

Harris Township and fire protection

By Kenneth E. (Ken) Lindsay, Harris Township Trustee

If a primary responsibility of townships is to provide fire protection, why isn't there an entity named the Harris Township Fire Department?

It's a fair bet that most people think the fire department that would be dispatched to their home is pretty important. That department also protects businesses, responds to car accidents, handles suspected COVID-19 cases, and addresses various hazards. In Indiana, in places where a city does not exist, fire protection is the responsibility of the local township.

As a refresher, there are 13 townships in St. Joseph County, with Harris Township (HT) located in the northeast corner. "Granger" is not a city, and while the City of Mishawaka extends into parts of Harris Township, there are plenty of places outside city limits. Unsure where you fit? If your address contains five numbers, you're not in the city.

The township saw a lot of change over the past few decades. Not too long ago it was mostly rural, with many farm fields and a volunteer fire department. While the City of South Bend's population shrank, Granger's grew rapidly, fueled in large part by new housing subdivisions. Such growth can put stress on services like fire protection, and the nature of government finances can complicate funding them. During the height of the growth, the Harris Township Fire Department was funded by an emergency loan process.

In 2010, Harris Township joined two other townships in a fire protection "territory." The state-sanctioned model provides for one entity to serve multiple government units, in this case (east to west) Harris, Clay and German townships, along with the towns of Indian Village and Roseland. Harris Township holds two seats on the Clay Fire Territory's Fire Commission, a five-person board that provides leadership and oversight. Harris board member Jeff Broadwick and Trustee Ken Lindsay are serving in those roles.

The Clay Fire Territory (CFT) is managed day-to-day by Clay Township, thus the name. Under the direction of Fire Chief Timm Schabbel, CFT is responsible for fighting fires plus administrative functions including hiring, procuring equipment and technology, managing fire station operations, securing insurance, and processing payroll. Two of the territory's five fire stations are in Harris Township, at the corners of Elm and 23, and Bittersweet and Anderson Roads.

A major challenge is the lack of city water, and therefore fire hydrants in HT. (For a similar reason, HT also relied on septic systems, as opposed to a sewer system.) Over the years, the City of Mishawaka expanded, bringing sewer and water to a few places in HT, and a small sewer capability was implemented closer to "downtown" Granger.

CFT maintains an aggressive water strategy which combines advanced fire apparatus, and strategically placed water sources. Within the last few years, the HT board approved funding for two new fire wells - one on either side of the railroad tracks.

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Meeting the water challenge is just one of many things done very well by CFT. They've regularly been recognized as a top-performing fire department, including by an independent rating agency whose opinion matters to many insurance companies—meaning insurance premiums were reduced for some residents.

Emergency medical services (or EMS) are also provided by the territory utilizing advanced life support systems, and highly trained personnel. There is a paramedic ambulance stationed at the Elm Road station.

Various mutual aid agreements result in cooperation, not competition, between “neighbors” including, at times, those across county and state lines.

Fast response with quality service, utilizing advanced technology (that we'll explore in a subsequent article)—all are goals of the hard-working members of the Clay Fire Territory, and the supporting Harris Township board and trustee.

To learn more, CFT's website is www.clayfd.com.

Discovery's 8th grade girls' basketball team wins Big 11

Discovery Middle School's eighth-grade girls' basketball team got off to a hot and fast start with six consecutive victories to start the season. A mid-season mini-slump saw the Lady Archers lose four

of their next five contests. However, the team would not lose another game as they finished the regular season strong and cruised into the championship game with victories over Jimtown and Concord.

The championship game featured the Archers vs. the undefeated Northridge Raiders at beautiful North Side Gym in Elkhart. To say the Archers started slowly out of the gates in the championship game would be a monumental understatement. The Raiders scored the first 15 points of the game to take a commanding 15-0 lead with two minutes left in the quarter.

The slow start didn't stop the resilient Archers' squad. After an adjustment on the offensive and defensive ends of the court, the Archers began to chip away at the Raiders' lead. Finally catching the Raiders in the third quarter, Jessa Troy, who scored a team-high 30 points in the championship game, finished off the Raiders with two free throws with seven seconds left giving the Archers a 43-39 victory and the 2020-2021 Big 11 8th Grade Girls' Tournament Championship.

Troy scored 264 points for the Archers during the season, which is good for a 17.6 point per game average. Ch'Rya Newman was the leading rebounder while getting much help on the boards from her front court teammate Megan Harnidge. Camille Biever and Lucy Salwin, part of the starting back court with Troy, made several clutch fourth-quarter jump shots in late-game situations. Salwin had a personal season high of 16 points in the semi-final game against Concord. A strong bench included Sofia Ugwoke, Tonyae Wilson, Abbi Gingerich, Manseerat Turna and Mackenzie Siet. Student managers are Adriana Aquilla and Mya Thompson. The head coach is Chuck Sowders.

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