

Waupaca Area Fire District



By Pete Wicklund

Things are hopping at the Waupaca Area Fire District, and that's not a reference to Easter, which is just around the corner.

We're talking call volume here. Last year was a record for calls for this 32-member volunteer force that protects 146 square miles in Waupaca County. The department answered 307 calls in 2020 and ran between 283 and 304 calls in each of the four years before that. And that was for a department that does not run EMS calls, save for an occasional lift assist.

Breaking down the calls shows a mix of responses. Of course, there are crashes, structure fires and mutual aid calls. But there are also the ever-increasing service calls like CO alarms, etc.

The call volume and the growing administrative demands has Chief Jerry Deuman and department

officers pondering the possibility of adding one or two full-time members. But that's down the road. Right now, the department is focusing on celebrating a milestone – the department's 150th anniversary.

As of this writing in mid-January, plans were still proceeding for a community celebration on May 22 at Swan Park. Among the planned activities: An apparatus parade; music from three bands; activities for adults and kids; an extrication demonstration; and more. Hopefully COVID vaccinations will have progressed to make the celebration a reality.

A proud heritage

The Waupaca Fire Company was formed on May 11, 1871, just 14 years after the creation of what was then the Village of Waupaca. The company split into two separate groups: The Hook and Ladder Company and the Hose Company.

Highlights in the department's history include:

- In 1885, a Mansfield Steam Fire Engine was purchased.
- In 1896, the city received a proposal to add a water system to the city to provide more efficient water supply for firefighting. With this advancement, 72 fire hydrants were placed throughout the city.
- In 1926, the first motorized truck, a 70 hp engine, was purchased from W.S. Nott Company in Minneapolis.
- In 1939, the City Council approved an ordinance combining the hose company and the hook and ladder company. With these two units combining the name of the company also changed to the Waupaca Fire Department.
- In 1962, the first rural firefighting equipment was added. Neighboring townships purchased an International pumper and three years later they



purchased a 1965 Chevrolet 1,200-gallon tanker.

- In 1968, building code violations led the City Council to move the police and fire departments from the old Downtown firehouse into the armory on Washington Street. The fire trucks were to fill the six bays that had been used by the National Guard. Subsequent additions were added in 1986 and 1995.

- In 1991, the City of Waupaca and the townships that the fire department serves merged together to form the Waupaca Fire District.

Today, the department is overseen by a commission comprised of the mayor of Waupaca and the town chairs from four townships. The portion of the tax levy each community contributes to the department is based on property valuation. The commission picks



Photo by SM Photography

the chief and the commission is apprised of other department officer appointments. The commission also approves background checks done on prospective department members.

The current budget for the department is \$400,000, a 1% increase over 2020. The first 13 members to answer a call receive payment of \$10; those who respond subsequently receive \$5 for signing in and standing by at the station. If those on standby are subsequently called to the scene, full payment is received. Deuman also receives a \$10,000 stipend to run the department.

Members come from a wide variety of backgrounds, several of them in the trades. That expertise comes in handy not only at calls, but with station and vehicle maintenance. Deuman, a 26-year veteran of the department, is a master electrician by training and has worked for 17 years at Waupaca Foundry, one of the city's major employers. Deuman serves as building and grounds maintenance manager for corporate offices and buildings for the sprawling foundry complex.

Deuman, who grew up in Waupaca,
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DEPARTMENT PROFILE

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was “invited” onto the department by his father-in-law, Lee Thompson, who served on the department for 41 years, 34 of those as chief.

A varied coverage area

WAFD’s service area is mostly rural/suburban, with additional seasonal homes and cottages surrounding the Chain O’Lakes (22 lakes). The district’s year-round population is approximately 15,500. In the summer, the population increases to 22,000. There are approximately 6,300 housing units in the district.

The city includes a historic Downtown that spans several blocks. In addition to the foundry, which employs close to 2,000, other industries include Gusmer Enterprises, a specialized papermill that manufactures filters; Faulks Brothers Construction, a regional grading and excavating company; machining and fabrication companies; a specialized papermill; and two scrap metal operations.

WAFD’s response area also includes a 24-inch, high-pressure 800 psi natural gas pipeline, which carries a maximum of 320 million cubic feet of natural gas per day. The district also has three large LP storage facilities.

There are more than 600 commercial or institutional properties in WAFD’s service area that require annual inspections. Thirteen members of the department are certified as inspectors and each is assigned to do at least four inspections a month, except for December, which is kept open for re-inspections and paperwork.

The WAFD coverage area includes 13.1 miles of railroad line and 59 miles of highways. According to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, more than 35,000 vehicles and 30 to 40 trains travel through WAFD’s coverage area. The Waupaca Municipal Airport has two runways (5,200 ft. and 3,900 ft.) and is capable of handling corporate twin-

engine and commuter jet aircrafts. The traffic count for 2019 for the airport was approximately 6,613 arrivals/departures and 4,983 passengers.

With all the potential hazards presented by the industry and transportation, being prepared for hazmat calls is essential. Capt. Steve Fenske, WAFD’s training and fire prevention officer, is also head of the Waupaca County Hazmat Team, and four WAFD members serve on that team.

WAFD provides mutual aid to 12 fire departments in Waupaca County and to departments in two neighboring counties. WAFD is a member of Wisconsin’s Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) Division 142, and has responded for mutual aid as far as 45 miles from WAFD’s station.

The department also provides automatic mutual aid for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for wildland fire suppression as well as protection of a state park and campground.

The state veterans’ home at King is within WAFD’s service area and has its own fire department. But WAFD is dispatched automatically for any fire calls there. In fact, the state contributed half of the cost of WAFD’s aerial to help protect the home.

Public outreach

With four public schools, two parochial schools and a countywide head start program located in the district, one can understand the emphasis on fire prevention. Of course, in normal, non-pandemic times, there would have been an open house at the fire station and school visits. Last year, with close contact with youngsters precluded, the department focused on a coloring contest to get the fire

prevention message out. Gift cards for pizza were awarded as prizes.

Fire prevention and safety education is not limited to the youngsters. For example, WAFD partners with local restaurants to hand out cooking safety brochures during meal deliveries.

The Waupaca community is appreciative of the service provided by WAFD and has shown its support during department fundraising efforts. Both of the department’s brush trucks as well as its Kubota UTV were purchased with fundraising money.

For many years, a dance was the major fundraiser for the department. In recent years it’s been a cash raffle that has brought in funds. The raffle has a top prize of \$5,000 and only 450 tickets are sold and go quickly.

Local businesses and corporations have also donated to the department over the years. One notable contribution came from Gusmer Enterprises, which donated \$5,000 for a fire extinguisher training simulator.

“Our community is unbelievable when it comes to support,” Deuman says. “It’s amazing the people who stand up to help you.”

The department auxiliary, made up of member spouses, has played a big role in assisting fundraising efforts. The spouses get some thanks for all their assistance and sacrifices at department get-togethers, like the annual smelt fry. The close-knit department also holds a steak fry for members and spouses on the night before the Super Bowl.

One recent example of the way the department comes together to support each other has been evident in the way members of the longtime all-male department welcomed and mentored its first female firefighter, Molly Stashek, last year.



Photos depict Waupaca F.D.'s diversified training throughout the year.

WAFD Officers (year joined)

Jerry Deuman, chief / inspector (1994)

Kim Nelson, assistant chief / inspector (1990)

Steve Fenske, captain, training / fire prevention (1990)

Jacob Waller, captain / inspector, apparatus/equipment (2009)

Pete Jungers, lieutenant, fire prevention (1987)

Casey Martinez, lieutenant / inspector, equipment (2009)

Andy Wanty, lieutenant / inspector, fundraising / grants (2006)

Tim Banazsak, safety / health officer (1997)

Mike Jungers, secretary / treasurer (1991)

Waupaca Apparatus

Engine 901 (E901)

2005 Pierce Enforcer Pumper

Engine 902 (E902)

2019 Pierce Impel Pumper

Engine 904 (E904)

2002 E-One Pumper

Ladder 909 (L909)

1997 Pierce 100 Aerial Platform

Rescue 910 (R910)

2013 Pierce Rescue Squad

Tender 905 (T905)

2009 Pierce Tender (Sterling Chassis)

Tender 906 (T906)

2001 Pierce Tender (Sterling Chassis)

Brush 907 (B907)

2007 Chevy Silverado 2500HD

Brush 908 (B908)

2002 Chevy Silverado 2500HD

Command 903 (C903)

2008 Chevy 2500 Silverado

UTV 1

2006 Kubota RTV 900

Drone 1

DJI Mavic 2 Enterprise Dual



About the Waupaca Community



Waupaca is a community that effortlessly blends scenic beauty with a strong work ethic and deep-rooted Wisconsin values and grit. The seat of government of its namesake county, the city is home to about 6,500 residents and is the center of commerce for over 30,000 people who live within a 15-mile radius of the city. It is also just a short boat trip down the Crystal River to the 22-lake Chain 'O Lakes area.

According to local legend, the city is named either for the Menominee term *waubuck seba*, meaning "pale water," or after Sam Wapuka, a local Potawatomi man who was also known as Chief Waupaca.

Waupaca has long been a working-class town. Waupaca Foundry is

the largest employer in the city, employing over 1,500 workers in three plants in or around the city. Most of the employees live within 20 miles of the city. Also located nearby is the Wisconsin Veterans Home at King, a 750-bed state run nursing facility.

Of course, with so much water and hilly terrain, the Waupaca area is a natural attraction for outdoor recreation enthusiasts. The River Ridge Trail is part of a plan to preserve urban natural areas or "green space" in a non-motorized trail system that winds throughout the Waupaca area.

Located a few miles outside Waupaca, Hartman Creek State Park offers 10 miles of hiking trails; a 7.5-mile equestrian

trail; a 300-foot-long sand beach and swimming area; fishing; both on and off-road biking trails; cross country skiing; snowshoeing; and camping. The Waupaca area also boasts more than 400 miles of well-groomed snowmobile trails. Popular events and festivals in greater Waupaca include: The biennial Garden Walk and Art Tour; the Waupaca Fine Arts Festival; the Waupaca International Film Festival; the Winchester Academy speakers series; the annual Strawberry Festival in June; the Waupaca Blues Festival in October; and, of course, the annual Waupaca County Fair in August.

Information from the Waupaca Area Chamber of Commerce, City of Waupaca, Danes Hall of Waupaca, Wega Arts, and Clear Water Harbor Restaurant.

PHOTO GALLERY

Waupaca Area Fire District submitted photos



Photography by Waupaca Area Fire District and Image Studios/Bill Kapinski