.

"The chief completely accepted what happened and offered whatever help he could. The guys here have given me their phone numbers, email addresses and said to contact them if I need anything.

"That is just the way it is around here."

Everyone, he said, has urged him to contact them if something needs to be done or if he needs to be represented in some way locally.

"I cannot think right now of any help I might need, but it is good to know I have good support if something does come up.

"That, and the assurance that I will have a job when I get back, will help me focus on the job I am going to."