

MOVIN' ON UP!



Utica Community Fire Protection District

By Chief David Edgcomb

The Utica Community Fire Protection District covers a region of about 100 square miles within the north central area of Illinois. Rural in nature and geographically situated approximately 100 miles southwest of Chicago and includes many miles of highways, rivers and railroad. Within the District, there are Interstates 80 and 39 and US Routes 6, 71 and 178 that amount to more than 80 miles, 8 miles of CSX/Iowa International Railroad, 10 miles of the Illinois River and 12 miles of the I&M Canal.

The population is estimated at 5,526 according to the latest census and as noted later, a more broad population base is served.

Utica Community FPD provides many aspects of emergency service to our community as well as the general public. Their fire suppression staff consists of 21 paid-on-call fire fighters, 11 of which are licensed as EMS first responders and many others are certified to the firefighter II level. Additionally we have 20 certified emergency medical technicians and run two ambulances. The District operates 24/7 year-round mutual aid, intermediate life support, and upgrade staffing for adjoining communities as needed. In 2006, the Utica Community Fire Protection District paid on-call service responded to 250 medical calls and 170 fire calls.

The Utica Fire District is part of MABAS 25 and due to the amount of Haz-mat traffic, is known as the I-80 corridor. In 2006 the District made 17 mutual aid calls. In the event of a mass casualty situation in the metro area, they would be requested to assist the other volunteer P.O.C. Departments to cover the entire county while other districts dispatched respond to the incident.

The Fire District's physical make-up consists of farms, factories, quarries, state parks, a canal tow path and federal land acreage. The latter includes plants for sand, chemicals, seeds, asphalt, strip malls, a four-bin grain elevators with two more in the planning stage. There are also two marinas, a large barge loading facility, a tar-making plant, a

Federal lock and dam with a visitor's center, bed and breakfast facilities, small trucking firms, three storage facilities, a flea market, winery, new very large struck stop, five campgrounds, and numerous small businesses such as gift shops, day-care centers, etc. Construction is to begin soon on an additional water tower.

For the past 10 years, the taxes collected by the Fire District were slow and were not raised for several years. Prior to 1998, the ambulance service was a separate membership and organization and therefore not a revenue for the Fire District. When struck by a tornado in 2004 and the ambulance building was destroyed, the fire station and equipment were damaged, it became evident that we were behind and in order to adequately provide services to our community, they would need to increase the tax structure. The District sold its original building, used the FEMA funding from a disaster relief and nearly exhausted all resources earmarked for new equipment to build a new station at a different location. The new facility is a great start toward new directions for the District, and ultimately protects their aging equipment.

The Village is exploding with development; but with five TIF districts, the income generated will not reach coffers for approximately 23-25 years. TIF agreements are being implemented, but the population and industrial demands leaves a definite need now for additional and updated equipment, for the safety of its visitors, town, citizens and work crews. Transition fees are not applicable in our area at this time.

Several fund raisers are held each year to help procure funds for updating and maintaining equipment. Events include fish fries, ice cream socials, barbeques, cookbook sales and community outreach seminars.

To give back to the community that supports them, the Utica FPD proudly sponsors the 6-week BB Gun Club, participates in 3 annual parades and visits schools during Fire Prevention Week. The District also provides courses in CPR, in-house training to local factories, assists with life-guard training and assists the local Cub Scouts with merit badge training. Their department also supervises and staffs 5 major weekend events where the average number of visitors for each event is 10,000 people.

Future plans for the Utica Fire & Ambulance Protection District include finishing the specifications, bidding out a new commercial 2,500 gallon pumper/tanker for delivery in 2008. This equipment will replace the 1980 Class A pumper and the 1980 3,000 gallon tanker. They also hope to staff a full-time paid ILS ambulance 24-7-365.

Utica and its neighboring fire districts continue to face a stagnant tax base, aging equipment and increased demands for service. Their hope is to acquire financial assistance in procuring a new, safe first-line pumper which to benefit each of them. ■

Editor's Note: If you would like to have your district featured in the "Movin' on Up!" column of *The Fire Call*, please contact us at 800-524-6620 for more information.