

Our History

In order to understand our future, it is important to have a clear perspective of our past. This is especially true with the fire department, since the fire protective services originated with a small group of dedicated volunteers, making personal sacrifices for the good of their community.

The Town of Menasha Fire Department originated in 1938 and was a combined department with the Town of Neenah. The departments were staffed by a total volunteer service with fire suppression being the primary mission and focus. The majority of the town's development was east of Little Lake Butte Des Morts with no fire stations west of the lake. Later in time, the Town of Menasha began to grow toward the west and at the same time, significant parcels of land were annexed to the surrounding cities, particularly the City of Menasha. This created a checkerboard affair of town properties with jagged borders. Sanitary District #4 was the controlling water utility in the area (supplying water for hydrants and domestic use).

In 1979, the staffing of the fire department began to change with the hiring of its first full-time Fire Inspector. State code under the direction of the Department of Commerce requires public buildings and places of employment to be inspected twice a year (every six months). The number of buildings to be inspected was growing rapidly with industrial, commercial and manufacturing development occurring on the west side of town.

In 1980, with a disproportionate response between the Town of Menasha and the Town of Neenah in fire incidents and other associated risks, the two fire departments separated. Fire Station #1 was located at 1000 Valley Road along with the Police Department and Town Administrative Offices. In 1982, the Town of Menasha built Fire Station #2 west of Little Lake Buttes Morts at 1326 Cold Spring Road. Previously a single engine on the west side of Town was housed in a water utility building. Both stations were staffed, equipped and supported equally with dual response (both stations) to all emergency incidents in the Town of Menasha.

In 1987, with service demands expanding and staffing/training becoming an issue, the first full-time Fire Chief was hired. By this time, firefighters were compensated for some of their services related to incident response and training. The department was now classified as a "Combination" fire department with paid-on-call firefighters. There are 50 paid-on-call staff members with 25 firefighters staffing each fire station. There was an established county-wide mutual aid agreement as well as agreements with neighboring fire departments in adjacent counties. The first full-time Administrative Assistant was hired in 1988 to manage office duties and record keeping.

In 1996, the Town police department and administrative offices were relocated to a new Municipal Complex located on the west side of town at 2000 Municipal Drive. This move exemplified the changing character of the town. This left the fire department as the primary occupant of 1000 Valley Road.

In 1997, the fire department began responding to medical calls as First Responder. This was a service formally provided by the town police department. By this time, fire calls were averaging over 225 per year with EMS calls averaging over 500 per year. Calls for emergency services continued to be managed by the paid-on-call staff. A comprehensive set of Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs) that had been previously created, continued to be updated to guide the fire department in all facets of their service. Stringent training and certification requirements for all personnel were instituted to maintain an effective work force that parallels or exceeds most full-time fire departments. The town continued to be impacted by changes in the community. The widening of Highway 41 (a major north/south highway) to six lanes, the extension of Highway 10/441 (east/west highway), highway interchange alterations, and an increase in train traffic directly impacted the response times for both stations. There was a slight increase in response times and a reduction in the amount of access to the highway system. With these changes taking place the Town of Menasha under the direction of the fire department created their first Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in the new municipal complex and developed a community Emergency Operation Plan (EOP). This allowed the various town departments to work more closely together under a unified command system.

In 1998, a historical agreement was reached with the City of Menasha to begin a comprehensive and coordinated effort to “straighten” the boundaries of the contiguous communities. The fire department continued to expand its services with a rope rescue team, extrication capabilities, and first responder hazardous materials. For the second time in the budget history, requests for full-time firefighter positions were denied. The fire department began an Accreditation Project, coordinated through the International Fire Chiefs Association. The purpose of this project was to adequately evaluate the department in respect to meeting the needs and expectations of the community. It began with a very comprehensive self-study analyzing and documenting current practices and procedures.

In 2000, the Fire Marshal/Inspector was scheduled to retire. The fire department identified the need for a position that had authority to make administrative decisions in the absence of the Fire Chief. The Deputy Chief/Fire Marshal position was created with new personnel hired to fill the position. The Town of Menasha Fire Department became the first fire department in the State of Wisconsin to become accredited through the Commission on Fire Accreditation International. History was made when the fire department hired its first full-time firefighter to assist with the community’s growing demand for services and inspections along with the need for the department to develop pre-plans and provide additional public education opportunities. Renovation of the former town administrative offices at 1000 Valley Road began that provided a Community Center for the Town of Menasha citizens. Part of the renovation project included a limited amount of changes to the fire station.

In 2001, it was the opinion of the Town of Menasha’s labor attorney that because of the increasing work demand, the fire department’s paid-on-call personnel were no longer considered volunteers under the Fair Labor Standards Act. The Town of Menasha Board of Supervisors agreed to compensate the firefighters for all work associated with fire department activities. This changed the status of the paid-on-call personnel to now be considered part-time employees. The ruling also limited the amount of time that the personnel had been donating to the department. The community center renovation project was completed that changed 70% of the building’s interior which then came under the control of the Park

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and Recreation Department. Some slight modifications were made to the fire station portion of the building but no significant changes were made. The Town of Menasha Fire Department received from the Federal Emergency Management Agency a grant from the Firefighter Assistance grant in the amount of \$10,000 that was used to upgrade training equipment.

In 2002, the fire department continued to purchase additional extrication equipment to enhance and expand their extrication capabilities. There were minimal fire station renovations completed at Station 40 on Cold Spring Rd. to separate office space for privacy as well as to improve work efficiencies. The department started to analyze and modify their Standard Operating Guidelines. This will be an on going project.

In 2003, the firefighters at Station 41 on Valley Road completed renovations to the fire department area of the building. Carpeting, tables, chairs and kitchen cabinets and countertop were replaced. These items were not replaced when the building was renovated for the community center in 2001. The fire department added an additional vehicle to the fleet as the need arose from the additional personnel hired in 2000. This vehicle was purchased to be used as a command vehicle for the Fire Chief. The Winnebago County Communication Center completed an upgrade of the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. This upgrade required the replacement of the Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs) with Mobile Data Computers (MDCs). The completion and opening of Highway 10, a major east/west highway, was an important part to the growth and future of the Town of Menasha. The Town experienced a significant increase in the amount of single family dwellings constructed as many new residential subdivisions were developed. While the Town is experiencing an increase in the population, the number of fire and EMS responses has stayed fairly consistent. The fire department members put in a significant amount of time writing the specifications for a new rescue vehicle to replace the existing utility vehicle that became inoperative due to mechanical issues. This rescue was designed to meet the needs of the community now and in the future. The amount of traffic in the area and the number of vehicle accident responses continue to increase justifying the need for a rescue vehicle. The rescue was ordered with a 6 month delivery date. The fire department Administrative Assistant/Public Educator was trained and the department started to offer child safety seat checks as a public service to the community. The fire department was in the process of developing a comprehensive set of standard operating guidelines for Rapid Intervention Team operations and began assigning crews to this function on emergency scenes.

In 2004, recognizing the need for an increase in the fire department's public education focus, the fire department changed the title and job description of the current Administrative Assistant/Public Educator to Public Fire and Life Safety Educator/Fire Department Associate. The position was made an administrative salary position to address overtime issues and supervisory needs with a position of this nature. A budget request creating a full-time training officer position in 2004 was denied. The fire department received and put into service the rescue vehicle that was ordered in 2003. Training and equipment mounting were completed before putting the vehicle into service. The fire department developed a basic skills check off list to ensure the competence of all active firefighters. The fire department developed a training program and started to train surrounding fire departments on firefighter survival and Rapid Intervention Team training utilizing a training prop that was built by the firefighters with grant funds received in 2001. The Winnebago County Communication Center

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implemented Priority Medical Dispatching procedures in the county. This allowed a change in the type and number of medical incidents that the Town of Menasha Fire department was responding. Certain calls due to the close proximity of the ambulance service could be handled solely by the ambulance service without the need for fire department first responders.

In November of 2005 the fire department entered into its first automatic aid agreement with the Town of Grand Chute Fire Department. The agreement states that for any structure fires north of Highway 441/10 and for any car accidents in southbound 41 north of Highway 441/10, Grand Chute Fire Department will automatically be dispatched along with our department. Likewise, for any structure fires or car accidents in the southern most portion of Grand Chute, the Town of Menasha Fire Department will be dispatched automatically to assist Grand Chute.

In 2006, the fire department hired its first full-time Division Chief of Training. This decision was made due to the increased demand for training by the firefighters as well as the increased requirements from local and federal government in regards to standards, mandates, etc.

In the spring of 2006, the town voters passed a vote to renovate both fire stations. Work began in June to add office space, shower and locker rooms, a day room, sleeping quarters, and an exercise room to each station. Station 40 also added two new apparatus bays to the two that they already had. One of these bays would be a drive through bay for L40.

As the demand for service grows and the number of calls increases, the department will be challenged with finding ways to continue to provide quality and efficient service. Automatic aid or other joint response effort may be one way of doing this. The need may also arise to hire additional full-time firefighters or staff the stations with the current paid-on-call firefighters.

