

"Public Education In Portland Fire & Rescue"

Source: Don Porth

The fire prevention division of Portland Fire & Rescue was founded on March 18, 1914. While the division was a much needed addition to the fire department, its primary focus was on the abatement of fire hazards through the demolition of derelict buildings and identification of arson. Over the years, public education campaigns were developed and delivered, but the idea of education as its own discipline was not well organized.

Many individuals contributed worthy education efforts over the years. In most cases, they were the initiative of motivated individuals more than a department agenda. One of the most well known efforts began this way but became the gateway for organized public education programs in the fire department.

Jeff Morris began his career with the Fire Bureau in 1943, at age 15. During the World War II years, many firefighters were sent to war leaving a workforce short on help.

Jeff rose through the ranks to Battalion Chief. Along the way, he became well known for his wit and his love of people. He also loved to teach fire safety. Most of Jeff's time was contributed through his own initiative since the Fire Bureau had no organized public education effort. His efforts would cause this to change.



Jeff became the fire department spokesperson and actually found his office located in City Hall. His contact with the media was so favorable that he developed many strong friendships within the media community. Jeff passed away in 1974, at age 46, after a bout with brain cancer and it was the media community that rallied to remember Jeff. The "Friends of Jeff Morris" committee was formed and eventually became a non-profit entity in 1982. One of their first tasks had been the acquisition of a van dedicated to public education

programs. This became known as the "Jeff Van" and was a department fixture until 2011. They later organized a fundraising mission to build the "Jeff Morris Fire Museum" on the north end of fire station #1, which served from 1985 to 2004. It would be revitalized in the 2010s.

The Fire Bureau quickly realized the void left by the passing of Jeff. Assistant Chief Harry Surbaugh solicited firefighters to become speakers on behalf of the fire bureau at community events. Chief Surbaugh was a member of Toastmasters and felt a cadre of firefighters with similar skills could benefit the Fire Bureau as representatives to the community. About 14 firefighters stepped forward and became the "Speakers Bureau." Station #1 Firefighter Les Pratt became instrumental in organizing this movement and was one of the most active members.

Much of the effort of the Speakers Bureau supported outreach to the schools. A poster contest for fire prevention week was popular at the time and it was judged by the Friends of Jeff Morris Committee. Presentations to other civic groups were common as well. At the time, much of the funding came from the "Independent Insurance Companies of Portland." This was facilitated by the insurance company that provided insurance for the city.

In the late 1970s, Chief Francis Sargant gave the okay for Firefighter Les Pratt to hire a civilian educator to assist with public education program. She stayed on for only a short time but apparently showed value to the idea of a dedicated public educator for the department.

In July of 1979, the first uniformed public education position was created and filled by Firefighter Don Berger. A few months later, the section was assigned to a Senior Inspector who shared responsibility for both public information and education. Now, with an established presence in the prevention division and a focus on schools (grades K-4) and civic groups, the discipline of public education began to take shape. The impact of this addition was immediate. The 1979-80 annual report for Portland Fire & Rescue stated

"...fire prevention presentations more than doubled this year due mainly to the addition of the Firefighter Specialist position. For the first time in the history of the fire bureau we were able to present our safety programs to every school (grades K-4) in the city."

The following year, the Firefighter Specialist position was upgraded to an Inspector I position, making it commensurate with the other staff members in the Prevention Division and at an equivalent pay and rank level as Lieutenant. The public education position now reported directly to the Fire Marshal while the public information position would report directly to the Chief of the Bureau.

1979 marked the entry of television services into the fire department. The newly formed unit would utilize a television studio and staff to create professional videos to train firefighters and to educate the public. Over the next couple years, the team of Don Berger and production assistant Sandra Peabody would produce public service announcements, news programs, training on how to conduct fire station tours for the line personnel, and a four-part children's television program called "Let's Roll with Fireman Don."

In 1984, the Fire Bureau entered into a contractual service agreement with Fire District #10. Portland began providing service for the district and all district employees became Fire Bureau employees. This created two new public education positions. One was an additional public information officer and the other an educator with a focus on business and industry.

In 1985, a string of tragic fire deaths caused by children misusing fire prompted the creation of a new position in public education. This position would manage an intervention program for children involved in firesetting behaviors. Lieutenant Steve Muir was assigned to the development and oversight of the program.

By 1993, the staffing for Public Education included a Senior Inspector supervising the unit, a public information officer and four public education specialists covering the areas of schools, youth

firesetting behaviors, business/industry, and community emergency services. The Jeff Morris Fire & Life Safety Foundation (formerly the Friends of Jeff Morris Committee) was being revived from a dormant state to play a more active role in non-traditional funding of public education programs. Volunteers and/or contract employees served the role of executive director at times and assisted with overall public education efforts. Fundraising was quite successful yet the positions dedicated to these tasks were not retained. Fire Marshal James Crawford (who began his career as a public educator) continued to promote the value of the public/non-profit relationship and approved innovative ways to partner with the Jeff Morris Foundation.

Over the next few years, an idea began to evolve. It would endeavor to develop a safety learning center to provide an education attraction for citizen safety. With a limited budget, the Jeff Morris Foundation became the best opportunity to leverage support for such a project. It struggled for many years as the project searched for funds and a location. Several old fire stations were considered but nothing came to be. During this time, staffing in public education shrank to a total staff of four.

Between 2000 and 2010, a general obligation bond allowed the fire bureau to seismically upgrade all fire stations in the city. While most stations could be upgraded, some needed to be moved, which included the sale of the old fire station. Such was the case with Station 9 in Southeast Portland. However, when the 1912 firehouse, located in the Belmont District, was vacated, it turned out that it didn't need to be sold. Opportunity combined with the influence of former Fire Commissioner Gretchen Kafoury allowed the old firehouse to be offered up as a location for the safety learning center. So on August 2, 2003, the public education staff moved into the now dubbed "Historic Belmont Firehouse" and began to build the Safety Learning Center & Fire Museum.



Financial pledges were now cashed in and, combined with federal grants, infused about \$330,000 into the facility. A primitive operation opened in September 2004. By September 2006, a professional, high-quality safety learning center opened to the public. The "Fire Engine Experience," an interactive emergency response simulator, was completed in January 2007 and a final grant to add additional safety and exhibit features was finished in November 2008. This completed the dream and hard work established by Fire Marshal Jim Crawford, Public Education Specialist Don Porth, and the Jeff Morris Foundation. The project involved about \$500,000 in addition to the building itself.

In July 2004, the Safety Learning Center was deemed a full time job and a position in public education was created specifically to manage it. However, this was at the expense of the supervisor position overseeing Public Education. Staffing essentially remained status quo.

At the peak of the economic recession in 2009, public education would again be reduced. The position serving outreach to schools was eliminated and other prevention responsibilities began to be inserted into the time of public educators. 2010 saw another position eliminated. This occurred at a time when a grant-funded position was installed to administer a smoke alarm program. The position was finally restored in July 2011. By mid 2012, public education was eliminated as an element of the Fire Prevention Division. Personnel were re-assigned to the Communications Section working under the Chief's Office. This would be reversed in May 2016 and public education would again become a component of the Fire Prevention Division.

Over the relatively short life of the Public Education Section (1981-2012 / 2016-2021), the following personnel would serve in the unit:

Senior Inspectors

- Don Mayer
- Rich Butcher
- Don Porth
- Tim Kelly
- Stew White
- Michael Silva
- Kim Kosmas

- George Lucas
- Jeff Liggett
- Earl Diment
- Joanne Ely (support)
- Dave Centers
- Gary Farland
- Lori Hatlen
- AJ Jackson
- Dan Redding
- Joe Troncoso
- Scott Goetchius
- Mike O'Keeffe
- Trudi Salisbury
- Alice Johnson
- Gretchen Pederson
- Ron Rouse
- Eric Heard
- Mike Rider
- Erin Spens
- Rich Tyler

Inspectors

- Don Berger
- Ray Nelson
- Wayne Benson
- Jim Crawford
- Rob Ware
- Steve Muir
- Karl Findling
- Sam Fonteno
- Neil Heesacker

HISTORY OF THE HISTORIC BELMONT FIREHOUSE, SAFETY LEARNING CENTER & FIRE MUSUEM

Source: Don Porth

- Original wooden Firehouse built on the lot in 1898 to serve the Belmont community
- Served as Hose Co. #5 from 1898 to 1904 (Hose Co. #5 was established in 1896 at SE 34th and Yamhill)
- The current brick building was built on the site in 1912

- The building served as Engine Co. #9 from 1904 to August 1, 2003 (housed Truck Co. #6 from 1928 to 1963)
- The site became the Historic Belmont Firehouse August 4, 2003
- The Safety Learning Center & Fire Museum opened September 11, 2004
- Grand Re-Opening of the finished facility - Safety Learning Center & Fire Museum - occurred on September 9, 2006
- The "Fire Engine Experience," the most significant interactive exhibit was added on January 11, 2007
- The final exhibits for the Safety Learning Center & Fire Museum were completed on November 21, 2008

FUNDING FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SAFETY LEARNING CENTER & FIRE MUSEUM

- Portland Fire & Rescue provided the Belmont Firehouse Facility for use as the Safety Learning Center & Fire Museum. This gift occurred on August 4, 2003 when the new fire station #9 opened and the Historic Belmont Firehouse became the home of the Public Education Section of the Prevention Division. This contribution was valued at \$500,000
- DHS/FEMA provided Fire Prevention and Safety Grants totaling \$228,000 for the following:
 - \$125,000 for the development of "The Fire Engine Experience."
 - \$25,000 for the purchase of the "Hazard House" educational prop.
 - \$78,000 for general exhibit development.
- American LaFrance Fire Apparatus Company donated a 2004 Eagle fire engine cab for the development of "The Fire Engine Experience" emergency response simulator. This contribution was valued at \$25,000.
- Safeway corporation's "Because Safeway Cares" community giving program donated over \$26,000 between 1999 and 2008.
- The Fred Meyer Foundation provided \$27,250 to develop the "Life in the Firehouse" and "Arrival and Entry" exhibits.
- State Farm Insurance donated \$30,000 for the development of the "Animals In The Fire Service" exhibit to also showcase their support of the Accelerant Detection Dog program. They provided funding and support for Portland's first K-9 firefighter, Charlotte, and her handler Greg Keller.
- McCormick & Schmicks Seafood Restaurant (1st and NW Oak) began fundraising events in 2004 and over a four year period raised \$18,231 for support of exhibit development.
- Artist Rip Caswell placed his inspirational bronze sculpture called "Strength of America" on the entry plaza of the Historic Belmont Firehouse as a tribute to the lives of service providers who were lost on September 11, 2001. It is valued at \$55,000.
- The Belmont Area Business Association provided support for programs at the Historic Belmont Firehouse and also placed a piece of community artwork on the east side of the building. The art piece is called "Sunspot" and it is valued at \$5,000.

- The Wal-Mart Foundation donated \$5,000 for exhibit development from their community grant program.
- Fullerton & Company Insurance in association with Fireman's Fund Insurance donated \$12,978 in two grants (2007 and 2009) to support exhibit development and program delivery at the Historic Belmont Firehouse.
- Liberty Mutual and Don Porth donated \$10,000 to the Historic Belmont Firehouse when Senior Inspector Porth received the National Firemark Award (and accompanying \$10,000 award) given by Liberty Mutual for excellence in Public Education. The funds were contributed to on-going programs and exhibit development.
- Total contributions \$942,459

THE FIRE ENGINE EXPERIENCE

created by Don Porth and Formations Inc.

"The Fire Engine Experience" transports 4 riders to one of five emergency responses, which include a vehicle collision, medical emergency, fire, false alarm, and child locked in a car. Each response is from 7-9 minutes long, from loading to unloading. Riders are seated and seat belted in the position of the firefighters riding in the jump (back) seats. On the way, riders will hear the dispatcher sending vital information to the crew and the officer and driver engage in typical banter that includes their hopes for the response, their anxiety, and their frustration with traffic. Each response concludes with several positive safety messages to encourage citizens to take responsibility for their own safety.

This attraction is a one-of-a-kind experience that is as real as it gets without leaving the building for a real emergency. From the flashing lights to the rumble of the engine to the wail of the siren, each rider will experience the adrenaline rush every firefighter gets on an emergency response. What makes this experience more meaningful is the safety message delivered on each trip. The messages built into the programming are designed to encourage safer behaviors by citizens of Portland.

Based within an American LaFrance Eagle cab, The Fire Engine Experience exposes each rider to the demands emergency responders face on a daily basis and equip the citizen to recognize the initial actions they can take to save a life at a fire, provide assistance at a medical emergency, support a victim at a traffic collision, or to not encumber a response while firefighters are en-route to the scene.

The Fire Engine Experience is an integral part of the safety experience designed into the Historic Belmont Firehouse - Safety Learning Center & Fire Museum. This "safety education destination" brings the history and heritage of Portland Fire & Rescue to life for every visitor. Exhibits span the 150 years of the fire service in Portland and allow guests an up-close look at tools, equipment, and life in the firehouse that exist due to the safety needs of the public. An underlying safety message exists in all tours, events, and displays.

