**Jefferson Township Volunteer Fire Department**

The Jefferson Township Volunteer Fire Department was first organized in 1957 after residents had begun meeting for several years in hopes of forming a local volunteer fire department for the community. Before the fire department was organized, if a fire occurred in the Township, Cloverdale, Greencastle, and the State Farm fire departments would be summoned to respond. The first meetings of the department were held at the Belle Union School. Among the items discussed was how to fund the department so a truck and equipment could be purchased and where to build a fire station. The members who gathered decided that they should begin a fish fry to be held at the school to try and raise money. They held their first fry the following year and even included a queen and a court for the event. The fundraiser was a big success, and the fish fry became an annual summer event for the department, even being dubbed the World's Largest Fish Fry at one point.

Incorporated on April 8, 1958, the original name of the group was the Belle Union Volunteer Fire Department. After a name change to the Jefferson Township Volunteer Fire Department, the newly formed organization covered the town of Belle Union as well as the 49 square miles of Jefferson Township.

With money raised from the fish fry, the members of the department purchased a used 1935 Mack chemical fire engine for $700. At first housed in a local barn, the fire station that would subsequently house the engine was completed in 1959 in the center of Belle Union. The fire bell placed on the building is believed to have been the original bell at the Greencastle Fire Station that was located at the corner of Indiana and Walnut streets (now the location of Breadworks). How Jefferson Township came to be in possession of this bell is not known. The 1700-square foot fire station is still used by the department today.

After more successful fish fries, which now included a carnival and shows, the department wanted to expand its fleet, so a used 1958 International Fire Truck with a 750-gallon water tank and 250 gpm pump was purchased in 1964. This truck, affectionately known as the “The Binder,” served the department until 1998. Another department purchase, in 1965, was air packs for members.

In 1968, the department locally purchased a Chevrolet C60, its first new fire truck, from Jim Harris Chevrolet in Greencastle. The truck, with its 1000-gallon water tank and 350-gpm pump, was sent to Darley Fire in Chicago to have the fire equipment installed; the vehicle remained in service until 2003.

After many successful years for the annual fish fry, since fish fries had grown so much in popularity, members decided to try something a little more unique. In 1987, the first pork chop supper, hosted in 1987, had a different menu that was a big success. Like the fish fry before it, it’s now an annual event held in August.

One of the most unique fire trucks to serve Putnam County was donated to the department in 1992 by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. A used United State Air Force jet fuel tanker capable of holding 5000 gallons of fuel was converted into a water hauling tanker by the members of the department. In addition, a 350-gpm pump was installed, and the truck had faithfully served the department for several years when it was sold to A&A Township Volunteer Fire Department in Eminence, Indiana, after their tanker was involved in an accident.

The Trustee for Jefferson Township, Larry Salsman, purchased a new fire engine for the department in 1998. The Ford F600 E-One pumper had a 1250 gpm pump and a 1000-gallon water tank. The department had never had a fire engine that was capable of pumping that much water at a fire, so this truck was a major upgrade for them. In 2003, this truck pumped at full capacity for several hours during the Rector Hall fire on DePauw campus in Greencastle. It remains the primary pumper truck for the department today.

In 2003, the department took delivery of a new Freightliner FL80 E-one tanker. With a 2100-gallon water tank and a 500-gpm pump, this truck was much smaller than their 5000-gallon former tanker, but its smaller wheelbase was much easier to handle on country roads during responses. This truck is also still in service today as the department’s primary tanker.

In 2011, the department once again benefited from a donation. Putnam County Sheriff Steve Fenwick donated a 2004 Ford Explorer 4WD to the department to use as a first response/Fire Chief’s car. The truck was outfitted with medical response equipment as well as radios to serve as an incident command vehicle. It served the department until 2019 when it was replaced by a 2019 Chevrolet Tahoe that is used in the same capacity.

As many Putnam County volunteer departments discovered, medical and rescue calls greatly increased as the years went by, highlighting the need for a truck dedicated to handle those types of calls. In 2012 the Township purchased a new Ford F-550 Wynn Fire Apparatus rescue and brush truck that featured not only a small water tank and pump for grass and field fires, but also compartment space to house extrication equipment and medical gear. Since its purchase it has been the most used truck on a yearly basis, since 70% of the total call volume is made up of medical and rescue calls.

The department purchased a new Ford F-350 aluminum flatbed truck in 2015. Department members converted this vehicle into a dedicated brush truck. While the rescue truck can still respond in that capacity, it has all the necessary equipment needed to fight a fire off road in the woods or in a field.

In addition to the 2003 Rector Hall fire, one of the biggest the department has responded to over the years, Jefferson Township has also had a couple of major fires at the Collier Sawmill located along US 40 near the State Road 75 intersection. The first fire in 2005 consumed a large pole barn and in 2021, another large pole barn was destroyed. Both fires brought several Putnam and Hendricks County departments to the scene to assist in extinguishing the fires.