

# DEPARTMENT PROFILE

# Iola and Rural Fire Department

*By Eric Johnson*

*Photography by Fred Loomis*





# IOLA AND RURAL FIRE DEPARTMENT





## Iola & Rural Fire Department & Ambulance Service

When you hear the word Iola, one thing that may come to your thoughts is the annual car show that takes place there. But there is much more that takes place in the quaint town that is settled in the middle of our state. And that is the business of the Iola & Rural Fire Department & Ambulance Service.

Shortly after Wisconsin became a state in 1848, the region around present-day Waupaca County began to attract lots of settlers and soon the life of the Village of Iola started to take shape. The newcomers from mainly Switzerland and Norway took advantage of the rich natural

resources and before long a dam was erected on the Little Wolf River which helped to support a new lumber mill so the immigrants could make use of the seemingly endless supply of towering white pine trees that were present.

As more buildings sprouted up in the village, a need to form an organized fire brigade to protect them was soon realized. Like how many fire departments across the state got their humble beginnings, citizens began to assemble equipment to help fight fires. On October 6th, 1896, The Iola Volunteer Fire Company was officially created.

Jumping ahead 127 years, the Iola & Rural Fire Department & Ambulance Service responds to fires in the Village

of Iola and also to four nearby townships; Iola, Helvetia, Harrison, and New Hope. The response area for EMS also takes them into the areas around the towns of Scandinavia and St. Lawrence. The financial support to the department from the surrounding areas is based off a per population system.

While standing in the middle of the apparatus bays of the firehouse, you can immediately get a sense of the pride that exists from the members of the department. Standing guard overhead of the rigs is an American flag. High on the walls, turnout gear and equipment from the past is displayed to remember the efforts of former members. On each of the fire trucks is a decal that says, "Honoring America's Bravest 9-11-01, We Will Never Forget" and inscribed on the sides of the two ambulances is "In God We Trust". In addition, Chief Joe Barden mentioned that a group picture and photos of each member will be going up in the main hallway of the station in the very near future.

Another sample of the pride the members of the Iola & Rural Fire Department & Ambulance Service possess is the number of members they have (over 50 total). Roughly



*Firefighters Brody Fischer, Greg Duescher, Hayden Vomberg, and Nikki Olson sitting in Rescue 925 waiting to depart for training.*



*Firefighter Chuck Fritz mans the dispatch office.*





*Chief Joe Barden*

half of them are firefighters and half are EMS with a handful that wear two hats. Whichever hat is worn, they work side by side each other. "Every time they (fire) turn their wheels, we (ambulance) turn our wheels," stated Carrie Snyder, who holds the position of EMS Captain and business manager for the department. The fire department responds to all car accidents that the ambulance responds to no matter what township it may be in to provide extra manpower and equipment in case extrication is required.

The two sides of the department have a need to work together harmoniously because for a week in July every year, the normally quiet, sleepy village transitions to anything but that during the annual Iola Car Show. According to the website, the show attracts over 120,000 attendees to look at the 2,500



*EMT's Becky Graham, Deb Barton, and Ashlie Edminster working on a patient during training.*



*Two firefighters tend to a patient during a mass casualty training.*



*Volunteers helping as accident victims for mass casualty training*



vintage cars and 4,000 swap spaces. Somehow, there are 1,600 campsites in the area for participants to relax at during the show. The Iola Car Show taxes the department, but they have an Operational Plan to manage the chaos. "It is the only time of the year that the station is staffed 24/7," stated Chief Barden. "We have 5 or 6 campers parked behind the station and volunteers from our department and beyond can sleep there during their shift," he explained. There is a large influx of EMS calls, gas leaks from the vintage cars, out of control campfires, minor mva's, and other environmental issues leading up to and during the three-day event.

The Iola Car Show may produce the largest amount of calls, but it doesn't necessarily produce the single largest calls. That one occurred on June 20th, 1999, Father's Day that year, paged out at 6:10 p.m. for a possible fire at a business called Grandpa's Still. The relatively small fire developed into a conflagration and a backdraft that spew particles of glass seemingly everywhere. The fire consumed seven businesses, over 1/3 of the entire downtown, before being brought under control by creating a fire break to the buildings with a backhoe. The fire would likely have been much worse if that tactic were not deployed due to the commonly shared party walls, attics and basements!



### *The Fathers Day fire 1999*

*The fire occurred before MABAS 142 was formed. Mutual aid to Iola came from Scandinavia, Waupaca, Fremont, Weyauwega, Mukwa, New London, Clintonville, Marion, Manawa, Amherst and Plover fire departments. The fire drained the municipal water supply in the water towers. Thankfully Iola has an ample supply of water in the dammed up Little Wolf River that creates Iola Lake.*

### **The Iola & Rural Fire Department & Ambulance Service responds with:**

- A805- 2018 Braun
- A806- 2010 Braun
- Tender 922- 2007 Sterling
- Engine 924- 2012 Pierce
- Engine 926- 1993 Pierce
- Rescue 925- 1998 Freightliner
- Brush 923- 2002 Ford 350
- Squad 927- 2019 Ford 250
- Squad 921- 2019 Ford 150

The squads are used for pulling the departments UTV's for medical and fire related responses.



*EMT Paula Weber receives training from EMT Laura Fritz in the Ambulance.*



*Mass casualty training simulation 'Car vs Bicycle' accident.*



*Firefighters removing the windshield of a vehicle for training in extrication.*





*Iola Fire Department's partial crew prior to mass casualty training.*

The enthusiasm to be involved with the department is contagious. Five firefighters with the department are going to be attending a new hybrid Emergency Medical Technician course with Mid-State Technical College. Even more impressive is the feat of Mackenzie Woyak. Mackenzie is the daughter of

member Jason Woyak. She graduates from high school this year and has to wait until after her 18th birthday yet to accept her Firefighter I certification from the state that she has already completed!

If you don't have any plans yet for Saturday, October 7th, the members

of the Iola & Rural Fire Department & Ambulance Service would like to see you at their annual raffle and fundraiser event. Talk to the firefighters and EMS folks there and maybe you can lend a hand alongside them at the 2024 Iola Car Show.

## *Testimonial*



*The Iola Fire Department is a huge asset to Iola and the surrounding communities. They are dedicated, reliable and hard-working individuals, and I thank them so much for being the finest.*

*Jennifer Schustek  
President, Village of Iola*

