

MOVIN' ON UP

Morrisonville-Palmer Fire Protection District



District Chief:
Jack Christian

District Trustees:
President - Robert Wagehoft
Secretary - Dan Walter
Treasurer - Larry Prose
Duane Dozier (*recent recipient
of the IAFFD Outstanding
Trustee Award*)
Joe Kent



The Morrisonville-Palmer Fire Protection District was formed in 1988, when the two communities merged their respective fire departments. The all-volunteer district provides fire protection to approximately 144 square miles in Christian and Montgomery County. For logistical reasons, the district maintains two fire stations. The main fire station is located in Morrisonville, and a smaller station is maintained 6 miles away in Palmer. The use of both stations has proven to be beneficial in times of bad weather when the state highway between the two stations is impassible. This also places a station on each side of the railroad line that runs through our district, so response times are kept to a minimum when rail crossings are blocked.

The Morrisonville-Palmer Fire Protection District was instrumental in persuading the local Christian County Board into developing and implementing a Comprehensive Countywide Fire Protection Plan, so that no property in the

County is without a designated fire protection provider, thus eliminating what is known in the fire service as "no-man's land."

The Morrisonville-Palmer Fire Protection District belongs to the state MABAS Organization (Division 50), and through this affiliation, several of our volunteers were sent to assist in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. The Morrisonville-Palmer Fire Protection District also sent equipment and turnout gear to the World Trade Center in 2001.

The District also belongs and trains regularly with two other local mutual aid organizations, the Christian County SOS Mutual Aid Association, and the 3M Firemen's association, which includes departments in Montgomery, Madison, and Macoupin County.

As several adjacent fire departments offer rescue services, one of which is a paid department with a full-time staff on duty, the District has chosen not to invest in apparatus and specialized equipment necessary for rescue and extrication.

The District does not offer EMS services as our community is fortunate to have a separate community ambulance service offering basic life support, and there are several private ALS units 15 minutes away.

Then VS. Now

Since the District was formed, we have upgraded our apparatus to include two 2000 gallon pumper-tankers that were purchased new, along with a 2000 gallon tender, which was purchased used. As most of our coverage area is rural, and the two communities having older water supply grids, we are able to arrive at a fire scene with 6000 gallons of water on the three units. Other rolling units include an equipment van and a third back-up pumper.

Dispatching procedures and communications have improved drastically since the district was formed. In the late 1980's, the entire county adopted a 911 call system, which eliminated the older "fire phone" system, which was only effective if the firefighter was at home to receive the call, which had to be channeled through a local funeral home. Firefighters now carry pagers and are paged through the County 911 Dispatcher. As all Christian and Montgomery County fire departments are now dispatched in this manner, ample equipment, water, and manpower can be requested and received through the mutual aid network in a much shorter time span.

SCBA units have been standardized. Before the District was formed, there were three different brands and models of SCBA units on the apparatus. Most of these units were either donated by other departments or were obtained through government surplus.

Through several state and federal grants, the District has been able to standardize all air packs, which simplifies training and fire ground operations. The District received an Assistance to Firefighters Grant several years ago, which funded an in-house breathing air compressor and refill station. Prior to this the breathing air tanks had to be refilled at a neighboring fire station 15 miles away. We continue to try to standardize equipment for our firefighters, allowing them to focus on the emergency instead of the gear.

The former station at Morrisonville was a rented wood framed building which was not energy efficient, and had no area other than the truck bay. At that time, no apparatus over 30 feet long could be purchased, due to the

limited length of the station. The new station was designed to allow us to add technology as it is acquired, integrating it into our building.

New Station, New Equipment

Our district has been aggressive in pursuing grants and fostering community support. With assistance from both, our new 9,900 square foot facility, constructed in 2006, has 6 truck bays, a kitchen and training room, a conference room, a radio communications room, and several offices the station was designed with an indoor fire hydrant, allowing the firefighters to refill the tankers inside, out of the weather after a fire call. This interior fire hydrant has also been useful for conducting training drills during inclement weather. It also has two drive-thru bays, allowing for district growth.

Any Advice for Smaller Districts?

Our district has tried to foster a positive relationship with our federal and state legislators. This affiliation has helped us in obtaining grants and finding out about various programs available to our District.

Keep a line of communication open between the District Board and the volunteer firefighters, as these volunteers are your greatest asset.

Maintain good relationships and train frequently with neighboring departments that you work with regularly.

Plan several years ahead and keep a new piece of equipment "on the horizon" at all times. The Morrisonville-Palmer Fire Protection District tries to focus on the equipment that is truly needed in our community.

Develop a standard rotation of maintenance and testing to make sure the apparatus and equipment is in a constant state of readiness.

Select an attorney that is experienced specifically with, and has a thorough understanding of, the fire service and laws specific to fire protection districts.

Attend workshops and seminars sponsored by fire service associations such as the IAFF and the IFCA. You will learn that many districts are experiencing the same issues of concern that your organization is.

What is Your District's Biggest Challenge or Concern?

Without a doubt, volunteer recruitment and retention. As families move away from our largely rural community, we lose volunteers frequently. With the shortage of available daytime personnel, we are fortunate to have mutual aid agreements with all neighboring departments.

Keeping the constant turnover of new volunteers trained to current NFPA 1001 and NIMS proficiency is an ongoing struggle.

What's Next for your District?

Equipment goals include the installation of an emergency backup generator at each fire station, so we will have radio communications, heat, and operational truck bay doors so during power outages.

We hope grant funding in the near term will allow the district to purchase several new sets of turnout gear and additionally, audiovisual technology devices, such as a LCD projector and other items to assist visiting instructors.

The Morrisonville-Palmer Fire Protection District continues to strive to provide the best fire protection services to the entire district. Through the efforts of the volunteer firefighters, we work to serve our community and respond to any type of emergency. ■

Editor's Note: If you would like to have your district featured in *The Fire Call*, please contact us at 800-524-6620 for more information or visit www.iafpd.org.