

History

Volunteer Organization

The Union City Volunteer Fire Department was organized in late 1960, beginning with 50 to 55 members, and growing to approximately 68 members. Marcell West was appointed Chief of the newly formed department, and served as the volunteer Fire Chief until March 1977. The first fire apparatus and equipment were acquired from Civil Defense in 1960. This consisted of a 1942 Ford crash truck with a 200 gallon tank, a 60 GPM front mount pump, and assorted equipment. This truck served until taken out of service in 1965.



The Department answered a total of 38 calls during their first full year of operation. At that time Union City and Red Oak were the only departments to answer calls in unincorporated South Fulton County.

Facilities

The first Fire Station was funded and built by the volunteers beginning in 1960. All work except for the laying of the block was done by the volunteers, and took almost a full year to complete. The Department operated out of City Hall until the station was dried in, and then operated off the dirt floor until the concrete could be poured. This location was used for 44 years until July 2004 when it was replaced with a new station on Highpoint Rd.

Apparatus

As the department began to grow, additional apparatus and equipment were purchased through donations and volunteer funding to increase protection to the city. The first chief's car was a red 1955 Chevrolet station wagon owned by Chief West. The volunteers purchased the next apparatus (a 1955 Dodge/1500 gallon fuel tanker) from the Gulf Oil Company, which they converted into a

tanker/pumper. This apparatus was later damaged in a rollover, which occurred while responding to an alarm.



Union City Gets New Fire Truck

Union City firemen seem especially proud of this fire truck. They have good reason to feel that way. The truck is a new one for the department. City officials say they are hoping that the addition of the new truck to the department will help lower the fire rating for the city, which in turn should help lower ratings for residents to some degree. Shown getting the new machine into order are (L-R) Mike Morris, Ken Alexander, Glenn Payne and Dean Burns. (Staff Photo By Diane Burns)



New Union City Pumper

Union City now has a new pumper truck, and pictured are Fire Chief E. M. West (in hat) and four of the full-time drivers at the department, positioned around the glowing red truck. Pictured are West, Rick Wheeler, Mike Morris, Ken Alexander and Glenn Payne. Full-time drivers not pictured include Dean Burns and Tony Criff. The new pumper is the second in the Union City Fire Department fleet. It is being replaced in the plant at the location where fire station, which is scheduled to be built on Rhannon Parkway, near the intersection of Rhannon Boulevard. Already in the fleet were another pumper, the ladder truck, and the rescue squad. The new pumper has a 500 gallon tank and can pump water from hydrants at 2000 gallons a minute.

The volunteers then purchased another truck from the Gulf Oil Company (a 1955 Ford F800/1000 gallon fuel tanker), which they also converted into a tanker/pumper. This truck served until taken out of service in 1982. Later they acquired a 1955 GMC flatbed truck from Fulton County and the Georgia Forestry Commission on a mutual aid agreement, which they converted with a tank purchased from the Atlanta Oil Company. This truck served until taken out of service in 1985.

Funding

Over the years, the volunteers were able to expand the department through various fund raising events and donations from the area citizens. Fundraisers included several donkey ball games and the annual barbecue sale held up until 1973.

In 1964, the Union City Volunteer Fire Department entered into a contractual agreement with the City of Union City, which gave the City partial control over the Department and assisted in obtaining a lower



insurance rating. As a part of this agreement, the City purchased its first apparatus, which was a 1965 Chevrolet/Pirsch 750 GPM pumper. The Volunteer Fire Department then began to receive funding from the City of Union City. At that time Union City funded the Fire Department \$50 a month, of which \$25 went toward operating expenses and the other \$25 went into the treasury.

In 1968, the Union City and Red Oak departments were joined by the Palmetto Volunteer Fire Department to answer fire alarms in South Fulton County and to assist the surrounding county departments.

Full-time Department

The first full-time personnel were hired in 1973 when the City first budgeted the Fire Department, and the Department gradually progressed from volunteer into a fully paid department by 1978. Also in 1973, the 1955 Chevrolet chief's car was replaced by a red 1973 Plymouth Fury also owned by Chief West.

The first rescue (a Chevrolet van) was purchased in 1976, and that year the Department answered 116 rescue calls. Also in 1976, the rear of Station #1 was extended to house the additional apparatus in service at that time. In March 1977, Chief West was hired as the full-time Fire Chief, and served in this capacity until January 1991. The next apparatus purchased was a 1978 Ford/Pirsch 1000 GPM pumper, and was the last gasoline apparatus purchased.

A second fire station was added in 1981 to provide additional protection for the rapidly growing city. The Fire Department headquarters were relocated to this station, which was designed to operate a double company. By 1982, the department had increased to 22 personnel (7 firefighters per shift and the Fire Chief).

In 1983, the City purchased a 1976 Chevrolet Caprice which served as the chief's car until 1990. In 1985, the City purchased a Ford/E-One 1250 GPM pumper to replace the aging 1965 Chevrolet which was then placed in reserve. Then in 1988, the City replaced the 1976 Chevrolet rescue with a GMC/E-One custom rescue. The 1976 rescue then went into service with the City's Public Works Department. Station #1 was also remodeled in 1988, and then again in 1996.

Union City purchased its first ladder truck (a Custom Cab/E-One 95' Aerial) in 1989, and in 1990 the chief's car was replaced by a new Ford Crown Victoria.

Upon his retirement in 1991, Chief West was succeeded by Captain S. R. Wheeler who served as Chief from February 1991 until his retirement in March 1993. In August of 1993, S.R. Tarnowski was hired to fill the position of Chief where he served until May 1998. Also in 1993, the Department purchased a 1993 Freightliner/E-One 1500 GPM pumper, at which time the 1965 Chevrolet was retired, and the 1978 Ford/Pirsch was placed in reserve.



In 1994, the Fire Department began operating two Advanced Life Support Rescue/Engines, converted the 1988 rescue into the Incident Command unit, and purchased a 1994 Ford Crown Victoria to be used as the chief's car.

Public Safety

In late 1995, the Union City Department of Public Safety (UCDPS) was formed, and B. L. Fronebarger was appointed to the post of Director of Public Safety. With the advent of the UCDPS, the renamed Fire and Police Services Bureaus began cross training personnel as police officers, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians to be utilized by both bureaus.

Upon the retirement of S.R. Tarnowski in 1998, Donald Leasher served as Interim Fire Chief until June of 1999. Kenneth Collins was promoted to the position of Fire Chief in June of 1999. He served as the Fire Chief for ten years until his retirement in December 2009. During Chief Collins tenure he was instrumental in obtaining several grants to assist in the purchase of equipment, apparatus, and Fire Station #3.

In 1997, the Department purchased a Custom/E-One 1500 GPM pumper, at which time the 1978 Ford/Pirsch was retired, and the 1985 Ford/E-One was placed in reserve.

Fire Department

In May 2004, the Department of Public Safety was divided into two branches for primary focus of services. The Union City Fire Department became a separate division within the City at that time.

In November 2009, Donald Leasher served as the Interim Fire Chief until April 2010 when the Mayor and Council appointed him as the fifth Union City Fire Chief. Chief Leasher has been with the department since October 1992 serving as the Assistant Chief/Fire Marshal for the City.

The Union City Fire Department currently mans three fire stations and operates 2 engines, 1 75' quint, 1 – 100' aerial, 3 quick medical response units, and 1 command vehicle.

At the present, there are 51 members assigned to the Fire Department which include the Chief, Assistant Chief, four Battalion Chiefs, three Lieutenants, six Sergeants, firefighters, EMTs, paramedics, and one administrative assistant.