



Members of Adams Fire Co. gather for a photo to mark the company's 100th anniversary. On May 1, 1924, a group of men met at the home of George C. Toellner to purchase a potato planter. Then it was decided that, because the community was growing, there should be fire protection. They all agreed and immediately organized a fire company. William Adams agreed to give the new company a 40-by-60-foot lot on Niagara Falls Boulevard near Nash Road. That was the beginning of the Adams Fire Department of Nashville, New York, according to the company history at <https://www.adamsfireco.com/about/history/>

## ADAMS FIRE CO. MARKS 100 YEARS

### ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY KAREN CARR KEEFE

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"Happy birthday!" Adams Fire Co. President James Mihalko said as he welcomed the members and guests to the 100th annual installation dinner.

The fire company celebrated a century of service to Wheatfield this past weekend with a big splash – and the festivities didn't cost taxpayers a dime.

"It's been a three-year project. None of the funds used for this weekend's celebration came from the taxpayers of the Town of Wheatfield," Mihalko said.

"Numerous fundraisers the past three years are paying for this event," he said.

The company started out in a 25-by-34-foot building. The lot at Niagara Falls Boulevard and Nash Road was given to the founders by William Adams, and the company was named the Adams Fire Department of Nashville, New York. The original building is still standing today, next to the Sawyer Creek Hotel.

Mihalko pointed out that a lot has changed since then: "Calvin Coolidge was president. A dozen eggs was 28 cents." A new house was \$3,000. A new car cost \$264.

As the company and the population grew, the current Station 1 was built in 1950 at 7113 Nash Road. Station 2 was completed and opened in 2006 at 3805 Klerner Road.

"The call volumes have increased dramatically" since the company's founding," Mihalko said. "Calls in 1924 were dispatched by either the house siren or the house phone. ... Now we can dispatch on our cellular phones."

"The firehouse is family. Many times I remind members, make sure your priorities are in order: Family, faith and firehall. Tonight, I ask you to deviate from that order and place firehall on the top."

"This is about you, the members that make the organization run. Without you, the buildings, equipment and vehicles would be absolutely nothing."

Former Niagara County Sheriff James Voutour was master of ceremonies for the event.

Gilbert Allen, John Domaradzki and Robert Leaderstorf were honored as benevolent directors for 2024.

Others sworn in included executive officers, firematics line officers, Auxiliary members and fire police.

Closing remarks were given by company Fire Chief Don Lauer. He praised the members, past, present and deceased.

"I could go on and on with the amount of time that members have put in this organization without expecting anything in return," he said.

"Our goal is, and always has been to see this organization succeed and to provide the best fire protection and EMS service to our residents. We stand here on the giants that have come before us, that have dedicated their time and made the Adams Fire Co. what it is today."

"It is important to note the sacrifices we all make every day to make Adams Fire Co. great. I want the younger and newer members to know that, for the 43 years I belonged to Adams – and the members here who have given more than me, we have given our time, our strength and our money to keep this place going. So you see, this is a big deal ... we put our lives into this organization. Whether it be for 65 years or less – the time we put in has kept us away from our families, dinners we've missed, family time we could never get back. But for a lot of us, this has become our fam-

ily. This is why it is a big deal for most of us to be here to celebrate 100 years of service.

"If you are 20, 30 or 40 years old and a member, you will determine if we can continue this tradition through the 125-year celebration. So once again, I challenge you: Can you do better, can you do just a little bit more, knowing the only reward is serving the residents of Wheatfield in their time of need?"

Lauer also challenged town, local and state politicians to recognize that fundraisers are not something in the future of the fire service.

"Times are changing, and things need to change now," he said. "But are you willing to change your thoughts on how much money we need to continue operating at this high level? If you can't change with the times, the fire service you take for granted will no longer exist."

He said he is honored to lead the company as fire chief into the 100th year celebration: "I might have a different color hat, but I am just like you. I walk alongside you. I do what you do. You are my family, and I'll look after you because I am you. I love you all."

In the true spirit of community service, the fire company's anni-

versary was one of remembering and continuing to honor the spirit of volunteerism that has been its hallmark for a century.

Adams is one of five companies that cover the town of Wheatfield. The others are Frontier; Shawnee; Bergholz, which was established in 1920; and St. Johnsburg.

The Adams Fire Co. stands out not only for its longevity, but also for its dedicated members.

The installation of officers for 2024 was significant not only because it was the 100th, but also because the company – with around 40 active members – is a vibrant mix of long-timers and young recruits who are moving through the ranks to take their place.

Last summer, Lauer spearheaded a recruitment drive called "14 Neighborhoods in 12 weeks," during which members went right out to the neighborhoods to talk about what it takes to be a firefighter. Three recruits have joined since that drive.

The company is always looking for more to join.

**NEXT WEEK:** Seven firefighters – both veterans and newer members – tell their stories of dedication to the Adams Fire Co.



Executive officers sworn in on Saturday at the Riverside Resort in Niagara Falls are, from left, President Jim Mihalko, Vice President Amy Zastrow, Secretary Jennifer Mitchell, Treasurer Peter Chase, Financial Secretary Lawrence Henneberger, Assistant Treasurer Michael DiPasquale, and trustees Gilbert Allen, Russell Leaderstorf, Scott Leaderstorf and William Nalbhone Jr. Other executive officers not shown include chaplains Steven Keller and Kanjin Cederman, and Trustee John Domaradzki.