

## **Fire Department**

*Bryon Woodward, Chief*

After dedicating 36 years to the Mishawaka Fire Department, including the last 19 years as Fire Chief, Dale Freeman retired on June 13, 2016. Chief Freeman leaves a legacy that is hard to replicate. During Chief Freeman's tenure, the EMS department was merged into the Fire Department. This allowed for the addition of EMT's, Advanced EMT's and paramedics on our apparatus. The then aging fleet was replaced and upgraded to meet the ever-increasing demands. The department saw its first increase in staffing since the 1980's with the addition of the third ambulance staffed by cross-trained firefighter paramedics and AEMTs. Our communication system was upgraded twice assuring state of the art technology at the fingertips of every firefighter. In short Dale was responsible for the making wholesale changes in training, equipment and technology which helped every firefighter provide the best service possible to the city. Thank you, Dale, for all you have done and for leaving the city in great shape for the future.



On June 14th, Bryon Woodward was sworn in as the new Fire Chief. Chief Woodward participated in a lengthy selection process by the cities senior staff. The senior administration designed a process that was divided into several interviews. The process included several qualified candidates and designed to give each candidate the opportunity to express his vision for future of the department. "The presentations were all well-presented, but it was clear that Bryon had the tools and experience we were looking for to lead the department. I have great confidence in Bryon and his staff to lead the department and continue the legacy that preceded them" commented Mayor Wood about the selection.

### **Response Summary**

The Mishawaka Fire Department had another record setting year as the Department responded to 7,201 calls for service. The greatest number of calls for service was EMS. Our ambulances and fire trucks responded to 5,625 calls that required EMS response, this was nearly a 10% increase

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from 2015. In addition the MFD had 205 calls that involved a commercial, residential, apartment or other type of fire. The remaining 1,371 calls included any request

by the public such as investigations, gas leaks, citizen assists and a variety of other types. In addition, collections were up for ambulance billing making 2016 the largest revenue year to date. We collected \$1,467,117.08 for services provided.

We continue to research and try to increase efficiency in the way we handle emergency responses. As we migrate to the new combined Saint Joseph County Dispatch Center we will be

looking at how many EMS and fire vehicles we send to responses. We improved our technology with the addition of new tablets and upgraded radios in all our response vehicles, which allows us to be on the forefront of change and continuously improve our response times and level of service to our citizens. We look forward to the day when all the emergency responders in Saint Joseph County, both police and fire will be dispatched by the unified communications center. It should allow for greater communication and coordinated responses by the respective agencies.

## **Fire Prevention**

The Mishawaka Fire Prevention Bureau is responsible for inspecting buildings, new and old, to ensure the safe occupancy of the people who work in and visit them. In 2016, the Fire Prevention Bureau performed over 1,900 fire inspections of buildings in the City. Our Fire Marshals work closely with the Mishawaka Building Department by reviewing all design drawings for new construction, building additions and remodels within the City to make sure all fire and building codes are met. Final inspections and testing of safety features such as fire alarm systems, fire suppression systems, emergency lighting, etc. are completed before a final Certificate of Occupancy is given.

Fire Investigators from the Bureau were called out 30 times to investigate commercial, residential, apartment and vehicle fires in 2016. All fire scenes are fully documented, photographed and a written report is completed as to the cause and origin. Any fire that is considered suspicious in nature will be jointly investigated with the Mishawaka Police Department Detective Division. All Fire Investigators are on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year.

The Mishawaka Fire Department Prevention Bureau has always had a strong commitment to educating the citizens, employees, students and visitors to our City. Throughout 2016, we trained many businesses in the hands-on operation of fire extinguishers. Extinguishing a live-fire in a controlled environment helps people learn how and when to use fire extinguishers properly and effectively. Also during 2016, many seminars and presentations were given to businesses on topics such as evacuation drills, fire safety plans, fire extinguisher use, emergency planning and preparedness, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, fire suppression systems and fire alarm systems. Our main focus continues to be those occupancies that contain the elderly and children.

We continue to partner with businesses in Mishawaka to promote fire safety, prevention and education. We were again fortunate in 2016 to be the recipient of a \$1,000 donation of smoke detectors from Lowes Home Improvement Store #200 in Mishawaka. These detectors will enable us to continue to run our Mishawaka Fire Department free smoke detector program. This program helps us to provide free smoke detectors to the elderly or to those who may not otherwise be able to afford them. We also received a donation of \$300 from Timken Bearings that will enable us to purchase additional safety items for a variety of programs.

For the first time, the Mishawaka Fire Department hosted 3 days of open houses for Fire Prevention Week. These open houses were conducted at Fire Station 4 on October 11th, at Station 1 on October 12th and at Station 3 on October 13th. They were from 6 to 8 p.m. and were open to the public. Each of the open houses had a bounce house for the children donated by Burns Rent All's, cake and drinks donated by Mishawaka Fire Department Local 360 and fire truck kits that were donated by our Home Depot in Mishawaka. Our Fire Prevention Bureau fire

extinguisher training unit help train the adults in the use of fire extinguishers. Fire prevention and safety literature was available on various subjects such as home fire drills, office fire safety, home fire

prevention, kitchen fire prevention, etc. We had a fantastic turnout for these open houses from the public and plan on continuing the program. Educating our citizens on fire safety is a top priority!

On Saturday December 3, 2016 the Mishawaka Fire Department partnered with the American Red Cross and their Home Fire Campaign. Volunteers from the Red Cross and members of the Mishawaka Fire Department went door to door in the Normain Heights subdivision giving out and installing free smoke detectors to any home needing them. We also educated the homeowners about having a fire safe home, establishing an escape plan and encouraging them to practice their plan. By the end of the day, we knocked on several hundred doors and ended up installing 85 smoke detectors! In a matter of 3 hours, Normain Heights was a much safer place! We are already in the planning stages of partnering again with the Red Cross in the future to target more neighborhoods to make Mishawaka a safer community for everyone.



## Training

We believe in the mantra “You can never know enough for a job that can kill you” so the training division continuously strives for improvement. The wide variety of services we provide makes our continuing education paramount to firefighter safety. The men and women of the MFD spent 800 more hours in the classroom and on the training grounds than in the previous year. Our long standing, common goal is for each firefighter to survive the shift and return home to his or her family. We are taking this to a higher level with additional training in cancer prevention, PTSD recognition and suicide prevention to give each firefighter the opportunity at a long prosperous career and retirement.



The department is in the process of upgrading our data management program to more accurately capture and assign hours to our members. These hours used to design an advanced training program that continuously meets the old and new training requirements and help our department design a safer, more efficient working environment.

In 2016, we also began to partner with other regional fire departments to use new innovative

methods to deliver our training. We are building a base for a new learning management system that will offer more options that can accommodate our ever increasing workload. By using technology to our advantage our members will have continuous access to training options that are accessible at anytime.

### **Health and Wellness Program**

We are now in the process of building a health and wellness program to aid our firefighters in living a healthier lifestyle on and off the job. This type of education is very important to our firefighters due to the stress of the job and will deliver first class information to guide and help us with nutrition, physical fitness and mental health. We are now in our third year. We will again be providing work performance evaluations on a voluntary basis as we work towards adopting a formalized program in coordination with Mishawaka Professional Firefighters Local 360. We are also evaluating our physical fitness equipment to see how it best fits our needs to keep firefighters in shape. New rowing machines and Airdyne bikes have been added to every station to provide a high intensity, low impact workout options for our firefighters.

### **Apparatus/Increasing Efficiency**

As our current fleet of apparatus ages we need to be vigilant in maintaining and replacing our trucks in the most cost efficient manner. We took delivery of two new vehicles in 2016, a new Sutphen fire engine and a PL Custom Ambulance, and have two more ambulances slated for delivery in early spring of 2017.

We are also currently implementing a new preventative maintenance program for our fleet which will attempt to maximize longevity of our vehicles and utilize both the resources of the City's Motor Pool as well as exploring the option of contracting out some of the more specialized fire apparatus maintenance.

We continue to explore software which increases the efficiency of the way we conduct our day to day operations. A new program, Emergency Services Reporting, has been brought online to better track all of our fleet maintenance and reporting as well as track a multitude of other programs within the department.

### **Charitable Causes**

The Mishawaka Fire Department continued to give back to the community in 2016. As a fire department we go into people's homes on a daily basis and see those in need. We like to give back to the community we serve when we are able. Our Needy Family Fund raised \$4,120 this year to distribute to 11 needy families with 28 children. The money comes from donations from firefighters and their families only. We do not solicit funds from outside agencies. We were also able to donate an additional \$1,000 to the Mishawaka Food Pantry to assist those less fortunate.

In 2016 Mishawaka Fire Fighters ran two very successful t-shirt campaigns to raise funds and awareness for some great causes. First, we honor the veterans of WWII by selling Honor Flight Shirts. The sale of these t-shirts raises money for Honor Flight of NE Indiana. Honor Flight flies WWII veterans to Washington, DC, at no cost, so the veterans can see their memorial.



The limited edition shirts are worn on duty in the month of May to recognize the military and veterans and currently their sales have raised \$6,714. Second, our firefighters take on cancer every year with their Breast Cancer, Guardians of the Ribbon, Awareness campaign. A limited edition, pink t-shirt is created every year and worn through the month of October to raise money and awareness for breast cancer patients and survivors. In 2016, 374 shirts were sold, raising \$2380, our best year yet.

Lastly, our firefighters through other functions, such as their annual golf outing, continue to fund and award two separate \$1000 scholarships for local students from the city.

### **Public Service**

The Fire Department also performs many hours of public service and education at no extra cost to the citizens. Some of the many examples of additional public services provided are fire extinguisher training and demonstrations, car seat inspections and installations, Survive Alive, Little Red, MDA Fill the Boot and on Veterans Day firefighters place flags on the grave sites of our military veterans. The members of the Mishawaka Fire Department performed over 12,771 man hours of public service to its community in 2016.

