

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



Madeira Indian Hill Joint Fire District's Centennial

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Madeira Indian Hill Joint Fire District. It has a long and storied past and is celebrating the occasion in many ways throughout 2024.

Prior to 1924, firefighting was done by volunteers who responded by foot or on horseback in Madeira when the Presbyterian Church's (then at the corner of Miami and Laurel) bell rang, sounding the alarm. At first it was a bucket brigade, and later when Cincinnati Water Works extended service, the group had a trailer, hose, ladder, and some axes. Similarly in Indian Hill, when Armstrong Chapel's bell rang, neighbors rushed to burning structures saving lives and possessions, but usually not the building. In 1924 business owners and residents of Madeira organized for fire protection and loosely created a fire department. By 1927 the station house was purchased from the traction company at 6912 Miami Road.

Population expansion in Indian Hill resulted in newcomers seeking fire safety. Leonard Smith, William Goodall, and O. DeGray Vanderbilt recognized the existing department nearby and assisted in renaming it the Madeira and Vicinity Fire Company, an incorporation based on voluntary contributions. Reminders were sent out annually. There were financial difficulties during the Depression, but the department had a 1930 pumper truck and by 1937 a newer engine – a Dodge Ahrens Fox. In 1940 a second fire station was constructed at the southwest corner of Drake and Shawnee Run Roads. As the communities of Madeira and Indian Hill grew, additional equipment was purchased. Emergency medical service began in 1948 in a modified Chrysler limousine. Over time many changes have been made bringing EMS up to the standards of today. Nowadays, EMS is 80% of the job of the MIHJFD.

Apparatus, equipment, and staff have increased. Two-way radios were purchased in the 1950s. The Madeira station moved to its current location in 1962. Pagers for personnel were available after 1980. In 1985 the department was renamed the Madeira and Indian Hill Joint Fire District. There were several renovations of both stations. Most significantly Mr. & Mrs. Harold Thomas made major donations to create new stations in Madeira and Indian Hill, which were completed in 2016 and 2017 respectively.

Major fires have been fought. One loss of death occurred about 1952 when a fireman was electrocuted in Madeira. In 1937 the garage wing of the Albers estate on Shawnee Run Road burned down. The Meshewa Farm fire (LeBlond) on Given Road in 1977 destroyed the 34-room mansion. The 2007 Jaeger fire on Cunningham Road had a property loss of over \$1,000,000. Some firefighters were injured requiring hospital stays. The Decker fire on Cunningham in 2014 also caused substantial damage.

Current Chief Steve Oughterson (the ninth chief of the department) and his team have organized activities to commemorate the MIHJFD's 100-year history. One ongoing theme is 100 Acts of Kindness, which is kept in a register at the station. The first act to be recorded was the Rangers Hockey Tournament in April which benefitted a firefighter with cancer. Doing kind deeds for people, like changing flat tires or assisting the elderly with chores are such Acts. This caring attitude is typical of the organization, as the men and women of the department go the extra mile all the time. A blood drive was held in June. A flag recognizing 100 years of the department was designed, and it currently flies at both stations. A 100-year patch was produced for employees' shirts. A logo sticker was developed for distribution – it features a UC Bearcat with the caption "Ignite the Fight". All these things brought a greater awareness in the community of the history of the fire department.

The MIHJFD also participated in Independence Day parades this summer. Madeira's occurred on July 3rd and Indian Hill's was on the 4th. Banners announcing the 100th year were mounted on the firetrucks and spectators cheered as the fire engines passed. There will be another exhibit this fall. On October 5th the department will participate in Camargo Hunter Trials at Clippinger Field. Chief Oughterson arranged to borrow (from a museum in Indiana) the actual 1936 Dodge Ahrens Fox that once was used by the department and will display it there. The vintage fire truck will be decorated, and staff will create hors d'oeuvres and a signature beverage highlighting the MIHJFD's history to the "Bring to Share" gathering. This fun event is always well attended and will draw recognition to the people of the department who have loyally provided service, protection, and aid for an entire century. Plan to attend and celebrate this centennial.