

Hi Fred Nelson for Community Comment,

Two weeks ago I talked about the Eureka Volunteer Fire Department, its history and some of my experiences. I don't recall the date the City of Eureka switched to the City Manager form of government. The new City Manager was not satisfied with the makeup of the Fire Department. The insurance on two hundred volunteers was too pricey and he thought that either a smaller group of "Call-men" (paid when called out) or a smaller group of trained and safely clothed volunteers made more sense. The paid department was also growing with the city trying to maintain a decent insurance rating. There were many old time volunteers who hated the idea of losing their status and the camaraderie that existed at the time. Although disappointed, I accepted the change as it made sense. The volunteers were cut from two hundred to about forty or fifty men. An age limit was set to help with the reduction. I stayed on as I had some years left and was in fairly good condition. I welcomed the training as did the others who stayed on. We were trained with and by the paid firefighters and learned from their experiences. We were issued "turn-outs" (protective clothing and boots). I kept mine at the house, ready for quick response. We were tied into a phone network that relayed the location of a fire. We responded by our own vehicles where upon arrival we would be assigned by one of the fire officials on scene. We would be reminded ahead of time for scheduled training sessions at the City training grounds which contained a three story fire tower with a basement. The old site is now the location of Costco. As with any organization, we had some practical jokers. One summer evening, we were schedule to report to the fire tower where a new type of fire foam was going to be demonstrated. We were in our 'turn-outs' and were ordered to walk through the new type foam which claimed that even though the foam would smother a fire, it did not have that effect on a human. The basement was filled with foam and the tests begun. It was amazing to walk through it. Of course the visibility was limited. Watching all this activity, standing outside the basement windows (in their dress uniforms) were fire officials from a number of nearby cities. After the demonstration and clearing of the basement, the officials went downstairs to check out the scene. One of my fellow volunteers saw his chance and crept up to the foam nozzle and proceeded to pump foam into the basement where all the chiefs were gathered. You never saw such a quick unhappy exit by so many fire chiefs. We were told that the foam would not soil or stain clothing. The damage was to their pride. Gotta go, more in two weeks.

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