

Melrose Park Fire Department

The Melrose Park Fire Department began as a volunteer organization chartered on July 11, 1895 with ten firefighters. They used a two-wheel tank and hose cart with a hand pump that could be drawn by horse or manpower. At the time of a fire signal, the first person there with a horse received \$5. It wasn't until 1913 that the Department got its first motorized fire vehicle. The first officers of the department were Fire Marshal Gustav Klug, Captain Andrew McAuley and Lieutenant Ernest Bailey,



In 1932, Anthony Prignano was appointed Melrose Park's first fire chief. Chief Prignano served for 35 years and guided the department's growth from a small, but dedicated, volunteer brigade to a department staffed by equally dedicated, full-time firefighters. At the time of his retirement, Chief Prignano was the longest serving Fire Chief in Illinois' history.

According to fire department manpower regulations, the Melrose Park Fire Department's roster is larger than needed for a population of 25,000 residents. The larger number of firefighters is due to Melrose Park's daytime population that exceeds 50,000 people working around the village in its various industries and stores.

The original fire station was located at 706 North 18th Avenue, where it remained until 1994 when the building was demolished in order to accommodate the expansion of Melrose Park School. In 1958, Station 2 opened at 15th and Bloomingdale Avenues as part of the department's ongoing efforts to provide protection to the expanding industrial park and new residential subdivisions along the North Avenue corridor. Station 2 also housed the fire department's administrative offices until 1974 when Station 3 was opened at 3601 West Lake Street, where the Fire Department administrative offices are now based.

On June 13, 1967, Anthony Zito became Melrose Park's second fire chief. Chief Zito served in this capacity until his retirement in April 1972. On

April 1, 1972, Fire Captain Alfred Mueller was sworn in as fire chief. Chief Mueller oversaw the building and opening of Station 3 in 1974. This third station at 36th Avenue and Lake Street enhanced Melrose Park's ability to offer prompt and effective fire and rescue services to residents and businesses on the village's west side. The addition of Station 3 also allowed the village of Melrose Park to realize its goal of increasing its staff of full-time firefighters by one-third.

Upon Chief Mueller's retirement in 1985, Fire Captain John Anderson (the department's first training officer) was sworn in as fire chief.

In 1987, Fire Captain Anthony "Rusty" Maggio, Sr., became fire chief and served the department for another 10 years until his retirement.

In 1997, Fire Captain James Cernauske was sworn in as fire chief and served until his retirement in 2005.

Richard A. Beltrame was sworn in as fire chief in 2005 and is Melrose Park's current director of the Fire Department. Rick was sworn in as a firefighter/EMT in 1981 and rose through the ranks of the Melrose Park Fire Department, serving as lieutenant, captain and assistant chief before assuming his role as fire chief and now director.

Over the years the Melrose Park Fire Department matured into one of the finest suburban departments in the area. From the humble beginnings as an all-volunteer department, the Fire Department is now a fully professional team.