

Celebrating Vestal's 190th Anniversary 1823-2013

No. 14—"Help is on the Way"

...a comforting statement to those in peril. The well-trained, dedicated men and women who provide Fire, Police, and Emergency services to Vestal residents and surrounding communities are always ready to answer your call for help.

For many years volunteers from the town of Vestal joined their counterparts in the town of Union to provide fire protection for both communities. As the industrial growth brought more people to Union and Vestal, it became apparent that Vestal needed its own fire protection. And so at the October 24, 1921 meeting in the "Old" Vestal Grange, the first Vestal Volunteer Fire Department was organized.

The Vestal Fire Corporation was officially incorporated on January 3, 1922. Company No. 1 volunteer firemen held dances, dinners, and solicited residents to raise the funds to purchase the first piece of firefighting equipment at a cost of \$3500. Two years later, in 1924, they built the first fire station on north Main Street at a cost of \$11,114.00. The station had a large meeting room on the second floor where the town board met. The building would eventually share space with the Vestal Police Department.

As early as 1957, the search for a new location for Company No. 1 began. The Ford property on the east side of Main Street next to the former Intermediate School, aka the Red Building, was a primary candidate. The old one room school across Main Street that was being used as the Town Hall was another. It would be the Kretchmar property to the north of the existing station that would be purchased for the new station.



Meanwhile, the population continued to increase, spreading over the town's 52 square miles. Sixty-five men from Vestal Center met on January 25, 1938 to form volunteer fire company No. 2 that would focus on the southern portion of the town. With a donation of land on Sugar Creek Road from William and Lenora Fairbrother, the men made an appeal to the Town Board for funds to erect a fire station. At the February 3, 1938 Town Board meeting, \$600 was appropriated to build the Vestal Center station. An additional \$250 was appropriated in March to make it a two-story building. The men provided their labor to construct the building. Vestal Fire Company No. 2, Inc. was officially incorporated on June 2, 1938.

Although a second bay was added to accommodate bigger trucks, Sugar Creek flows directly behind the building leaving no room for further expansion. The property on the south side of Sugar Creek, where the Vestal Centre Creamery once stood, was purchased from Clare A. Stark, Jr. for a larger fire station. Architect Robert J. Rolloson designed the new \$175,000 station in 1967. An additional \$54,000 would be spent before the October 13, 1968 dedication. The station bears a plaque commemorating Chief Ralph D. Transue who died in the line of duty November 23, 1941.

Shortly after WWII ended, a third group of volunteers organized Company No. 3 in Ross Corners. Their firehouse was built along Tracy Creek Road on land donated by Chester, Harry, and Estella Harrington. By December 3, 1945 they were officially incorporated as Vestal Fire Company No. 3, Inc. Seventeen years later in 1962 the land where the former 2-room Ross Corners School stood was purchased from the Vestal Central School District for \$60,000. A new station on Old Owego Road replaced the undersized original building that had fallen into disrepair. It was dedicated on September 20, 1975.

Men from the Willow Point Rod and Gun Club organized Vestal's fourth volunteer fire company in 1948. They immediately purchased a 1923 American LaFrance pumper from Binghamton for \$207. Unfortunately they had nowhere to store it so they appealed to the nearby Hazard Lewis Dairy for permission to store the truck in one of their barns. On November 7, 1949 they were officially incorporated as the Willow Point Volunteer Fire Company, Inc. Land for their firehouse was purchased along the Vestal Parkway between North Jensen and Earl Roads in 1952. As with each of the other three stations, additional room was needed for equipment and trucks

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which led to the dedication of an enlarged firehouse on October 6, 1984.

Between 1922 and 1945 Vestal had four volunteer fire companies strategically located throughout the town to provide fast, efficient service in the event of an emergency. The four companies remained as separate organizations within the same fire district until July 14, 1952 when the four companies joined to become the Vestal Fire Department.

It was a resolution offered at the July 16, 1946 Town Board meeting that established the Vestal Police Department which initially consisted of one full time officer, Donald Knapp, and one part time officer, Martin Neily. Former Navy pilot Donald Knapp was replaced by Endicott patrolman Albert Decker in 1947. Their primary responsibility was the policing and protection of the school population and property. A March 4, 1947 photo shows Patrolman Knapp standing beside the newly purchased patrol car costing \$1200. The siren and special light were to be added later.

Records show that during the first six months of 1947, the police vehicle traveled 6789 miles while investigating 9 accidents, answering 57 calls for service, and making 27 arrests. Mrs. Arthur Wilcox became the first police woman in the Triple Cities when she joined the Vestal force in September 1954 as a part-time school-crossing guard.

Vestal had looked to Endicott for ambulance service until the Vestal Chamber of Commerce spearheaded a campaign to provide Vestal with an ambulance to be operated by the Police Department. The October 11, 1956 issue of the Vestal News ran a photo of the new \$6600 ambulance that had been purchased with contributions from house-to-house solicitations and local business organizations. The white 1956 Oldsmobile ambulance was a gift to the town from the Vestal Chamber of Commerce. On October 8, one day after the ambulance was delivered, the Town Board met in special session to consider expanding the police force to operate the ambulance.



Four hundred residents had joined the Vestal Chamber of Commerce in asking the town of double the three man force. In 1957 the ambulance responded to 91 calls, by 1966 the number of calls had increased to 364.



Leo Green, a former City of Binghamton detective, was appointed the department's first Police Chief on September 12, 1960. In late 1962 "Caesar", a two-year old black German shepherd joined the force under the control of Patrolmen Roy Fundis and Richard Garey.

From 1947 to 1967 Vestal was home to a State Police substation on the south side of the Parkway in a building most recently occupied by Silver Image. The new barracks was the headquarters of Zone No. 3 which patrolled the whole Binghamton area. Sgt. Edgar D. Crosswell led troopers from Vestal's substation in the raid on what was called a "criminal syndicate gathering" at the Apalachin home of Joseph Barbara, Sr. Sixty men attending the gangland convention were rounded up. By the end of 1967 the thirty-seven state troopers and their equipment had outgrown the Vestal substation and moved to a new location in Kirkwood.

Everyone dreams of something, Terry Beishline dreamed of starting a volunteer emergency service. He and five others who shared his dream (Rich Williams, Dave Bennett, Brian Mather, Chuck and Cheryl Greene) along with community support established the Vestal Volunteer Emergency Squad (VVES) in 1975. At first the squad answered calls with the Police Department but by January 1, 1976 responding crews consisted of two Squad members and a Police officer driver.

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After completing an emergency medical technician (EMT) course, the Squad received New York State Certification in April 1976 which allowed them to operate with Squad drivers. With the help of the Union Volunteer Emergency Squad (UVES), VVES started Advanced Life Support service in August 1979.

VVES squad members worked out of two small rooms in Town Hall until the former Twin Orchards Community Center building on Myrtle Street was renovated as the squad's new home. Over the years the VVES has incorporated changes that have strengthened their organization for the good of the community. During the September 2011 flood several areas of Vestal were particularly hard hit including the VVES headquarters which required major renovation.



Sources and additional information about these organizations are found at the Historian's office.