

Cottage Grove Volunteer Fire Department



Photo by Roger Hamilton

By Pete Wicklund

Long a crossroads community, be it by trail, rail or highway, Cottage Grove has seen a lot of transformation in its 140-year history. From agriculture center, to quiet bedroom community of Madison, Cottage Grove lately has started to emerge as its own hub of suburban commerce.

Just 10 minutes east of Madison, directly east of Monona and McFarland, and south of rapidly growing Sun Prairie, the greater Cottage Grove community still maintains aspects of all its vestiges – rural, suburban and natural. There is an old business district along Highway N (Main Street), a newer commercial business district along Highway BB (Cottage Grove Road) and, at the north end of town, there is recent corporate development including the new six-story Summit Credit Union headquarters at I-94

and Highway N.

The Village of Cottage Grove, first settled in the 1880s and incorporated in 1924, has a population of about 6,200. The Town of Cottage Grove has just shy of 4,000 residents. For 110 years, the community has received fire protection services from the Cottage Grove Volunteer Fire Department. The department first operated out of a single-stall wood building that still exists as a cherished landmark at Fireman's Park in the heart of the village.



The department would call two other buildings home until 1999, when it moved to its current quarters at the Cottage Grove Public Safety Building. The building housed the Police Department until 2005, but today it's shared between the Fire Department and Deer-Grove EMS, which also serves neighboring Deerfield.

Even with increased development in the area and a diversified assortment of residential, multi-family, agricultural, recreational and industrial properties to protect, Cottage Grove F.D. manages to handle its responsibilities with a 36-member all-volunteer force and four active honorary members. There is no shift staffing and members are toned out as needed by pager and IamResponding.

The department responded to 265

calls in 2019, 306 in 2018. Part of the reason for the heavy 2018 volume was a construction project on Interstate 90 that reduced traffic lanes and resulted in several crashes.

The department's service area encompasses 48 square miles. In addition to the village and Town of Cottage Grove, the department serves a portion of the Town of Pleasant Springs. The department is responsible for 16 miles of Interstate 90 in Pleasant Springs, about four miles of I-94 in Cottage Grove and a section of Highway 12/18.

Included in that territory is a central control center for American Transmission Company, a Dane County Highway Department shop, the county medical examiner's office and backup 911 center at the station, a landmark Co-op propane and grain site, a Hydrite chemical plant, four schools and several nursing homes and assisted living facilities.

Recreational amenities include a starting terminus for the Glacier-Drumlin State Trail and a portion of Lake Kegonsa State Park.

All-volunteer force

Membership has had its peaks and valleys over the years. When Nick Archibald first came on as department chief in 2018, it was probably the lowest it had been, at just 28 members. But last year the department had "a huge increase," picking up 12 people. Five of those have since moved on.

But Archibald, a 14-year veteran of the department, notes that the department is holding its own with daytime response. Several members work in town; there are a couple of members who work in public safety on third shift and are available for fire calls during the daytime; and, lately, daytime availability has



Members of the Cottage Grove Fire Department pose for a Group Photo Photo by Todd Rueter

been augmented by some members working at home due to COVID.

Cottage Grove does have automatic aid for structure fires. From the north, it's Sun Prairie Fire that responds, while Deerfield comes in from the east, and if it's down near the Town of Pleasant Springs, then it's McFarland F.D. which helps out. "We can easily get a truck out during the day," Archibald said. "If it's a bigger one, we'll rely on some more mutual aid."

for much of the apparatus. Tenders and the old brush truck are owned exclusively by the town.

The municipalities also share vehicle maintenance and fuel costs and utility and insurance costs for the station. The fire company owns the antique parade truck, department ATV and its trailer as well as some of the smaller tools.

The department runs on a modest



Cottage Grove firefighters battle a Garbage truck fire.

Photo by Roger Hamilton

The department is officially a private company that receives funding and oversight from a joint fire committee made up with representatives from the town and the village. The municipalities share operational costs

annual budget of \$111,000. Members receive no pay for calls and just a modest stipend for attending monthly drills and performing apparatus/equipment maintenance inspection

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“I think the members here are really proud of what they do,” said Asst. Chief April Hammond, a 19-year member of the department and the third generation of her family to serve Cottage Grove F.D. “I think they try really hard and just like every other volunteer they are here for the community.”

Lt. Erik Severson, who oversees the department’s Fire Prevention Division and handles the bulk of the department’s fire inspections, does receive compensation from the municipalities for inspecting. His regular job, in the ER at St. Mary’s Hospital in Janesville, offers him flexibility to conduct the inspections Severson has served the department for more than a quarter century and is a second-generation member.

The chief is elected by the membership and officers are appointed by the chief. As noted, Archibald, an HVAC mechanic by training, has been chief since 2018. Previous chief Bruce Boxrucker was with the department for more than 36 years and was chief for 22 of those. He retired in 2017.

COVID impacts fundraiser

Traditionally the department augments its budget with funds raised at its Firemen’s festival, which up until 2020 had been held annually over Father’s Day weekend since 1931. Like so many events this past year, the pandemic caused the festival last summer to be canceled.

Archibald and Hammond noted that several people in the community realized how the loss of the festival would affect the department’s goals to purchase extra equipment and gear and as a result, the department received several checks in the mail.

“I think the community really came together knowing it was hard for us not to have it this year,” Hammond said.



*Structure Fire on HwyMM in the Town of Cottage Grove
Photo by Rachel Scott*

The department was able to carry out a smaller fundraiser last year — its annual corned beef and cabbage dinner. The dinner took place in March the day before schools were shut down in the state. The department offered a drive-up format for the event.

A mix of calls

With several major highways and interstates in its jurisdiction, crash calls typically accounted for much of the department’s call volume, although the department the past couple of years has seen several fire calls added into the mix.

November is when the department does its annual extrication training. Archibald notes that the department usually gets about 10 cars to work on. This past fall, a training scenario had cars resting on Jersey barriers, the concrete walls that divide construction lanes.

Extrication tools have been carried on the department’s Engine 4 and the department’s heavy rescue was second-due for crash calls. But the department has also equipped its new brush truck with a set of

battery-powered tools and that rig is now first out for crashes.

Recent significant calls include a major house fire on Sept. 14 on

Highway BB. Another major house fire was fought in 2019 on Highway MN. The department also responded with its ladder and engine to the July 2018 Sun Prairie Downtown gas explosion.

While Cottage Grove F.D. does not provide EMS services, they do assist Deer-Grove EMS from time to time on PNB calls and when there is a need for a driver.

But department members keep up on CPR skills, which proved valuable during a call last August.

A motorist drove up to the station with a PNB passenger in his car. Luckily, the department happened to be having its officer meeting that night. Alerted by the driver’s honking the car’s horn, department members went to work. Deer-Grove EMS crews were not in the station at the time.

“We actually got a save out of it,” Archibald noted. In fact, Hammond said the patient was reported to be talking and sitting up within an hour.

But when the page was dispatched with the address of the fire station, nearly the entire department showed up, thinking the worse that something had happened to a fellow member.

With its rapid-response brush/crash truck in service, the department is next looking at replacing Engine 3, which is nearing 25 years of service. The Fire Commission has approved purchasing a replacement this year with delivery expected in 2022. Archibald said the department has already speced out what it wants and has obtained prices. The rig will be a

pumper tanker, with a 2,000-gallon tank and a large-volume pump.

“When we have rural calls, we’ll go out the door with that first,” said Archibald.

Meanwhile, recruitment and retention are continuing to be addressed. The department recently received a Safer Grant and part of those funds will be used to replace the sign outside the station with an LED message sign that will be used for recruitment. The sign will also be used to celebrate and recognize “who we are and who we have on the department,” said Hammond.

The department also plans to send out flyers to every household in Cottage Grove once a year to inform residents how the department operates and that they are looking for volunteers.

Department officers:

Nick Archibald, Chief

April Hammond, Assistant Chief

Jess Robinson, Assistant Chief

Mark Kudrna, Captain

Lance Severson, Captain

Jason Helgeland, Lieutenant

Erik Severson, Lieutenant

Jason Kudrna, Lieutenant



The full Bay area as seen from above.



Chief Nick Archibald poses with the 1950 American LaFrance GMC Pumper

Apparatus:

L1 — 2003 E-One Platform Ladder, 95-foot stick, 2,000 GPM Hale pump, 300-gallon water tank, 10-gallon foam tank with a foam-pro injection system.

E3 — 1996 Custom Fire Peterbilt Pumper, 1500 GPM 2 stage Waterous pump, 990-gallon water tank, 20-gallon foam tank with a foam-pro injection system.

E4 — 2008 Pierce Contender Pumper, 1500 GPM Waterous pump, 1,000-gallon water tank, 20-gallon foam tank with a foam-pro injection system.

T1 — 2000 Monroe Fire Peterbilt Tender, 450 GPM pump, 2,100-gallon water tank

T2 — 1997 Custom Fire Peterbilt Tender, 450 GPM pump, 3,650-gallon water tank

S1 — 1998 Custom Fire Peterbilt Squad, On board cascade system with air fill containment system.

B1 — 2020 Midwest Fire Ford F-550 Brush Truck, 400 GPM pump, 400-gallon water tank, 12-gallon foam tank with Trident foam mate system.

UTV 1 — 2019 Polaris Ranger XP900, Kimtek pump/rescue skid, 65 GPM pump, 70-gallon water tank

Parade Truck — 1950 American LaFrance GMC Pumper

Cottage Grove Community



Cottage Grove is a suburb of Madison with a population of 6,904. It is considered one of the best places to live in Wisconsin.

Cottage Grove is a safe, friendly, and attractive community for businesses, neighbors, and families to live, learn, work, play, and enjoy the richness and opportunities of a growing village.

Many families and young professionals live in Cottage Grove. The public schools are highly rated.

Both our residents and visitors enjoy our many excellent parks and attractions.

Explore everything this area has to offer, from activities and attractions, to fairs and festivals, there’s something here for everybody!

Come visit us in Cottage Grove for your next Wisconsin vacation.

(Information from Cottage Grove Community Guide)

PHOTO GALLERY

Courtesy of Cottage Grove F.D.



A wildland training burn in March of last year.

photo by Jason Kudrna



Cottage Grove F.D., Deerfield F.D. and Deer Grove EMS pose at a training burn.
Photo by Roger Hamilton



A training burn in Sept. 2019 on West Star Road.



A wildland training burn in March 2020 in Town of Cottage Grove .
Photo by April Hammond



Captain Mark Kudrna at a training burn.



Cottage Grove firefighter doing hose testing.

Note: WSFA recommends practicing social distancing and mask wearing.