

Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment

I would like to recognize all the firefighters, both paid and volunteer, for their part in battling the fire that recently destroyed the historic "Star Hotel" building in Fortuna. Any building over one hundred years old, built primarily of wood, is always a high fire hazard no matter the latest building improvements that might be incorporated. Although the fire became unmanageable as far as the building was concerned, the fire crews, through their training, decent firefighting equipment and their personal dedication were able to contain the blaze and save the rest of the downtown area of Fortuna. As a former twenty year veteran of the Eureka Volunteer Fire Department, I can appreciate what took place in Fortuna. My time as a volunteer started in the late Nineteen Forties. Back then, the Eureka paid fire department was a small group augmented by two hundred volunteers. The paid men, including some excellent people, received most of their training the hard way, on the job, but the volunteers had little or no training with no type of protective personal gear such as boots, helmets or clothing. It is bad enough, attacking a fire 'up close and personal' in full protective gear and impossible in civilian clothes. Two hundred volunteers sound overwhelming. Many of the older members were not physically fit for the job and you never knew how many would be available at any given time a fire might break out. In nineteen sixty four, the active volunteers were reduced to about thirty five members, who were outfitted and trained in the latest firefighting techniques. This enabled the volunteer to work alongside paid personnel who could now appreciate a person, well trained, "having their back". As much as the fire service has advanced over the years, there is always room for improvement, especially in the rural area fire districts. Fire equipment is expensive and some fire districts suffer from lack of funds and because of that the fire fighter has to make do with dated or worn out equipment. It is very important for the citizen to help, in any way they can, to overcome the obstacle. When a fire department or district asks for funds, remember that this money is not going to be used for a party; it is going to be used to help protect the lives of your family and your property and also used to rescue accident victims. Remember the next time fire apparatus shows up for a medical emergency they do not hand you a bill for services rendered. Also remember that every volunteer fire fighter is dedicating a portion of his or her daily life to the protection of others. It goes further than that, if the volunteer has a family, they are also included in the equation. To all firefighters, may future fires be few in number and small in size.

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