



News Release for Colerain Fire

Colerain Fire – EMS Remembers the 1964 Western Cabinet Fire

Fifty years ago this October 19th, a tragic fire at the Western Cabinet Company located in the 7600 block of Colerain Avenue, claimed the lives of two firefighters and a company employee. The fire began approximately 6:45 PM in the early evening hours of October 19, 1964, and the Groesbeck Fire Department, one of several departments consolidated into the Colerain Twp. Fire Department in 1974, was initially dispatched. Fire crews arrived to find a smoky fire in the two story frame building that housed a woodworking and cabinet shop as well as the offices of the company. Initially the fire appeared to be confined to a dust collector on the roof of the manufacturing facility and crews attempted to cool this down from the exterior.

While the fire crews began to extinguish the fire, heavy smoke lingered near the ceiling in the manufacturing area. Fire Captain Leroy Hammitt, Firefighter Allen Bruce Price and Mr. Michael Hausfeld, the son of the owner of the company, proceeded to the second floor to start a large exhaust fan in an attempt to clear the smoke and improve visibility. What happened next is open for speculation: either an electric arc from the fan triggered a dust explosion from the accumulation of sawdust in the collector and building, or the fan created a new supply of oxygen to the fire creating what we now call a “Flashover”. The resultant explosion and fire dazed several firefighters in the structure who were able to escape, but also trapped Captain Hammitt, Firefighter Price and Mr. Hausfeld, claiming all three lives. These were the first Line of Duty Deaths to firefighters in Colerain Township.

Calls for help were immediately made, and several surrounding fire departments, including Dunlap, Mack, Mt. Healthy and North College Hill responded. As darkness fell, the battle to contain the fire and find the trapped victims continued, and as word of the tragedy spread, many residents of the area gathered in a vigil. The fire eventually consumed both the manufacturing facility and the adjacent showroom taking several hours to bring it under control. Late that evening, the bodies of the victims were recovered.

Captain Hammitt and Firefighter Price along with three other firefighters who gave their lives in service to Colerain Township: Lieutenant Charles Palm, Sr.; Captain Robin Broxterman and Firefighter Brian Schira are remembered in two separate monuments in the township. The oldest is situated at the Galbraith Road fire station that also served for years as the Groesbeck Fire Department station and at the new Gateway Memorial at the intersection of Springdale Road and Colerain Avenue.

Colerain Township Department of Fire and EMS
3251 Springdale Road
Colerain Township, OH 45251
513-825-6143

A nine minute video of the fire has been restored and placed on line at www.colerain.org under the banner "Latest News" as a tribute to these fallen firefighters and to remind everyone of the sacrifices made by those who protect their communities on a daily basis.

Questions or inquiries into this press release may be directed to Public Information Officer: Assistant Chief Frank Cook at 513-825-6143, fcook@colerain.org ; Captain Steve Conn at 513-615-8698, sconn@colerain.org, Captain Darian Edwards at 513-623-0078, dedwards@colerain.org



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