

Livingston Volunteer Fire Department

The Livingston volunteer fire department was established in 1915 when the village President, J.A. Hebenstreit and board of trustees adopted an ordinance giving birth to the organization. The fire department consisted of fifteen active members appointed by village officials. The officers included: President D.E. Aylward, Vice President John Arkabauer, Secretary Harry Finer, treasure Tony Joshu, Chief Tom Banyan, Assistant Chief Joe Sanders, Captain Bert Dunlap, First Lieutenant John Rydgig, Second Lieutenant, William Renner and Custodian Roy Pollett, Social members were accepted by paying an annual fee and advanced to status of fireman as openings became available.

The following men have served as fire chief from 1915 to the present day: Tom Beynan, Bert Dunlap, Henry Lorson, Leslie Lovejoy, George Augustine, George Lusiana, Elmer Gerdes, Ronald Pollett, Steve Boston, Aldo Bacca, Louis Perne, Russell Klein, Don Schwandner and Robert Pollett.

In 1977, John “Kop” Kopuster was the first fireman to attain fifty years of service to the Livingston Fire department. In 1981, George Augustine was also honored. Now Anton Karnosky, Stanley Karnosky, Bruno Larker, Ronald “Muggs” Pollett, Armando Rami, Robert Wray, and Jack Brown have also joined the list of those who have given over fifty years of service to the Livingston-Williamson Fire Department. Also serving the community for many years were Louis Perne (49 years), Roger Pollett (48 years), and Robert Martintoni (48 years). Anton Karnosky served as treasurer of the Livingston Department for thirty-seven years before retiring in 2004. Tina Logsdon was the first female firefighter to join the department in 1982, and since that day there have been four other females who have volunteered their services.

The first piece of equipment consisted of a hand drawn cart with some hose on it. A year later a hook and ladder wagon was purchased for \$250 with a chemical engine being added a year after. Since only a small portion of the village had water lines, the bucket brigade still served a useful purpose. During WPA days “fire wells” were dug in various locations. The fire alarm devices consisted of a large bell located atop the city hall or a series of short blasts on the steam whistle at the local coalmine. At that time the fire department sponsored an annual Fourth of July celebration where they



The above is a 1924 Model T Fire Truck. Pictured above from left: George Lusiana on back of truck and George Kreuter, driver. Picture taken June 22, 1929.

competed with nearby fire departments in ladder climbing, hose coupling, foot racing, baseball and other contests. The day was usually climaxed with a tug-of-way for a keg of beer, with all participants free to partake.

In 1922, a motorized truck replaced the hand drawn carts. It carried all the equipment but still did not have a pump. It wasn't until 1935 that a 300 GPM rotary pump mounted on a Chevrolet chassis was put into service. This truck, although retired from service, is still in good running condition and is stored at the firehouse.

In 1950, a fire truck referred to as the white engine was purchased. Since then the fire department has

had five different trucks. Today's department has two pumpers, one heavy rescue van, one tanker, and one brush truck with four-wheel drive. According to Robert "Doc" Bowles, the Chulka fire in 1969 could be considered the most tragic fire since two young people lost their lives in the fire. He said the biggest, most memorable fire also occurred during the sixties. A train derailed near the present day Burcham resident, and tank cars exploded throughout the night and the next day.

In 1981, George Augustine, a fireman with fifty years of service, said "We got our experience at each fire, never had any training sessions." One of the biggest fires he recalled was when the coal mine burned, steeple and all. They fought the fire all night, pumping water from the mine pond supplied by the reservoir. The firemen weren't personally equipped with more than mere knee boots and raincoats, and often returned from winter fires in an open-air truck shivering because they were soaking wet. Since September 11th, 2001, federal grants have provided monies for upgrading fire departments, and today our firefighters have the gear and equipment necessary for fire and emergency situations. Today they are notified of a fire through pagers,



Livingston Volunteer Fire Department - 1948

- Front Row:* Clarence Meyer, Anton Pellizzaro, Roy Pollett, Frank Ocepek, John Smerk, John Lusiana, Ronald Pollett, Anton Karnosky, and Steve Ruzevich
Second Row: George Lusiana, Louis Perne, John Bacca, Frank Nicco, John Kopuster, Armando Rami, and George Augustine
Third Row: Roy Ray, George Kreuter, Anton Perne, Steve Augustine and Elmo Pomatto.

and no longer do firemen ride on the back of a truck, but all must ride inside an enclosed vehicle due to insurance and safety regulations. Don Schwandner, a former chief, said the fire at Kendon's Motel and Restaurant in 1985 was the biggest fire in recent times. There were eleven fire departments and twenty-three

pieces of equipment there to battle the blaze. Neighboring fire departments worked together well on that day and are still providing mutual aid when more equipment and firefighters are needed. He said he is very proud of our Rescue Squad which was formed after a serious accident on New Douglas Road when firefighters worked for hours trying to extricate the driver from his wrecked vehicle. Unfortunately, they had no modern equipment for opening vehicles and the firemen used whatever tools they had available including pocketknives and saws. Now they have tools and training to extricate accident victims in an expedient manner, and Schwandner deserves the credit for working tirelessly to establish a Rescue Squad in our community.

Some firefighters have volunteered to help their community at great personal sacrifice. In 1982, Orville Soens died of asphyxiation while working on a fire truck at the firehouse, and in 1981, Jim Heeren was involved in a very serious accident when he was responding to a call for a grass fire.

The original firehouse was built in 1913 at the present day site, and it was also the Livingston Village Hall. It was torn down in 1984, and a new brick building was constructed. Today the department has sixty-one total active and honorary members and it is always looking for new people to volunteer. Today's volunteers must be willing to participate in government required training on how to operate the equipment. Olive Township definitely benefits from having a group of well-trained volunteers who are willing to give their time and efforts on behalf of their community.



Fire Station. 2005



Anton Karnosky standing beside the Fire Department Memorial at the dedication ceremony.