

THE FIRE DEPARTMENT

In 1890 or 1891, a picnic was held in Bensenville to raise money for a small hand-operated fire engine. The equipment was used to fight fires at the Runge barn, the Bensenville Depot, and the Koehn barn. These structures were not saved, but the adjacent buildings were. It was apparent that trained fire fighters were required. On August 27, 1894, the Bensenville Volunteer Fire Department was organized with 21 charter members. The first meetings were held in rooms above Tiedemann's Store. Herman H. Korthauer was elected chief, Charles Martin, assistant chief, Frederick H. Wolkenhauer, engineer, Fred Elfring, secretary, and William L. Korthauer, treasurer. A constitution and bylaws were adopted. The following month, the first fire department picnic was held to raise money for equipment. The concessions included a wheel of fortune, a bar, and stands selling baby dolls, canes, and candy. The profit of \$74.89 was sufficient to buy a hose drying rack, raincoats for each member, and a padlock for the engine house with three dozen keys.

Frederick Wolkenhauer made a firebell of two triangular pieces of iron hung about nine inches apart, which gave the effect of a bell ringing when struck together. This bell was hung in a tower on the icehouse near Tiedemann's Store. Chief Korthauer ordered the bell rung continuously and as loudly as possible for a fire. It was rung twice, stopped, rung twice, stopped, and repeated for a fire drill. The members of the fire department would leave their work and race to the firehouse on hearing the bell. All the wells and cisterns in town were inspected and their location noted. In the event of fire, the cisterns were used as a source of water. The department investigated the possibility of building a ten barrel wooden tank on the old engine truck to be able to carry water to the fire.

The following year, the second fund raising picnic was held in Korthauer's Pine Grove on Park Street. A dance floor was built for the occasion and Japanese lanterns hung in the trees. An outdoor bowling alley was constructed. The pins and balls were kept in a box at the grove and served to entertain groups for a number of years. The 1896 picnic proceeds were used to purchase uniforms for all the members.

The men of Bensenville volunteered to be members of the department and were voted in by the membership. Originally, they were not paid for firefighting. The chief and other officers were elected by the members, and the results of these elections were passed on to the village board, who extended their customary approval. The duties of various positions of responsibility were set forth in the 1899 Fire Department Constitution and Bylaws. The chief was to go directly to the fire and decide how best it be fought, where the engine should be set, and check the nearest water supply. The assistant chief was to go to the engine house and see that the tank on the fire engine was charged with water and that it started to the fire as

quickly as possible. He was also directed to precede the engine to the fire, pick out the road for it, and carry a lantern at night. The engineer had general supervision of the engine and was responsible for putting chemical in the tank and having it in good operating condition. The hose captain had charge of the hose and cart, and the hook and ladder captain had charge of the hook and ladder truck and the men assigned to it. The pumper was drawn by horses, often the nearest team was pressed into service to pull the engine to the fire. The chief was empowered to command the services of any bystander to help fight the fire.

The fire department was trained and available, and so ministered to most local emergencies and tragedies. The organization was strong, close and proud, and very practical, and through the years developed into an efficient modern organization. New equipment was acquired as quickly as possible and new firefighting techniques adopted.

In 1895, the fire engine house was located at the alley facing Roosevelt Avenue between Center and Addison. The village board ordered the firehouse lined, as it must have been quite cold. Three years later, the engine house was located on Schwerdtfeger's property at the southeast corner of Green and Center.

In 1903, a bell tower was erected on railroad property on the east side of Center Street. The department had been meeting at the Gilde Hall, but they were forced to find new quarters when it burned October 30, 1903. When the new village hall was completed at York and Railroad, the fire engine and all the apparatus were moved to the new engine room on July 5, 1909. In 1922, the first motorized Reo, a combination pumper and ladder truck, was bought. An electric alarm system was installed and in 1930, a new fire siren was added to the bell tower.

A request was made to the village board by the fire department in 1926 that the firemen be paid for fighting fires. "In the past, we have been willing to give our services voluntarily, on account of the village being small and fires less frequent than they are at the present time, but now we feel the village large enough to create a fund which would take care of compensation of the men on duty." The village board decided that the fireman should be paid two dollars for the first hour and one dollar each extra hour for reporting to a fire. Each man was to be paid two dollars per drill. The volunteers turned most of their pay back into the organization to pay for the department's fire fighting equipment.

The village board ordered the fire department in 1937 not to take the equipment out of the village limits and leave the residents of Bensenville unprotected. A few weeks later, a house burned at the edge of the village, killing two children. The fire department went to the fire having decided that the order could be broken, but nothing could be done to save the children. In order to prevent a recurrence of this tragedy, the Rural Fire Protection League was organized. The volunteers who made up this group were

residents of the unincorporated areas around the village responsible for fighting fires outside the village limits. The chief of the Bensenville Volunteer Fire Department was chief of the Rural Fire Protection League also. The money which was raised at the carnivals was evenly divided between the two departments to buy equipment for their own needs. A 500 gallon pumper and ladder combination with a 450 gallon booster tank was purchased for the rural firemen's use. The old engine house was too small to house this truck, so the firemen spent several weekends enlarging the building. Proceeds from the carnivals were set aside to build a new fire station.

In 1949, the village and rural departments were combined to form the Bensenville Firemen's Association. The fire station at 15 North York was begun in 1950. Financed, planned, and owned by the firemen themselves, it provided storage for the equipment and apparatus, kitchen facilities, and a large hall which was available for rent and served as a congregating place for the firemen's social activities.

Bensenville's fire department has fought several large fires. In 1945, spontaneous combustion ignited the Milwaukee Road coal chute near the roundhouse about 5 a.m., on a cold November morning. The roof, 150 feet from the ground, was enveloped in flames when the fire department arrived. Hoses had to be laid atop nearby towers to reach above the burning roof, and the firemen had to chop through four inch planking to reach the burning coal inside the chute. They worked ten hours in cold wet weather to put out the fire and save the coal chute.

On Sunday, September 17, 1961, an airliner crashed near Irving Park Road, one minute after takeoff from O'Hare Field. The plane hit a 34,000 volt power line, struck a railroad embankment, and burst into flames. The Bensenville Fire Department arrived at the crash, which was in the southwest corner of the airport, ten minutes before any other equipment appeared. The pumpers carrying water were immediately used to put water on the burning tail section. The plane exploded twice while the firemen were attempting to put out the fire, and only when it was evident that all aboard were dead, did the firemen retreat from the flames. The Bensenville Fire Department was commended by a resolution in the Illinois House of Representatives for its efficiency in the emergency'. Since that crash, Chicago and most suburban departments have adopted combination tank and pumper equipment, which is capable of carrying water to the fire.

Two spectacular and dangerous fires were fought in 1963. On July 5, the building which had housed the hardware store in which the village had been incorporated in 1884, burst into flames. Ellmore's Flower Shop, the Main Liquor Store, Eleanor's Bake Shop, and Sport-N-Work Clothing Store were destroyed. The old building had been rebuilt several times and there were no fire walls separating the units. The combination of bake ovens, liquor, and flammable goods produced flames which could be seen for miles. At one point, the front window blew out, throwing glass across Main Street onto the

Milwaukee tracks. Michael A. Kudelas' house on Center Street was so close to the fire that firemen had to turn sideways to get between the two buildings. However, the Kudelas home was protected from damage by a foam spray. Forty-seven men from Bensenville, Wood Dale, and Addison fought the fire for five hours.


A month later on August 9, 1963, the townhouses under construction on Hamilton Street caught fire. The buildings were quite close together, and the fire spread from one unfinished building to another, so that the firemen were fighting a fire from both sides. One building collapsed, falling away from the firemen. Volunteer fireman Horace Langguth did not report back to the firehouse. He was found near the burned out area, his death attributed to a heart attack following his exertion fighting the fire. George Korthauer, Sr., retired in 1967 after serving fifty-two years in the department, thirty-one years as chief. Armin Korthauer, his brother, succeeded him as chief. Originally a volunteer department supported by donations, the fire department had become a tax supported body as a part of the fire protection district and function of the village government. From hand-drawn pumpers, the department had developed modern techniques of firefighting with new equipment they had helped design to fit their needs.

Martin Heinrich was appointed the first full-time fire chief under the civil service laws in 1970. "Villard Schoppe was appointed full-time assistant fire chief. There are six full-time fire department members and 29 volunteers. A year's training program by the department prepares the volunteers to serve as firemen. Chief Heinrich states that the department relies on volunteers, and their training must be in all phases of fire service before they can answer fire calls.

The Milwaukee roundhouse fire, in the early 1970's, involved the Bensenville Fire Department and departments from six other towns. Flammable materials stored in the roundhouse fed the flames of the wooden structure. The fire loss to the railroad was set at \$500,000. Shortly afterwards, the American Furnace Company factory burned in a large difficult fire at a loss of \$400,000. The Greek Orthodox Church, which had been the Immanuel Church built in 1924, burned in September of 1972, probably ignited by candles used in a Saturday morning service. Within a month, the fire department fought a house fire in the unincorporated area. Flames pouring out a window were seen by people going by in the early morning. The fire department found a difficult fire well established by the time they were called, but the occupant and the house were saved.


The current equipment of the Bensenville Fire Department includes three engines (86,88,89), a one hundred foot aerial tower (90), two ambulances (78,79) and two cars which serve as command vehicles. The fire district the Bensenville Fire Department serves comprises ten square miles. The department still maintains equipment that will carry water to a fire, because some areas of the district do not have fireplugs.

Bensenville Fire Department Member Rolls



Herman H. Korthauer	1894-1930	Louis Brettman	1899-1919
Fred Elfring	1894-1896	John Schwass	1899-1900
Charles Wellner	1894-1896	Ed Freie	1900-1912
Charles E. Martin	1894-1898	Henry Sprandel	1900
William L. Korthauer	1894-1896	R. Schmoldt	1900
Fred Koelker	1894-1931	W. F. Dunteman	1902-1938
Dick Cieszinsky	1894-1896	Carl Kirchoff	1903-1938
Frank Steiglider	1894-1896	Ernst Schultz	1903-1913
Fred H. Volberding	1894-1942	Louis Grobe	1903-1935
H. F. Sandhagen	1894-1903	John Schaettler	1903-1912
J. T. Tiedemann	1894-1933	Louis Schroeder	1905-1908
Julius Baucke	1894-1895	Victor Beck	1907-1926
Ernst Boldebuck	1894-1937	Ernst Stelkopf	1909-1920
John Huber	1894-1900	William Grobe	1911-1948
Alex Schmidt	1894-1896	Robert Pilgrim	1911-1942
F. J. Mess	1894-1911	George Runge	1913-1946
Henry Lagerhausen	1894-1896	Albert Raack	1913-1926
Emil Ott	1894-1896	Henry Holt	1914-1950
F. H. Wolkenhauer	1894-1926	Louis Blume	1914-1917
J. C. Geils	1894-1916	George L. Korthauer	1915-1967
Fritz Kropp	1894-1896	William Urban	1915-1918
Herman Baucke	1895-1903	Fred Ahlborn	1915-1935
Theodore Kock	1895-1896	Charles Perlberg	1915-1925
Fred Greinke	1895-1898	Joseph J. Jankers	1915-1916
Herman Schmoldt	1895-1895	Herman C. Brettman	1915-1917
Henry Thieman	1895-1910	Harry Geils	1915-1933
August Schwerdtfeger	1895-1915	Herman Kossacks	1917-1920
Ed Winkelman	1896-1896	E. J. Franzen	1918-1950
Gustav Gutsche	1896-1918	Dr. I. W. Riggins	1920-1922
Fred Schmidt	1896-1898	Harry Franzen	1920-1928
H. Finke	1896-1897	George Boldebuck	1920-1947
Fred Warnecke	1896-1903	Otto Herrs	1920-1937
H. L. Geils	1896	Harry Kolze	1920-1954
H. B. Marshall	1897-1930	William Ernsting	1921-1946
L. Moss	1897-1898	Herman Wagner	1921-1935
George E. Franzen	1897-1926	Alwin Mahler	1921-1961
August Freie	1898-1907	Julius G. Frey	1922-1947
Charles Olhaber	1899-1925	Herman Beyers	1922
George Struckman	1899-1903	Otto Grobe	1929-1936

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W. C. Olhaber	1929-1969	Clarence Wilkie	1955-1959
Albert Kolze	1930-1973	Robert Geils	1956-1961
Armin Korthauer	1935-1970	Willard Schoppe	1957-1994
Vernon Franzen	1936-1951	Frank Gough	1957-1972
Walter Lauman	1937-1953	Horace Langguth	1958-1963
Arthur Seiber	1937-1939, 1948-1950, 1957-1961	Richard Thomas	1959-1965
Fred Koebbeman	1937-1943	Leonard Malina	1959-1963
Albert Born	1937-1951	Fred Sieber	1960-1974
Arnold Grobe	1938-1958	Harold Marshall	1961-1972
Wilbur Shebeck	1941-1945	James Ehrhardt	1961-1973
Martin Westby	1942-1947	Bert Severson	1961-1969
Cecil Poor	1942-1946	Joseph Martyniuk	1961-1986
Ed Heinrich	1943-1963	William Keller, Jr.	1961-1970
George Grobe	1943-1948	John Lill	1963-1974
Rudolph Laho, Jr.	1945-1968	Albert Richert	1963-1979
Joseph Chaban, Jr.	1946-1948	Steve Heike	1963-1971
Ed Jorns	1947-1968	James Garry	1963-1986
William Webb	1947-1950	Dean Hammersley	1963-1966
Walter Kehoe	1947-1975	Charles Simon	1963-1980
Dayton McIntyre	1948-1963	George Freda	1966-1979
John Spanley	1948-1952	William Heinrich	1966-1979
Marvin Rusteberg	1948-1974	Al Quinn	1968-1973
John Geils	1950-1963	Norman Thompson	1968-1979
Roy Imwie	1950-1954	Herbert Hasse	1969-1970
Harold Runge	1950-1970	Gregory DuPre	1970-1984
Erwin Luebking, Jr.	1951-1957 1959-1968	Kenneth Majeska	1970-1973
Martin Heinrich	1951-1988	Thomas Flanagan	1970-1978
Gerold Goble	1952-1975	Gerald Seiden	1971-1978
Delbert Kolze	1952-1971	Chester Luby	1971-1984
Herbert Grischow	1952-1960	Bernard McCauley	1971-1993
Joseph Chaban	1952-1954	James Dena	1971-1983
John Berry	1955-1966	Rick D. Willey	1972-1992
Robert Standard	1955-1972	Daniel Jackson	1972-1978
Allen Kissane	1955-1972	Stanley Jakalski	1973-2007
Charles Jones	1955-1957	Mitchel Srail	1973-1984
Edwin Piepenbrink	1955-1976	Leonard Swintek	1973-1990
		Raymond Batista	1973-1978
		Joseph Albert	1973-1981
		Thomas Ryan	1974-1988

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William Barr	1974-1988	David Trent	1982-1985
Michael Puntillo	1974-1976	Steve Long	1982-1983
Rick Furguele	1974-2001	Paul Kintzel	1983-1987
Ronald Schultz	1974-1988	Robert Broderick	1983-1985
Edward Joncours	1975-1979	Len Swintek Jr.	1983-2005
Ronnie Gough	1975-1984	Michael Buenger	1983-2005
Kevin Brennan	1975-1985	Hank Mandziara	1983-1993
Anthony Scandora	1975-1993	Michael Minow	1983-2008
Lawrence Kochan	1975-1984	Ray Dlouhy	1985-1994
Scott Eickelman	1976-2005	Rick Velinski	1985-1993
Stephen Foster	1976-1978	Dan Focht	1985-1987
William Praust	1978-1986	Jay Daly	1985-1991
Dennis Alund	1978-1981	Larry Karp	1985-
Charles Washer	1979-2007	Tim StClair	1987-1998
Ronald Lofton	1978-2010	Mike Swintek	1987-2007
James Ivetic	1979-2008	Ken Duda	1987-2008
Ron Nootbaar	1979-2008	Dale Dolezil	1987-1996
Charles Stokes	1979-2008	Charlie Johnson	1988-
Randel Jaeger	1979-1984	Ken George	1990-1993
Steve Serio	1979-2008	Dennis McCauly	1990-1992
Jack Barba	1978-2005	Bryon Polzin	1990-1995
Michael Hain	1979-1984	Tony Blezien	1990-1994
Thomas Waszak	1979-2008	Richard Tam	1991-
James Walsh	1979-1989	Tom Crowe	1993-1998
Jeffrey Schuck	1980-1984	Jim Ross	1993-1997
Guy Trayling	1980-2000	John Lasare	1993-1995
Kevin Herrick	1980-	Chris Conforti	1993-1996
Michael Batdorff	1980-2009	Rob Carson	1995-2007
George Obradovich	1980-1998	John Davis	1995-2000
John Hamill	1980-2001	Dan Mckernan	1995-1999
Norman Kaiser	1981-1985	Anthony O'Donnell	1995-2000
John Chevas	1981-1983	Michael Panos	1995-2000
Steve Kennelly	1982-1985	Rich Trevino	1995-1999
Donald Tessler	1985-	Bill Wegman	1995-1999
Chester Luby III	1982-1988	Hector Arista	1995-2000
William Zalas	1982-1985	Hyon Kim	1995-1997

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Daniel Pearson	1998-2004	Douglas Plumeri	2003-2007
Brian Ruscitti	1998-2000	Angel Reyes	2003-2007
Joseph O'Tool	1998-2000		2008-
Arturo Carrera	1998-2000	Andrew Seibel	2003-2007
Ryan Savers	1998-2000	Jeanette Gonzalez	2005-2007
Thomas Novak	1998-2000	Sara Stephen	2005-2007
Thomas Tolin	1998-2007	Alison Nicholas	2007-
James Tullis	1998-2000	Chris Sandilands	2008-
Nicole Interante	1998-2000	Andrew McGowan	2008-
Dale Navigato	1998-2007	Adam Lager	2008-
Michael Small	1998-2000	James Murphy	2008-
Mark Lamb	1998-2007	John Cardoni	2008-
Richard Waychoff	2008-	James Boyk	2009-
Richard Steiniger	1998-2000	Eugene Martin	2009-
Irving Mickens	1998-2000	Adam Sochacki	2009-
Henry travino	1998-2004	Nevin Hahn	2009-
	2006		
Thomas Larocca	2001-2006		
Richard Sweetman	2002-2007		

BENSENVILLE FIRE CHIEFS

Herman H. Korthauer	1894-1903
E. M. Boldebuck	1903-1912
Herman H. Korthauer	1912-1915
George Runge	1915-1916
E. M. Boldebuck	1916-1919
Louis Grobe	1922-1924
George Korthauer	1919-1922
E. M. Boldebuck	1924-1928
George Korthauer	1928-1936
George Boldebuck	1936-1947
George Korthauer	1947-1967
Armin Korthauer	1967-1970
Martin Heinrich	1970-1979
Leonard White	1979-1982
Willard Schoppe	1982-1993
Jack Barba	1993-2005
Michael Spain	2005-

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