**Fillmore Volunteer Fire Department**

In 1957, several citizens in Fillmore got together to voice their concerns about the lack of fire protection in their town. After that first meeting, a committee was formed to determine how best to start a fire department. The committee looked at equipment, considered where to build a fire house, and discussed whether a paid or volunteer force would be best. After much discussion and investigation, a fire department was formed on March 31, 1958, its Articles of Incorporation forming a not-for-profit organization known as the Fillmore Community Volunteer Fire Department Incorporated. Ten men made up the department’s first roster.

At the first official meeting, they passed the hat around for donations to purchase necessary equipment to begin operations. Soon the Ladies Auxiliary was formed and like most rural fire departments, Fillmore’s held dinners and bake sales as often as possible in an effort to independently raise enough money for trucks and a building.

The first fire station was in an old blacksmith shop behind the Post Office in town on Hendricks Street. This area was centrally located just off Main Street. When the members raised enough money, they made a down payment on the land and building and converted the old shop into a single-bay fire station. Soon after purchasing the building, a 1949 International KB6 flatbed truck was located, purchased, and sent to Coatesville where it was converted into a fire truck. After a tank and small pump were mounted onto the flatbed, the two-seat truck became the first official fire truck for the department and allowed the firemen to start responding to fire runs in and around Fillmore. From its beginning, in addition to Fillmore, the department responded to areas within Floyd Township, including Heritage Lake, and Marion Township. This lasted until Floyd Township started their own fire department in 2004.

In September 1959, the department hosted their first chicken barbecue fundraiser, a big hit from the beginning, since most departments relied on spaghetti dinners, euchre parties, or bake sales. The barbecue chicken was different, and its success prompted the decision to hold the event every September. The fundraiser has been raising thousands of dollars for the department since its inception.

With the funds it raised, the department decided to purchase fire trucks that would be effective fighting off road fires, meaning they would need more space in their fire station. A 1937 Chevrolet fire engine, a 1954 Dodge truck, and a 1954 GMC tanker truck became part of the Fillmore fleet, with the department doing its best to outfit each with necessary equipment. By the mid-1960s, a new two-bay block fire station was added right next to their original station, giving the firemen ample room to store trucks, their equipment and gear. Another bay was added in the early 1970s.

In 1970, the department purchased its first new fire truck, a Ford F600 Howe pumper with a 300-gpm pump and 750 gallons of water in the tank. Although it’s not used on a regular basis, as of 2022, this truck is still in service.

As the years went by, more trucks were purchased for the department: a 1972 Buick ambulance; a 1968 GMC tanker; a 1977 dodge grass/rescue truck (still used today); and a 1978 Mercedes tanker. In 1988, when the department bought a Chevrolet C70 1800-gallon tanker truck without a pump, it was following a very common practice of having a vehicle for hauling water only, with the intention of carrying a portable tank that the water could be dumped into. This portable tank would be taken off the truck and set up so that the tanker would dump the water into it, then return to the firehouse to get another load of water, allowing the fire engine to draft out of it and provide a continuous flow of water to extinguish flames. When the tank emptied, the truck, used as the department’s main tanker until 2020, returned to the firehouse to get another load of water.

In 1990, a purchase was made that greatly increased the department’s capabilities and continues to be the its main truck, a new Ford F800 fire engine with a 1250-gpm pump and a 1000-gallon water capacity

With more and more medical and rescue-type calls occurring, the department needed a truck with more compartment space than their 1977 Dodge, so in 2006, along with extraction equipment, a Ford 350 brush/rescue truck with plenty of room for rescue and medical gear was added to the fleet. The Dodge was kept as an off-road fire truck for grass and wood fires, and the new Ford continues to be the department’s busiest responding truck each year.

With the department still operating out of a 1960s fire station with its 1920 addition, the department knew that it needed to construct a new fire station at some point. The talk of a new firehouse started in 1985 when land was purchased behind the current firehouse for the construction of a new building. However, the biggest of several major hurdles was funding. There was no way the town or township could afford the project without raising taxes to avoid incurring debt. For over 30 years, the new station was discussed often without any real solution, but department members still made plans for a time when one was reached.

On December 23, 2014, department members broke ground for a brand-new fire house. The $733,000 project was made possible by many chicken barbecue fundraisers, the Putnam County Community Foundation, and a large Community Development Block Grant through the Indiana Office of Community & Rural Affairs, which contributed $400,000. Collaboration made this building a reality.

The fire station was completed, and the department moved into it in 2015. At 8,125 square feet, the new station was more than double the size of the old one and had room for six fire trucks, a kitchen area, offices, a meeting room, bathrooms, shower areas, and a large upstairs storage area. Until that time, the department rented a large tent for its chicken barbeque fundraiser, but the 6-bay station could accommodate the large event crowds. The old station was then torn down to allow for more parking spaces around the new building.

In 2020, the Fillmore Community Fire Department needed to replace its tanker truck with one capable of supplying enough water to a fire engine. Over the years, Putnam County departments had gotten away from using dump tanks as a primary water source and only used them on large fires. Most of the time the fire engine would arrive first and then the tanker truck would come in behind the engine and pump directly into the first truck. As it happened, the Reelsville VFD purchased a new tanker truck and offered Fillmore the opportunity to purchase the one they replaced. The Fillmore department bought the truck and took delivery toward the end of that year. The 1989 GMC has a 500-gpm pump and carries 1800 gallons of water, more than enough to supply a fire engine during most fires.

The current 22-member department responds to an average of 140 runs per year. It provides primary fire protection to Fillmore and Marion Township, and mutual aid to all fire departments in Putnam County as well as the western side of Hendricks County.