

# Wisconsin National Guard: New firehouse at 128th Air Refueling Wing paying off

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CONTACT: Maj. Joe Trovato | [ngwi.pao@mail.mil](mailto:ngwi.pao@mail.mil) | 608-242-3048

MILWAUKEE — A recently renovated firehouse at the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 128th Air Refueling Wing is enhancing training and helping ensure readiness for emergencies at the base, airport, and in surrounding areas.

Firefighters at the 128th Air Refueling Wing moved into their new firehouse this fall after nearly two years of renovations at their facility at General Mitchell Field.

For years the firefighters operated out of what was once the base motor pool. In addition to the building not being designed to house fire fighters, it was also far too small to hold the number of personnel needed to be on shift. This meant some members on shift would have to occupy offices in the building next to the fire house.

Now, after a complete renovation of the old building, and additions to the existing structure, the base fire fighters have the space and utilities they need to operate out of one building.

“To get everyone underneath the same roof, and work together... It's critical to have that tight-knit camaraderie”, said Master Sgt. Ronald Simon, the 128th Air Refueling Wing civilian fire chief.

One of the benefits of having all their personnel under one roof, is it creates a much more favorable training environment.

The time between responding to emergencies is filled with training, sharpening skills, and maintaining equipment. Having the required space is essential for all of those critical aspects of their jobs and it ensures readiness for when calls come.

“Training has definitely taken a better turn now that we have everybody under one roof,” said Capt. Matthew Fortman, 128th Air Refueling Wing fire department captain.

The building sits on the south end of the wing compound with quick access to the flight line. This makes it not only a critical asset to the wing, but also Milwaukee General Mitchell International Airport and the surrounding communities of Cudahy, St. Francis, and South Milwaukee, where the fire department maintains mutual aid agreements.

“I think being in the new facility is going to expedite our response times going off base, and makes us more proficient fire fighters to be a better asset for the surrounding areas”, said Simon.

Such readiness is critical to ensuring safe operations at an air wing designed to keep the U.S. Air Force refueled and in the sky.

“You’re living here a third of your life,” Simon added. “So when you’re able to live together, eat together, train, and work together, a lot of things all fall into place on the emergency scene.