

Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment,

I recently read an article in the paper titled "Fire Safety Knowledge Continues to Improve", the twelfth installment of a series called "Healthy Humboldt". Fire science is under continuous study, as it should be, and the advancement in knowledge concerning the subject has made some noticeable advances over the years especially in the health issues related to firefighters.. It takes me back to the mid nineteen forties when I first became a member of the Eureka Volunteer Fire Fighters. At that time there were eight fire companies with a total of about two hundred members. This was in addition to the small nucleus of paid firemen, the back bone of the department. Training for the volunteers was practically non existent. There was no protective clothing available for the volunteer, you reported to a fire in your street clothes. Fire helmets were not available so you were pretty much left tot the hazards without protection. Your best friend was the paid fireman and you stuck close for his expertise and protection. The problem with that? The paid man was there to fight a fire, not tend to a novice. In nineteen fifty three I reported for duty to the Firestone Store fire at Sixth and H Streets dressed in a tee shirt and Levis. The heat was intense with two groups of firefighters in the alley between the burning building and the Post Office directing streams of water up to the rafters of the Post Office to keep them from igniting. The streams would then glance off and continually soak the hose crews below. I was happy to be assigned to one of the crews as the water, soaking the crew members, made the position a bit more tenable. That was an example of what the volunteer used to face. Fire officers, aware of our weaknesses, made every effort to put us to work in a supportive role rather than jeopardize our safety but all fires are not equal and there were times when the volunteer was at risk although injuries were not common among us thanks to the paid man and his compassion. When the City Manager system was adopted in Eureka, things changed. The two hundred volunteers were reduced to about thirty five men. This was the beginning of a new fire fighting era in Eureka. The remaining thirty five or so had to meet certain requirements and be trained for the job. They were also equipped with boots, protective clothing and helmets. I was one of the group and was thrilled to be a part of the new volunteer force. We were taught how to operated and handle all phases of fire fighting equipment except for the operation of the engines. Yes, the fire fighter has come a long way but is still ready to place himself in harms way for the sake of his fellow man. Merry Christmas to the fire fighters, a special breed, and to all of you that they protect.

Fred Nelson for Community Comment.