



COUNTRY Financial Supports the Smithton Volunteer Fire Department With Operation Helping Heroes Donation

August 25 2023 10:35 AM



SMITHTON, Ill. - COUNTRY Financial Representative Deric Blaha is pleased to support the Smithton Volunteer Fire Department with a donation of \$1,500.

The funds will be used to support the purchase of a new grain chute to be used during grain bin rescues.

Today, grain bin structures serve as critically important facilities for farm operators to store and safeguard their harvests. But beneath this innocuous structure lies a hidden danger that, all too often, claims lives. Grain bin entrapments have been on the rise for years. Purdue University's Agricultural and Biological Engineering Department has been documenting and investigating these incidents since the 1970s. In its most recent study, in 2022, the group tracked 83 cases including 24 fatalities. This represents a 41% increase over the 59 entrapment cases reported in just the year prior.

"Grain bin incidents often lead to severe injuries and fatalities and take an immense emotional toll on farming communities," said Blaha. "Entrapments also create additional economic burdens on affected farm families who are already suffering in the wake of these tragedies. That's why it was important for me to join with others to find ways to help."

For volunteer firefighters, grain bin rescues are particularly hard because teams often lack the resources to extend their lifesaving work quickly enough. One of the primary dangers within storage bins is suffocation. This happens when an agricultural worker enters a bin with clumped grain where the surface collapses beneath them. Pressure exerted by tons of grain makes escape difficult if not impossible and can lead to suffocation within minutes. For this reason, prompt rescue is paramount to save workers who have become trapped.

COUNTRY Financial has donated more than \$5 million since 2020 to organizations and programs that support first responders, active-duty service members and veterans, supporting the company's vision to "enrich lives in the communities we serve." The Operation Helping Heroes program was created in 2015 to support non-profit events and programs that benefit active-duty service members, veterans, and their families. Later, the program expanded to include first responders and teachers.