

# Fire Department History

The City of Murphy was provided fire protection by contractual agreement with the City of Plano. The cost to citizens was rising and it was felt that the City could form their own volunteer fire department that would save money. The department was organized under the leadership of Carl Davis and Cyril Poindexter in August of 1973. The first meeting was held at the former location of Phillips Lumber Company on N. Murphy Road. The original living and office quarters consisted of a portion of a classroom in the old Murphy School ( a 1939 WPA school building). The apparatus bay was created by knocking down the wall between two class rooms, installing a steel support pole and a garage door. The City purchased a used open cab American LaFrance Pumper that was delivered directly to the mayor's house on Maxwell Creek Road. Former Mayor and Dallas Firefighter, Cyril Poindexter, took on the task of training the department and off they went. The original dispatch system was a telephone tree but the first few calls lead to a quick realization that this would not work. A multi-ring down fire phone was installed in city hall and in the homes of several of the department officers. Residents called 424-0600 to report a fire or medical emergency and the phone rang at all locations. Whoever answered the phone would then dispatch the fire department. During the day, the city office staff did this.

The department members modified the city hall building to have a place to park the fire trucks. The fleet was expanded by purchasing military surplus vehicles and modifying them to accept a water pump and carry some crude firefighting equipment. Most of the funding at that time was through the sale of snow cones from a used ice cream truck. The Women's Auxiliary was formed and an annual garage sale was held for additional funds. In 1979, the department purchased a Dodge utility body truck to use to carry additional equipment and emergency medical supplies. In 1980 a Dodge Pickup with a bed mounted pump was purchased in cooperation with the Texas Forest Service for use on the then most present danger, grass fires. An old tanker truck was purchased to provide water to areas without hydrants. Funding switched to a modest city budget and proceeds from bingo.

The department continued to provide service to the small rural community with the main threat being grass fires. In 1990, Engine 3 was purchased and was the first new fire apparatus the city ever owned. 1991 saw the end of bingo and the start of additional funding through parking cars at South Fork Ranch. In 1992, the tanker truck was destroyed in a one-vehicle accident while enroute to a call. The next year Engine 4, a 1983 Pierce mini-pumper, replaced that unit. This unit was purchased used from a dealer in Pennsylvania.

At this point in time, the department was still alerted by the old fire phone system in private residences. The city paid a dispatcher a monthly salary to cover the nighttime hours. Shirley provided this service for several years out of the kitchen of her home. In her absence other volunteers, her teenage daughters, or the former fire marshal that had

to take the call then run across the street to Shirley's house to dispatch the department covered the phone. This system was failing due to the inability of the telephone company to continue to provide the multi-ring line, problems covering certain times, and increased activity at city hall during the day. The dispatch was then transferred to contracted service with the City of Wylie. This provided a reliable cost-effective alternative and trained emergency service telecommunicators.

In the early 1990's, the Plano Fire department was providing ambulance transport service. They no longer desired to provide this service due to an increased demand in their own city. A contracted ambulance service was then used with the fire department being the first responder organization. The contracted services were below our desired standard so several Southeast Collin County cities formed an EMS coalition to collectively bid for ambulance service. This led to a new contract with a transport provider. To compensate for long response times the department set out to improve the level of service that could be provided as first responders. This included additional EMS training, more sophisticated equipment and recruitment of more personnel that were state certified.

In the mid 1990's, the State of Texas was preparing to make a switch from the Key Rate System to the Insurance Services Office (ISO) rating system. Under the key rate system, the homeowner's premiums for fire were based on the fringe rule where residents benefited from the lower key rates of the cities of Plano and Richardson. Under the ISO system, every city or fire district would be rated by their own fire protection capabilities and not the capabilities of their neighbors. This would have caused a dramatic increase in homeowner's premiums to residents of Murphy. The department leadership knew changes were needed and advised the city council of what was coming. The department took action aimed at improving services through a proactive approach to training, obtaining the proper equipment, improving record keeping, and establishing programs. The city received a transitional ISO rating of 7 until a field assessment could be conducted.

In 1999, Alan Palomba became a part-time paid Fire Chief tasked with meeting the challenges of a community starting to once again see growth and the approaching implementation of the ISO rating system. The department's goal of an ISO rating of 5 was surpassed when the rating was set at ISO 4! The result was a dramatic reduction in homeowner's premiums citywide. This reduction more than covered the cost of operating the department and continues to provide savings to the community in the form of lower homeowner insurance rates.

In 2000, the department purchased another new pumper and a light duty rescue truck. These units were needed to meet the fire flow requirements of the new buildings and to carry additional equipment. This period also saw some dramatic changes in the level of service provided. Fire inspections and plan review were implemented, codes were updated, training increased, firefighter safety was improved, proper equipment was specified and obtained, pre-hospital care improved by adding defibrillators, suction units, IV therapy, vehicle extrication tools, etc. We also saw an improvement in the use

of technology and moved from the one room office in City hall to a newly constructed 800 square foot building attached to the rear of the apparatus space. This new facility became the sleeping quarters, training room, kitchen, and at least three offices for various department personnel. The new building provided some breathing room to expand services including living quarters for personnel to spend the night and prepare meals. It also allowed for other members to begin the fledgling fire prevention program, although space was still limited. In fact, there was only one small office space, so additional offices were out in the common area which included sleeping area, kitchen and dining and the day room. This prompted some members to play practical jokes reminiscent of the old TV show "WKRP In Cincinnati" where they placed a tape line on the floor to delineate the office walls for the fire marshal!

In 2001, the city started to employ part-time firefighters to cover daytime hours. This was necessitated by the increase in call volume, regulation, and the lack of trained personnel available during the day. The part-time system was successfully integrated into the volunteer organization to a new cohesive group of individuals that recognized the value of all department members and embrace the diversity the organization had to offer.

The year 2002 had brought with it the planning of the City's first real fire station and full-time fire protection personnel. Most of the department members are paramedic certified and a total of 90% have a level of Emergency Medical Certification of EMT or above. Fire loss for the past few years has been minimal. Firefighter injuries are virtually non-existent. A part-time Lieutenant's position, filled by a member who had previously been a volunteer, was added in March of 2002 to perform plan reviews and inspections. As a certified firefighter and paramedic, the individual in that position responded to calls as well. Three full-time fire personnel were added in November of 2002, placing one full-time member on each shift.

Construction of the current fire-rescue facility began with groundbreaking on October 2, 2003. for the new municipal complex. The new fire station began with a design of over 31,000 square feet but was ultimately reduced to 27,000 square feet, a far cry from the 1800 square feet of office and apparatus space that existed. Moving into the new Fire-Rescue facility in June 2005, there is now a 25 person classroom and a smaller conference room for eight. Open space between the classrooms and the offices allows for classes where students must work on the floor performing such skills as in a CPR class.

On January 1, 2004, Murphy Fire-Rescue began offering advanced life support (ALS) emergency medical services (EMS) under the medical control of Biocare at Methodist Medical Center.

There are three apparatus bays that a vehicle can drive through from rear to front. This drive-through helps decrease the risk of injuries and damage potential from backing up. The other two bays are only open on one end, but constructed so the rear of the bays can be converted to drive-through if desired.

The residential area can sleep 16. There is a large dining area and a kitchen with a commercial range, oven and several refrigerators. There is even a brass fire pole to give the firefighters quick access to the engines and ambulance, when a call comes in for their help.

The north end of the building is the administrative area, for the Fire Chief, Administrative Captain, and Administrative Assistant. In December of 2004, the City Council authorized the purchase of a used ambulance from the City of Mesquite. The ambulance was to be used to offer ambulance service directly to the citizens of Murphy, thus improving response time. Due to limited staffing, the ambulance was only planned to run initially from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM on weekdays. This time frame was thought to be the most likely to required an ambulance. In April of 2007, the ambulance went to a 24 hour a day service provided by the Murphy Fire Rescue personnel.

There is computer and telephone connectivity throughout the building, allowing members to take online training and perform reporting duties. The building was configured to be used as a command center in case of an emergency, if the need would arise.

On April 18, 2005, Murphy swore in its first full-time fire chief. On September 1, 2005, the Murphy Fire-Rescue Department began offering ambulance transport service during weekdays from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

In December of 2005, three additional firefighter/paramedics were added bringing to two the number of full-time personnel on each shift. This began the transition from a combination department of volunteers, part time firefighters, and full time firefighters to a full career department with 18 full time firefighters - 6 per day. This transition was completed in December 2007.

All in all, the new Fire-Rescue facility mirrors the growth of the city and sets the stage for Fire-Rescue to bring a new level of service to the city.

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