

History

The Beginning...

After a fire destroyed a restaurant and dance hall in Spring Glen in the early 1950's (now where Spickler Enterprise's garage is located), residents of Hubley Township met to organize their own fire company. At that fire help was called for from as far away as Elizabethville, which indicated to them that another local company was needed. The first meetings were held in Arthur "Spike" Weist's barber shop in Sacramento, currently the Sacramento Post Office. It was January 1959 when the organization was officially chartered. Without a fire house or even an engine, the Fire Company's first action was to procure a water supply for Sacramento. One of the members, Robert Johns, leased land free of charge to the Fire Company on which a dam was constructed. The land would remain the Fire Company's as long as they maintained the property. In the mid- 1990's, with a hydrant system now in place to supply water in case of a fire, the pond and land was returned to the John's family.

It wasn't until 1961 that the Fire Company had its own official home. The Tri-Valley School District was putting the Sacramento Elementary School up for sale. It was originally offered to the Hubley Twp. Supervisors for \$1 but they refused. Now at auction, the Fire Company paid \$5,500 for the property. The building was all wood construction, dating back to 1921. It lacked central heat (each of the four classrooms had a large potbelly stove), running water (students had to go to a hand pump located along Route 25 to get drinking water), and outhouses provided rest facilities. Fortunately, the founding members of the Fire Company were hard working and industrious. Using dynamite, the coal miner members dug up the basement for a coal stoker, electricians rewired the building, and a kitchen, staffed by a Ladies Auxiliary, and rest rooms were added to the building. The first grade classroom was gutted and one wall replaced by barn style swinging doors to become the first engine room, although it had a dirt floor.

Led by its first president, Henry "Hap" Bowman, and by its first fire chief, LeRoy S. Radel, the Fire Company sent letters to other fire companies asking for donations. Boots and coats came from Klingerstown and Pennbrook, nozzles from Hegins and Valley View, 2-1/2" hose (cotton jacket with brass couplings) from numerous companies, and MSA smoke masks from Tower City. Hegins loaned their original truck, a 1925 Hurlburt/Bufalo 500 gpm pumper. That truck was used extensively in training. Millersburg Fire Company sent a number of its people to help train the young department. Chief Radel and Assistant Chief Roy Buffington attended a fire school through the Pennsylvania State Fire Academy.

The first fire for the fledgling company occurred after they purchased their own truck, a 1947 FWD previously owned by Jersey Shore. This truck was the first four wheel drive fire truck in the area and started a tradition where Sacramento will always have apparatus capable of off road travel. A local resident gave the Fire Company a personal loan for this purpose but wished (to this day) to remain anonymous. That first fire was on the Keiter farm, midway between Fearnot and Erdman. A barn had been hit by lightning. Curiously, the Fire Company will return 3 more times over the years to that location- each of those for chimney fires. One lesson learned from the fire was that the loaned equipment, while very appreciated, had many drawbacks. The boots and coats leaked, for one. Later fires will show the need to modernize and upgrade our equipment- a tradition we strive to maintain.

Other Apparatus

It wasn't until 1979 that the Fire Company took delivery of its second apparatus, a brand new Chevrolet/United pumper tanker. It was bought through Gene Bendigo, of Bendigo Fire Apparatus in Tower City. It was unique in several ways. First, it had the only front mount pump (750 g.p.m.) in the area, a decision that was made to allow for a larger water tank (1,500 gallons). Second, it was lime green. From now on, save for the 1980 Ford and the current 14-70, all of our pieces will in some fashion sport the Company's signature lime-green color scheme. That color has been the focus of a lot of good humored ribbing by other fire companies ("If you leave them sit in the sun they will ripen up"). It was chosen to make the apparatus more visible to vehicles on the highway.

The FWD stayed in service as a reserve piece and for off-road fires until it was replaced by the 1959 REO military surplus deuce-and-a-half. It fought its last fire in a field of wheat stubble close to Universal Hydraulics in 1988. By this time it was very undependable- it could only pump water from its 500 gallon tank, the brakes were bad, and it had a nasty habit of having its engine shut off.

The REO, designated Brush 423 at first, carried 1,200 gallons of water and could double as a tanker if needed. It saw extensive service at brush and forest fires in many counties when we had our own Forestry crew. It will be relabeled as Brush 14-40 after the Fire Company adopted the County's new identification system in the mid 1990's.

We purchased a 1980 Chevrolet van from the Lititz Fire Company for only \$1,000. This was used to haul people and to carry a cascade system capable of filling over 50 air cylinders. That system is now on 14-10. The van was sold to Michael Foods in Klingerstown and still sports its lime-green color.

The 1980 Ford Darley was purchased from the Mechanicsburg Fire Company later in the 1990's. Now, the Chevrolet was used only as a tanker. (It had the first quick dump valve in the area- to off load the tank quickly in the event that we needed to haul water for a distance. However, its technology was soon outdated and it was inefficient in tanker shuttles.) We now could operate as a two piece company, giving us many more options on the fire ground. The Ford stayed with us until 2007. It was "allowed" to remain the original white over red color. There was a time where if an incident required Valley View, Hegins, and us you would find red and white, lime green, blue and white, and orange trucks on the scene!

The Fire Company made many changes in its stable in the early years of the 21st century. Twin 1986 Ottawa Brimont off-road fire trucks were purchased from Carson City, Nevada. They each had seating for 4, a 500 g.p.m. pump and carried 750 gallons of water. With an articulating chassis and a nimble wheelbase, they were at home off the road. The major drawback of the trucks was the difficulty in getting parts. There were only six in the whole United States and we had two of them! They were both sold by 2005.

Also at this time we purchased a 1989 Freightliner/Fouts Bros. tanker from Millersburg, and, of course, painted it green- albeit with a white roof. The tanker, still in service, is the largest in our area. It carries 3,000 gallons of water and has a 500 g.p.m. pump. It took on the identifier of 14-30 and replaced the Chevrolet- which was sold to a fire company in Texas.

A 1975 Kaiser surplus 5-ton replaced the '59 brush truck. The 1,200 gallon tank was moved to that truck and the REO was sent back to the Bureau of Forestry.

The Fire Company has had good success with the Federal government's Assistance to Firefighters' Grant program. The 2006 grant made the purchase of the 2007 HME Ahrens-Fox possible. Delivered in September of 2007, the "Black Sheep" has a 2,000 g.p.m. pump, 1,000 gallons of water, and a Class A foam system. This rig began our black over lime green colors and is designated as Engine 14-10, taking that from the 1980 Ford. That truck was sadly sold for scrap.

Since then we replaced the van with a 2000 Ford Explorer and then replaced that with a larger 1997 Ford Expedition. These two vehicles have multiple uses and have reduced the demands upon the engine. We received another 5-ton to replace the 1975. It currently is being outfitted for offroad firefighting. A 1985 surplus Chevrolet pickup (now 14-41) with a 200 gallon tank is currently carrying the brunt of the demands for brush fires. In 2014 we received, as surplus equipment, a Polaris RZR, and of course painted it lime green and black. It saw action within one week of going into service at a rescue of someone hurt deep inside of Bear Valley and proved it was up to its potential.

Incidents

The number of calls to which the Fire Company responded each year has grown. It was common in the first 25 years or so to have 8-12 calls a year, usually brush fires, although one year had only 2! The most we had was over 120, many of them due to weather related problems. On average we have around 70 calls per year.

We receive automatic mutual aid from the Hegins Valley Fire Rescue, Klingerstown, Gratz, Lykens (for their ladder truck), Muir, and North End in Pine Grove on structure fires inside of Hubley Township. We provide automatic mutual aid- depending on the type of fire- in Hegins, Eldred, Upper Mahantongo, and part of Barry and Lykens (Dauphin County) townships. Otherwise, we will respond wherever requested.

The most tragic fire the Fire Company dealt with in Hubley Township was the December 11, 2001 early morning fire at the Robert Rissinger farm. That fire resulted in Mr. Rissinger's death and caused serious injury to his wife. As is too often the case in such fires, there were no smoke alarms installed, even though his family had given him one. Ironically, the previous fatal fire in Hubley Township occurred on the same farm over 50 years before when Robert's father died as a result of a fire. The Fire Company, using funds donated by the family, purchased several hundred smoke detectors and in 2002 walked door-to-door throughout the Township, distributing and installing smoke detectors free of charge. In 2009, the Fire Company took the initiative, applied for and received a large grant from the Walmart Corporation which was used to purchase nearly one thousand smoke alarms. We invited the Valley View Fire Company, Hegins Fire Company, and Hegins Ambulance along with Scout groups and once again walked door to door, this time covering all of Hubley, Hegins, and Barry Townships. To this day we provide free smoke detectors and now carbon monoxide detectors to residents in the Tri-Valley area.

Training and Certification

The Fire Company has always stressed the importance of training feeling that properly trained firefighters are not only an asset to the community that we protect but also can do this dangerous job more safely. Our people have taken numerous classes in fire suppression, wildland firefighting, vehicle rescue (Basic Vehicle Rescue Technician and Special Vehicle Rescue Technician), farm rescue, arson

investigation, emergency vehicle driver training, and hazardous materials responses. Additionally, the active firefighters are trained in basic first aid, CPR, and the use of an AED (carried on 14-10). Several have Emergency Medical Responder (EMR) and Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) certification. The highlight of this ongoing commitment occurred on September 5, 2006, when PA State Fire Commissioner Ed Mann visited out station to recognize the Fire Company for having 50% of its active fire fighters certified to at least the level of Fire Fighter I- a nationally recognized standard. We were the first in the area to receive that recognition.

Other highlights...

- The Fire Company was the first in the area to have self-contained breathing apparatus.
- In 1979, we were the first fire company to be dispatched by the Schuylkill County Communications Center.
- The Fire Company is part of the Northeast Pennsylvania Counter-Terrorism Task Force. Fire Company members are trained as an air and radiation monitoring team- one of five in Schuylkill County.
- The new building opened its doors in 2004.
- The Fire Company improved its ISO rating (a measure of a fire department's ability to provide services) in 2014. The Fire Company is in the top 35% in the country, according to this national measure. Many people in Hubley Township saw their fire insurance premiums go down as a result.