

## *History of DTVFD*

Delaware Township Fire Department was officially organized in the March meeting of 1952 by the board Delaware Township for the citizens of the township and the city of Lansing to provide basic fire protection. This meeting was the culmination of many years of work and perseverance on the part of many people in the community.

Mrs. Tom Pulley, Jr. arranged the first organizational meeting; this was held in May of 1946. There were 15-20 people in attendance. A committee of fact finders looked at the equipment and the costs for the equipment. Petitions would be circulated in hopes that there would be sufficient signers to show community interest. It was held in the Grade School Gymnasium with about 15 to 20 people in attendance. It would take a few years to finally see the first real organization.

In the intervening years, fire protection of the area was provided by members of the Wadsworth Fire Department, the Leavenworth Fire Department and various bucket brigades.

One of the first organizational meetings for forming a fire department was held on March 27, 1948. A firefighting demonstration had been held at the VA fire department on April 10, 1948 to show local citizens of Lansing, Bain City, Richardson and Delaware Township in hopes of attracting volunteers and potential funding for a fire department.

Another meeting was held on April 14, 1948 to discuss funding and volunteers. Then on March 30, 1952 the Delaware Township Board voted to create, maintain, and operate a volunteer fire department as per Kansas Law. The law was the same state statues of 1951 that had established the Fairmount Volunteer Fire Department, which is now Basehor, Kansas. The board members that voted for this new department were Dr.

P.L. Talbot, M.J. Edmonds and Joe Gast.

The board was authorized to spend \$12,000 to house and equip the new department. They could then levy up to one-half mill for department maintenance.

Things began to move quickly now as a new station was to be located and built. The site chosen was on the corner Kansas Avenue and Highway 73. This was the property of the Kansas State Penitentiary. It would be a two bay station constructed by inmate labor. Throughout the summer, work proceeded and in August it was nearing completion. By November 2nd the new station was completed and the first general elections would be there instead of the Elementary School

A new truck was ordered in the fall from the Luverne Fire Equipment Company in Luverne, Minnesota. The future fire chief Francis "Skeet" Bemis and Ernie Wendell went to the factory in Minnesota to pick it up in November. One of the ironic things that happened was that on the day they were coming home, a fire broke out in the restaurant known as the Green Haven Café, owned by Mrs. Florence Nohrn of Kansas City, Kansas. The building was destroyed only three hours before the arrival of the new pumper.

The first meeting of the Delaware Township Volunteer Fire Fighter Association was held on November 16, 1952. They met in their new station. Ernie Wendell presided over the meeting acting as the chairman and the first order of business was the election of officers. Walter Opfer was elected the President with Mr. Robert Woodson as the Vice-President. Jackson Stewart was elected the secretary and Russell Bent was the treasurer. These men would serve the association until a complete roster of firemen could be assembled and a subsequent election could be held.

Then the officers of the department were elected. Frances "Skeet" Bemis was

elected as the first fire chief of the Delaware Township Volunteer Fire Department. His staff included Walter Opfer as the Assistant Chief, Howard Hinde, Arnold Wendell, and Robert Woodson as the Captains. They were ordinary citizens who had a willingness to provide some protection for their fellow citizens. Walter Opfer was the town barber, Robert Woodson was a grocer, Jackson Stewart was an accountant and Russell Bent was an engineer. The Leavenworth Times was designated as the official paper and the meetings would be held on the 2nd and 4th Monday of the month.

By January of 1953 a siren was used to alert volunteers to the call for a fire. The initial response would be a phone call to Lansing 611, which was "Skeet's Café". Training had begun so that all 31 members of the fire department knew how to operate the truck. In the beginning those firemen that couldn't get to the station quick enough to ride on the truck would take their personal vehicles to a fire.

On August 4, 1955 Walter Stigmire was elected as the new fire chief after Frances "Skeet" Bemis retired. This year saw two men, Jackson Stewart and Ed Hamler elected as the Association presidents. Ed was elected on January 12, 1955 and Jack was elected on March 3, 1955.

Emergency medical assistance was first discussed at the March 1, 1956 meeting of the fire association. Russell Bent wanted the Red Cross to give the firefighters some schooling in safety procedures. The results of the first aid courses were that manuals would be placed on each fire truck. This would be an issue that some of the future chiefs would not always agree.

Today the department will respond to any medical emergency when called. Firefighters are now trained as EMT's or First Responders, with several MICT's on staff

as well. They will come to any call at any time either in a fire vehicle or their own personal vehicle. Training is through the local county EMS service or the local colleges.

## *Social Events of the Department*

One of the first fund raisers for the department was a carnival held on April 14, 1955. This was held to raise money for equipment.

The first Fireman's Ball was held in November of 1956.

A second Fireman's ball was held on May 10, 1958. Advertisements appeared in the *Leavenworth Times* newspaper's this and that column on May 8th and 9th. The dance was to be held at the National Guard Armory with an admission of 50 cents.

In August of 1997 a group of concerned citizens headed by Kelly Padgett approached the fire chief about getting a Thermal Imager. This is a device that will see hot spots and could be used to help locate missing people in the burning buildings. The department did not have the budget to include such a purchase and the group wanted to help. They began their quest to purchase this device for the department. Throughout the next year and a half, they would host a number of events designed to raise the money for the imager.

One of the first events was a Ciderfest on October 11, 1997. This was at the Lansing Activity Center. Numerous activities were planned for the community to enjoy as well as raise money for the thermal imager. The next event was to host a Christmas

Light Tour with a horse and wagon ride. This was followed by the biggest event which was the Valentine's Day Dance at the Frontier Crossroads Conference Center Ballroom at Fort Leavenworth. This was February 14, 1998.

By April they had reached their half way mark of raising the needed funds to purchase the Thermal Imager for the department. Their next project was to have a booth at the summer celebration of Lansing Daze. With matching funds from area business and donations from private individuals the thermal imager became part of the department's equipment in the fall of 1998. Through their efforts, almost \$25,000 was raised and the Department was able to purchase this much appreciated piece of equipment.

### *Fires*

The first structure fire was recorded to be the fire at Kirby's Groceries and General Merchandise store. The damage was recorded at \$4,000 to \$5,000. This was the largest of the runs for the newly purchased pumper and the seventh since it came to Lansing.

Another unusual fire was the call to "The Red Onion" in Bain City. Bain City was East of Highway 7 and south of Limit Street in Leavenworth which was the city limit of Leavenworth at this time. It was in Delaware Township and mostly located where McDonalds and Long John Silver's are today. The Red Onion was quite a popular hangout for the veterans at the Veterans Administration Hospital. It was within walking distance and the story was that they could have all their desires fulfilled at The Red Onion.

This fire was before fire fighters used self contained breathing apparatus and the building was completely filled with smoke. There was no open flame but a pot bellied stove was still sending out a lot of heat. It was determined that a mattress was on fire that caused all the smoke. Tiny Heinz and Gene Young decided that they would go in on their hands and knees and pull the mattress outside. Tiny was 6'6' and almost 240 pounds. The mattress was a single size on a metal bed. They thought they could pull bed and mattress together. They pulled but the bed did not move. After talking they pulled on a count of three as hard as they could. Unbeknownst to them there were two people still on the bed. As the bed began to move the two people jumped up and took off running to another part of the building and the mattress was pulled outside. The people were unaware of the smoking mattress and never did come out of the building.

Another fire that was fought before the introduction of the SCBA's (Self Contained Breathing Apparatus) was a fire at a house east of town on Highway 5. The fire was in the basement and the house was on propane gas. The house was full of smoke but no open flames. Firemen had entered the house but for some strange reason had not entered the living room, which had a full room size carpet on the floor.

One fireman turned off the propane gas valve and without knowing that, another one came along and turned the valve back on. Thankfully someone came along and discovered the problem and turned it off again.

That first year, Delaware Township responded to 25 alarms. By 1976 that number rose to 55 and in 2003, the last year of Delaware's existence, the total was 613.

## *Delaware's Fire Chiefs*

These are the men who have given of themselves to serve as Fire Chief of the Delaware  
Township Fire Department.

Francis "Skeet" Bemis 11/16/52

Walter Stigmire 8/4/55

Howard Hinde 1/7/60

Edward Hamler 5/5/60

Jack Stewart, Jr. 3/5/64

Ernest "Pete" Peterson 1/7/75

George Stull 9/3/81

Jack Fitch 4/5/82

Rick Huhn 8/12/96

## Family Traditions

Family traditions have always been strong in the fire service and at Delaware Township that tradition has grown through the ages. There have been several fathers and sons that have given their service to this department.

Jackson Stewart, Sr. - Jackson Stewart, Jr.

Gene Young - Tom Young

Joe Mondero - Tim Mondero

Jim Smith - Matt Smith

George Stull - Richard Stull

Jack Fitch - Jeff Fitch

Rick Huhn - T. J. Huhn

Jim Murphy - Dustin Murphy

Howell Alligood – Mark Alligood

Steve Lacey – Justin Lacey

Added to this family tradition we also have several brothers that have given of themselves for the safety of the community.

Elmer and Robert Martz

Ed and Terry Rush

Dale and Davy Thomas

Bill, Michael, and Jesse Green

Josh and Matt Budke

### ***Dedicated to the Tradition***

The following have dedicated at least 20 years to the service of the community:

Ed Davis-----21 years\*

Jack Fitch-----24 years

Jesse Green-----25 years

Rick Huhn-----41 years\*

Trevor (TJ) Huhn-----20 years\*

Gary Kenton-----48 years

Keith Kohler-----21 years

Tim Mondero-----30 years

Jim Murphy-----27 years

Greg Waters-----21 years

\*-----still active

### ***Building the New Station***

After nearly 45 years of service, and three additions, the original station on the corner of Kansas and Highway 73 needed some major repairs. The current station was not going to be able to accommodate any future growth. Chief Huhn presented the

Delaware Township board members of Sharon Jeselnik, Betty Brown, and Virgil Johnson with the idea of building a new station on the sight of the old. Discussions began with the prison authority and the warden David McKune about the best location within the given boundaries.

Plans were drawn and the ground was broken on September of 1999. Over the course of the next 1 ½, years work would proceed with the help of prison labor as well as the firemen themselves. With the foundation set the brick/masonry work would begin. This was accomplished not only with the help of the prison masonry crew but with firefighters helping 4 masons on weekends. Every weekend from January 20<sup>th</sup> to July 1<sup>st</sup> 2000, firefighters volunteered to be (hod) carriers for the 4 union masons that were hired to lay block.

Dedication for the new station occurred with a traditional open house in June 2001. The community was invited to tour the new facilities as well as have a picnic lunch. The new station has seven bays. Besides having a chief's and officers' office the station now has a training room where the firefighters learn firefighting principles and hold college classes to further their skills. Also the station has a weight room so that the firefighters can keep physically fit. In all the volunteers worked a total of 6433 hours to build their new fire station.

### ***Leavenworth County Fire District #1***

As the new millennium came, it became apparent that the volunteers of Delaware Township were not going to be able to keep up with the increasing amount of calls or the

increased budget that the fire department would require. Chief Rick Huhn approached the leaders of Delaware Township, City of Lansing and High Prairie Township, about the formation of a Fire District. Chief Huhn convinced the leaders that this step was needed to economically continue the level of professionalism that the community had grown accustomed to. The District would allow for the replacement of the ageing fleet of trucks, some nearing 30 years old, and more importantly the hiring of the first career firefighters. Over the past 20 years, the volunteers who were on the department started getting jobs away from the city and surrounding area. There was starting to be a man power shortage during the daytime working hours.

On January 1, 2004 Leavenworth County Fire District # 1 was open for business, and Delaware Township Fire Department became a fond memory. The lettering on the side of the trucks soon changed to the new name and District 1 was off and running. In 2004 the District responded to 677 calls followed in 2005 by 790.

Station 2 was added to District 1 on August 1, 2005. This station is located on 187<sup>th</sup> St and a proposed station 3 may be built in the future. With the City Lansing growth, there will be other stations in the not too distant future.

The District is now staffed by 5 career and 21 volunteer firefighters.

A new pumper-tanker was purchased in 2005, and a new rescue-tanker was purchased in 2007.

In 2009 the District replaced our 1986 slid-in brush truck with a new quick attack that doubles as a brush truck and a high angle rescue truck.

District 1's ISO rating is varied. Because of new rules by ISO, each township and the City have their own rating. The City of Lansing is a 4 rating and Delaware Township

is a 4. High Prairie is a 9 within 5 miles of station 2 and a 10 outside that range, hence the need for a station 3.

In 2010 the Fire Board voted to replace our 1980 mini pumper with a new quick attack to match the one we purchased in 2009. This truck will also serve as a dual purpose, brush and structural truck for the rural areas.

2012 was a mile stone for the department. The Board voted to hire an additional 2 firefighters and in February, we started our first 24/7 round the clock shifts. We are now at 7 career and 15 volunteers.

2013 the Board voted to replace our 1988 E-One pumper with a Pierce. This truck will be delivered sometime in mid-2014. Our ISO rating was again upgraded. Now all homes in the District within 5 miles of a station are rated at a 4.

2014 was another mile stone year. With this being the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the inter-local agreement between the City and the 2 townships, the District now owns all equipment as well as the trucks and stations. The new truck was delivered on September 2, 2014. It will be a great addition to our fleet.

The Board agreed to hire an additional 2 career firefighters to be stationed at station 2. This was done to provide better coverage for our patrons that live in High Prairie and the western part of the District. With these additional hires, we added an additional truck bay and living quarters to station 2. This addition was paid for by High Prairie Township Board.

2015 started with the completion of the remodel of station 2 and in February, A and C shifts started having 24 hour coverage. At this time, B shift will not be covered at Station 2.

At the October meeting, the Board approved the purchase of an RTV. The District purchased its first Kubota and took delivery in late December of 2015. This will be used for grass fires and on the City's many trails in its system.

2016 started with much discussion about manning B shift at station 2. The Board decided to do a 120 day trial for response times. After that trial was completed, it showed that response time were lower with the additional firefighter so at the June meeting a 10<sup>th</sup> career firefighter was hired. We now have 10 career and 16 volunteers.