



ARVADA FIRE

PROTECTION DISTRICT

Arvada Fire Protection District

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Chief Report

WE ARE A SPECIAL DISTRICT

I was giving one of my presentations about the District to a homeowner group last month and was told most of them had no idea that we, the Fire District, are a stand-alone government entity. After all, we are in *The Arvada Report*, a City of Arvada publication. We are in this publication but we pay a fee because we are not part of the City.

The Arvada Fire Protection District is organized as a special district, meaning we are a stand-alone government entity and independent taxing district (similar to a school district). We are not part of any city government and do not receive funding from either the City of Arvada or the City of Wheat Ridge. We are funded primarily through property taxes collected within the Fire District. We are governed by a five-member elected Board of Directors, to whom I report.

A special district is a quasi-municipal corporation and political subdivision of the State of Colorado, formed to provide necessary public services that the county or municipality cannot otherwise provide. It is essentially a tax-exempt financing mechanism used for the installation, operation, and maintenance of public infrastructure. The formation and operation of a special dis-

trict is governed by Title 32 of the Colorado Revised Statutes and other applicable laws.

The Arvada Fire Department became a special district in 1949 so we could receive funding from property and ownership taxes. The boundaries are not the same as the City of Arvada. Our southern border is Clear Creek, meaning we protect a portion of Wheat Ridge including their part of I-70 extending to Youngfield St. The cities did not go all the way to Clear Creek at the time. That boundary was chosen simply because we had better access to the north side than Wheat Ridge Fire did, and that continues to this day. There simply is not much access north to south across the creek.

As for funding, unlike the cities, the bulk of our funding, about 88%, comes from property and ownership tax. Cities have been afforded the opportunity to collect sales tax, which makes up the bulk of their income. They do collect some property and ownership tax, but it is only about 7% of the city's income. So, if you look at mill levies, ours is higher, but remember it is our main source of income.

I hope this helps your understanding of the Fire District. ■

A Look at Our Past

Olde Town Pride: 1907-1913

On June 10, 1907, the Arvada Town Board approved the purchase of Arvada's first fire engine. The hand-drawn chemical fire engine arrived by rail from New York City four months later, prompting efforts to organize a volunteer fire company.

Arvada's first "fire engine house" was located not far from the Olde Town Water Tower. The engine house was nothing more than a small shelter designed to protect the engine from frost.

A group of volunteers known as the Arvada Fire Company was established early in 1908. By the fall of 1909, these volunteers were equipped with a ladder, 100 feet of fire hose, two hand axes and six lanterns, in addition to 14 portable fire extinguishers and the Rex chemical engine purchased in 1907.

On May 10, 1910, the Town Board authorized the purchase of Arvada's first hand-drawn fire hose carts. The specifications called for two carts equipped with automatic gongs and wheels that stood more than five feet tall. The carts were also "handsomely painted in vermilion" and equipped with polished brass hub bands. Each cart weighed 500 pounds and had a hose capacity of 750 feet. Two small groups of men known as hose companies emerged following the purchase of Arvada's hose carts.

On December 11, 1911, Arvada's hose companies consolidated and recorded the formation of the Arvada Fire Department. Arvada consisted of about 840 residents and enough small businesses to provide townspeople with essential goods and services.

The early Arvada Fire Department was funded primarily by appropria-

tions from the town board and profits from dances held on the second floor of the First National Bank building. A successful dance could add \$20 to the Department treasury.

Old Town Politics: 1914-1924



On September 15, 1914, a church bell was sounded to summon assistance after Millie Graff accidentally dropped a match in a closet while looking for her night robe. Bucket brigades were formed as wind whipped embers from the Graff home toward adjacent structures. Firefighters and townspeople prevented the fire from spreading to buildings nearby, but could not spare the Graff home from destruction.

Friction between the Fire Department and the Town Board began to develop in 1917. This feud culminated when the chief and four firemen held a special meeting, divided up the cash on hand (\$7.65 each) and disbanded.

Two months later, the Department again reorganized. According to a local newspaper article, "about 20 of the sturdy young men of the village enrolled their names as active fire fighters, while a number of the older heads . . . and the editors of the local papers enrolled to give dignity to the organization on state occasions."

Served and Protected: 1924-1953



Arvada's first motorized fire engine was a 1923 Graham Brothers chemical engine purchased in Denver from the Julius Pearce Fire Supply Company. The "Old Dodge," as it has been dubbed by firefighters, can still be seen traveling the streets of Arvada, although its use is restricted to parades and other special events.

Arvada's first ambulance began operating in 1939 under the jurisdiction of the Wilmore-Richter American Legion Post No. 161. The Fire Department acquired the ambulance in 1947 and began providing first-aid and rescue services to the Arvada community.

In 1949, citizens approved the formation of the Arvada Fire Protection District, transferring control and financing from the Arvada City Council to a board of directors consisting of five elected officials. The board's first meeting was held on May 24, 1949.

Big Growth: 1953-1979

In 1953, storage of the Department's fire apparatus moved from the Town Hall to a new garage at W. 57th Ave. and Zephyr St. The Board hired Elizabeth Schmitt, who lived at 5701 Zephyr St., to receive emergency phone calls, sound the Department's outdoor siren, and phone firemen with



the emergency location. Mrs. Schmitt agreed to be available at all times for a monthly salary of \$150.

"Fritz" Sedlmayr served as fire chief longer than any other man in the Department's history. During Chief Sedlmayr's term, the Department roster tripled in size and four fire stations were erected. Loss of civilian lives and property from fire increased, as did Arvada's growth during the 1960s and 1970s. A commercial business fire in 1968 claimed a civilian's life, as did a house fire on September 28, 1977.

Fortunately, no lives were lost during an incident on December 4, 1978 when flaming drums of combustible liquids were hurled hundreds of feet into the air during explosions at the Thoro Products Company Fire. Some west Arvada residents still recall the fiery sky during a night in which winds gusted at speeds above 100 mph.

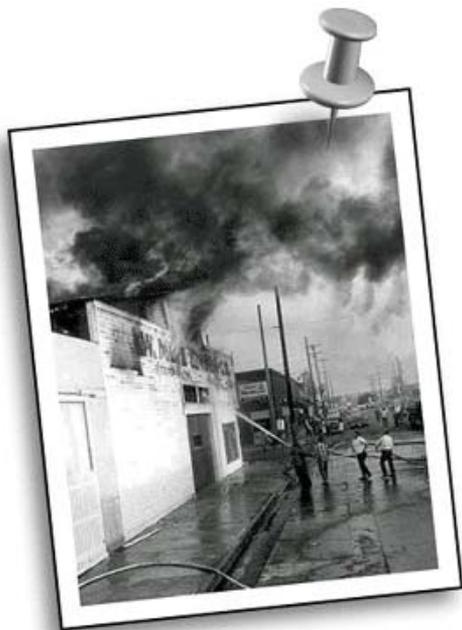
The 1970s also brought six full-time employees devoted to fire prevention, as well as a district manager, communications supervisor, mechanic, supply clerk, and secretary.

Significant improvements took place as communications evolved from an antiquated siren system to a staffed

radio communication center in less than a decade.

Three more stations were constructed as the City expanded north and west during the 1970s.

Big Fires: 1980-1999



The Department's eighth station and training center was put into service on January 1, 1980. Taxpayers in the Fire District approved a \$1.5 million dollar bond issue to construct the facility, located at 6651 Indiana St.

During the 1980s, fire crews witnessed more civilian fire deaths than that of any other generation in the Department's history. Seven civilians lost their lives in residential fires that occurred between 1981 and 1989. In addition to tragic residential fires, firefighters also confronted some of the worst commercial fires in the Department's history. The Wheat Ridge Lumber Company Fire on March 7, 1985 and the Army-Navy Surplus Fire on May 11, 1989 are two of the most notorious incidents.

The 1990s saw the launch of the Department's web site, and in late 1998, the first thermal imaging cameras were in use. Thermal imaging

cameras enable firefighters to see through smoke and are among the most significant fire service innovations to arise during the 20th century, topped only by the development of motorized fire apparatus and self-contained breathing apparatus.

On January 24, 1994, AFD firefighters rescued a father and two sons from a burning third-floor apartment at 6429 Quail St. All three sustained critical burns and were unconscious when firefighters arrived. The family returned to Fire Station 6 to thank the firefighters who saved them after the boys spent a month in Children's Hospital recovering from burns. Other notorious incidents in the 1990s include the 2-alarm Mother's Day fire on May 8, 1994 and the 2-alarm Interstate 70 Self-Storage fire on February 13, 1995. More than 100 firefighters used 1 million gallons of water and worked tirelessly in freezing temperatures to contain the I-70 Self-Storage fire. ■



Who We Are

The Arvada Fire Protection District serves approximately 150,000 residents in roughly 43 square miles of suburban areas northwest of the City of Denver.

The Department was founded in 1911. In 1949, the Fire Protection District Board of Directors assumed control from the City Council. In 1999, the Fire District changed from one of the country's largest all-volunteer departments to a combination department consisting of paid and volunteer personnel.

Our 185 full time personnel with 148 line firefighters provide 24-hour, full-service response to more than 15,000 incidents each year including fires; hazardous materials incidents; swift water, ice, and technical rescues; wildland interface fires; and emergency medical calls. We have three shifts: A, B, and C that work 48 hours on and 96 hours off.

The Arvada Fire District is a "special district" that covers most of the City of Arvada, unincorporated Jefferson County that falls within the Arvada City boundary, and the northern part of Wheat Ridge that falls north of Clear Creek. We are governed by a five-member Board of Directors who are elected to a four-year, non-paid term.

Community Risk Reduction (CRR) Division

The CRR Division is committed to effective and efficient programs that deliver lasting benefits to reduce loss of life and property from fire and injury. These efforts are maintained through over 1,000 new business and housing development construction plan reviews and over 2,000 business inspections annually. CRR also houses the investigators that determine the

cause and origin of a fire.

The CRR Division also delivers a comprehensive public education program that includes fire prevention programs for all ages, child passenger safety checkpoints at each station, smoke alarm and CO alarm installation and testing, home safety inspections, youth fire setter intervention and much more. We also host an annual community Safety Day as well as a Youth Academy in the summer and a Citizen's Fire Academy in the spring.

Be sure to check out the various social media platforms as well as our website for safety information and to request a home safety check, station tour or visit.

Training Division

The Training Division designs and implements programs through which Department members can obtain and maintain the skills necessary to provide the safest and most effective emergency services to the community. This responsibility begins the day that the new recruit starts and continues throughout their career.

EMS Division

The District responds to more than 8,500 medical calls for service annually, which accounts for more than 60% of the annual call volume. All District firefighters are cross-trained as either EMTs or paramedics.

The District staffs five ambulances with one other unit in mechanical reserve. All of the ambulances are staffed with Paramedics and are capable of providing Advanced Life Support. The firefighters assigned to the engine, truck, and rescue companies are integral partners in the delivery of

Emergency Medical Services to the most acutely ill patients.

Maintenance Division

The Maintenance Division is responsible for maintaining each of the Department's 15 buildings and 35 vehicles. Each year, the Maintenance Division conducts water pump tests on 13 trucks and ladder tests on over 50 ladders and aerial devices.

We welcome visitors to any of our District facilities. Please feel free to stop by, ring the doorbell and if we are home we would love to chat with you about who we are! ■

Arvada Fire's 9th Annual FIREHOUSE CHILI COOK-OFF



A suggested Donation of \$5.00
Donations will benefit Friends of Arvada Fire

**December 4
6:00 - 8:00 p.m.
Denver Beer
Company
Olde Town Arvada**

**During the
Lagniappe Festival**