

Antique Toy and Firehouse Museum

PO Box 742 Bay City, MI 48707

Ph: 888-888-1270

www.toyandfirehousemuseum.org

Email: info@toyandfirehousemuseum.org

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The Firehouse Chat

Message from Mike Snyder, Vice Chair

Welcome to the Fall Edition of Firehouse Chat

As winter approaches and another vibrant season draws to a close, we look back with gratitude and excitement on one of the busiest years in our museum's history! From summer tours filled with families discovering the magic of vintage fire trucks and classic toys, to our restoration crews bringing new life to historic apparatus, it's been a season defined by energy, teamwork, and community pride.

This year, visitors from across the U.S.—and beyond—experienced the joy of stepping back in time. Highlights included the return of our restored 1959 Valley Fire Truck to running condition, and the acquisition of the FDNY Super Tender through a generous Challenge Grant provided by Stewart and Kathryn McMillan. Thanks to the dedication of our volunteers, we continue to expand and enhance our historical displays, ensuring that every visit brings something new to discover.

Our mission to preserve the history of firefighting and childhood imagination grows stronger through your support. Whether you joined us for a tour, donated, volunteered your time, or simply shared your enthusiasm for our work, you've helped keep the spirit of the firehouse alive.

As we look ahead to winter projects and next year's exhibits, we invite you to stay connected—through this newsletter, our social media updates, and your visits to the museum in 2026. Your role as an ambassador for our mission is vital to our continued success.

Together, we're keeping history rolling—one fire truck at a time.

Thank you for being part of our story.

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Patterson Rd Museum

Status of the Washington Street Fire Station



The Antique Toy and Firehouse Museum is thrilled to announce that Phase 2 of the Renovation of Fire Station No. 3 is scheduled to begin in December! Fire Station No. 3, located at 115 Washington Avenue, Bay City, Michigan, aspires to bring history and entertainment together to offer an exciting and interactive experience to visitors from all over the Great Lakes Bay Region and beyond. The restoration of this 1890's Victorian Era Fire Station will not only ignite increased tourism to the region, but will also allow us to collaborate closely with other museums and organizations to create exhibits that are not only visually compelling, but also deeply informative. The development of interactive, STEM-focused displays, will educate and inspire students and adults alike. With the completion of the renovation of the front façade of the Fire Station, we are eagerly awaiting Phases 2—4, which will include:

- ⇒ 3rd floor construction
- ⇒ 1st—3rd floor stairway
- ⇒ 2nd floor "Historical Program and Demonstration Center"
- ⇒ Complete electrical and fire protection
- ⇒ 1st and 3rd floor display areas
- ⇒ Elevator
- ⇒ Accessible restrooms
- ⇒ HVAC
- ⇒ Display bays for 6—8 historical firetrucks

The rotation of firetrucks and historical artifacts will keep the museum new and exciting and encourage return visits.





Features of the Patterson Rd Museum

The Antique Toy and Firehouse Museum located at 3456 Patterson Rd, Bay City, Michigan, has totally transformed its entrance into a one-of-a-kind Welcome Center. The focus was on creating a space that was welcoming, efficient, and user-friendly.

This journey included eliminating the old NASCAR room as it did not match up with the vision for the museum going forward, and refreshing and updating that space. A small outdated restroom was removed, and two ADA accessible restrooms were installed that will accommodate persons with physical mobility challenges.

A designated space was carved out to create a user-friendly gift shop, and a meet and greet space. This additional area allows for us to better serve larger groups and tours where we can share more of the ATFHM history, and offer other educational support. This space has already proven to be very beneficial this season as the museum has hosted school groups, assisted living residents, social/book circles, Boy Scout troops, family reunions, and Antique Auto clubs.

This makeover project has breathed new life into the ATFHM creating a space that is not only visually appealing, but also practical and functional. All made possible with generous financial donations, and volunteer support from the community.



Entryway Before



Entryway After



A letter from the Founder by Jimmie Dobson

Let's say for sake of argument that my love of fire and fire related items all started in the late 1940s when Bangor Township, Michigan made the decision to start a township fire station, and I was able to land the Assistant Fire Chief position. At that time the station was comprised of all volunteers.

My collection of fire trucks started when I read an ad placed in the 1953 local newspaper. Essexville, Michigan auctioned off a 1928 GMC fire truck. I won the auction. To date, this truck is still in the museum's collection. That one truck fueled a fire inside me, and I collected all the trucks I could.

My late son, Jeffrey Dobson, was the one who got me into collecting models, toys, and fire related items. As I traveled around the globe I kept collecting. Collecting became obsessive. The collection grew to include 120 fire trucks, and more toys than I could count. The collection became too large, unmanageable, and space constraint was an issue.

An auction was held, the collection was downsized, and eventually, I found an old marine storage facility on Patterson Road in Bay City, Michigan. Friends, family, and volunteers helped to organize the fire trucks and toys into more relatable displays. It was much more than a collection – it became a museum that I thoroughly enjoyed sharing with the public.

As the museum continued to grow, and as I aged, it became too much for one person to handle. So, the decision became clear I donated the entire collection to a public non-profit (501c3). Though some things have changed I'm proud and thankful for the board members, volunteers, donors, and foundations that are keeping my dream alive where people from around the world can come to visit. They've taken the museum farther than I could ever do alone.

A year in review...

In 2024, the Antique Toy and Firehouse Museum set a record for museum attendance and in 2025 attendance was up an additional 37%! Our engagement with our community is driving increased attendance.

The volunteers participated in many community events and have some yet to come this year.

June 7 = COPOCO Kid's Safety Day

June 10 = Auburn Park Library Reading Program

June 22 = Auburn Corn Fest Parade

July 12 = Bay City Cool Car Show and Cruise

July 25—28 = Ribfest

July 26 = Frankenmuth Muster & Parade

July 27 = Munger Potato Festival Parade

August 3 = Auburn Make-a-Wish Car Show

August 5 = Bay City National Night Out

September 20 = Thomas Harding Fire Chief Memorial

September 24 = Independence Village In-House Museum

October 5—11 = National Fire Prevention Week

November 22 = Midland Santa Parade

December 6 = Auburn Christmas Lights Parade

The museum hosted 17 tours in 2025. Some of the groups or special occasions that stopped by include The Boy Scouts, St. John's Lutheran Church, Adoption Option Foster Care, Family Reunion, Class Reunion, Go Great Lakes Bay, Ann's Adventure, Independence Village (Saginaw), Primetime of Grace Birmingham, Saginaw SVRC Industries, Michigan Fiero Club, and Thumb Antique Auto Club.

Pictured are some of the tour groups during their visits.

In June, the show, Under the Radar Michigan, was on site and filmed an episode for their series featuring the Museum.

In July, the Bay Area Chamber of Commerce assisted with a ribbon cutting ceremony in celebration of the Grand Opening of the Patterson Rd Welcome Center and restoration of the historic Fire Station #3.

In September, the museum was featured in a *Neighbors of the Bay* newsletter. They highlighted the museum's mission of preserving history and inspiring generations. The museum was mentioned as "one of the Great Lakes Bay Region's most remarkable 'hidden gems.'"



Volunteers at the Antique Toy and Firehouse Museum



The Antique Toy and Firehouse Museum operates with a passionate team of dedicated volunteers who give their time, talent, and energy to preserve firefighting history and share the joy of vintage toys with our community and visitors from across the nation. We are always looking for more volunteers to help with various efforts at the museum. Complete the form on the next page to learn more about becoming a volunteer.

Doug Behmlander has been a volunteer at the Museum for 8 years. Doug worked for 30 years with Auburn-Williams Fire Department as Firefighter/EMT. He worked at Dow Corning for 26 years in Loss Prevention which included hazmat, fire prevention, environmental work. He became involved with the museum while working at Dow Corning. His boss, Mike Snyder, asked him to help with getting a fire truck started. He agreed and was successful on that project and has been involved ever since. His favorite part of volunteering with the museum is preserving the history of the trucks. He loves taking an old truck that doesn't run and getting it started. He encourages people who have any involvement in fire industry to volunteer to help preserve the history of firefighting.

Mike Ruegsegger heard about the museum from a friend of his from Auburn who was repairing machinery for the museum. He has been a volunteer for 5 years. He was a full-time fireman for Monitor Township and retired in 1986. He enjoys working on the Gamewell System. He is proud to say that he has it up and running as it did back in the day. His favorite memory was when the museum was featured on the Under the Radar in Michigan show. He loves watching the faces of children light up when they come through museum.

"Tonka" Dave Harness has been volunteering at the Museum for over 15 years. He met Mr. Dobson, Museum founder, in 1993 at a Toy & Tractor show in Breckenridge, Michigan. He is known as "Tonka" Dave because he has been a Tonka truck collector for over 45 years. He has a lot of boxed collector Tonka trucks. Dave was a firefighter for several years for various departments. When he was a firefighter he was a firetruck operator. At the museum, he loves taking the kids for rides on the fire trucks. He loves seeing the joy and smiles on the faces of children and adults. He truly has a passion for working with firetrucks and kids.



On October 13, **Independent Bank** employees, *pictured here*, volunteered at the Patterson Rd museum during their 10th Annual Be the Difference Day. This group helped clean and organize the many toys and items on display.

Support the Antique Toy and Firehouse Museum



You may use this portion of the newsletter to direct your donation toward the following priority need(s):

- ☐ **Capital Campaign—Historic Fire Station #3**
- ☐ **Update lighting and displays at Patterson Rd Museum**
- ☐ **Where Needed Most**

Please make checks payable to:

Antique Toy and Firehouse Museum

Mail donation and this form to: PO Box 742 Bay City MI 48707

- ☐ I would like to receive future editions of **The Firehouse Chat** newsletter.
- ☐ I would like to volunteer with the museum. *Please contact me!*

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Contact Us

Email: info@toyandfirehousemuseum.org

Website: www.toyandfirehousemuseum.org

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Hours of Operation

Seasonal
May—October

Saturday and Sunday
Noon—4:00 PM

Contact us to schedule
weekday tours.

