

"Clackamas County Fire District #1"

Source: Alyce Vick and Jim Crawford

Clackamas County Fire District #1 (Initially Milwaukie Rural Fire Protection District #56) had its beginning in 1955 when a Board of Directors was formed to protect the rural area of Milwaukie. The Chief at the time was Bryce Spence, formerly of Multnomah County Fire District #10. They operated out of one station located near the intersection of SE King Road and Fuller Road. They had six paid members, thirty volunteers, and a paid Chief.

Upon Chief Spence's resignation in 1963, Harry Carpenter became Chief and remained in that position until his retirement in 1987. The area grew during that time to provide fire and emergency medical protection to nearly 34,000 residents in about 8 square miles.

In the early 1970's District #56 contracted with and absorbed Multnomah County Fire District #12, serving the Errol Heights area, which at the time was outside the City of Portland. That merger gave the District #56 three fire stations, one in Errol Heights, one on King Road east of Milwaukie, and another on Lake Road south and east of Milwaukie near Clackamas High School. Milwaukie District #56 and Multnomah District #12 officially became Clackamas County Fire District #1 in 1976.

Clackamas County Fire District #1 owned and operated a central dispatch center out of the building on SE Railroad Avenue, which housed Milwaukie Fire Departments administrative office. They dispatched for Milwaukie, Oak Lodge, Boring, Sandy, Hoodland, Estacada, Happy Valley, Clackamas County Fire District #71, and themselves. In 1974 a new, more modern dispatch center was built on District #1 property at 6600 SE Lake Road.

In 1977 a new apparatus maintenance facility was constructed at the Lake Road site and provided many adjacent districts and cities with much needed repair services.

In 1984 a new central fire station was built on District #1 property at Fuller and Causey Road that was financed through the Tax Increment Plan that Clackamas County had for improvements in the area around the Clackamas Town Center. It was also about this time that District #1 was facing heavy annexation pressure from both Milwaukie and Portland. Chief Carpenter and the Board of Directors, led by Ralph "Tiny" Lidstrom, could see that the future of the district was in jeopardy of losing its tax base. Strong pressure from the Southgate Planning Association, the unofficial community leaders of the area, led District #1 to pursue a relationship with the Portland Fire & Rescue. There was strong sentiment at the time against Milwaukie annexing into the area. The local leaders believed that Portland would be the preferred body to annex the area south of the Multnomah County line to take in the newly constructed Clackamas Town Center.

In July of 1986 District #1 and Portland Fire & Rescue formalized an agreement for the provision of fire and rescue services to District #1's service area. The contract was to last for five years, with the possibility of extensions. The efficiencies of the contract service with Portland allowed the fire district to reduce its expenses to the public, and so garnered the support of the community, including the Southgate Planning Association.

Under state law, the employees of Clackamas County Fire District #1 were legally absorbed into Portland Fire & Rescue. Some, including Chief Carpenter, retired shortly after.

At the time of the Portland merger, District #1 had 33 firefighters, 7 dispatchers, 3 secretaries, 2 inspectors, 1 public information officer, 1 mechanic, 3 assistant chief officers, and 1 chief for a total of 51 personnel. The District would retain its own board of directors and ownership of all buildings and equipment, but Portland would maintain the district equipment under a lease in a no-cost arrangement. The District #1 fire board, as the elected officials, would continue to decide what levels of service to offer the public.

Portland, Milwaukie and the area Boundary Commission came to an agreement after the service contract was signed, which would prohibit the City of Portland annexing south of the Multnomah County line. That meant that the ability of Portland to stabilize the tax base and fire service of District 1's area was moot. The contract was allowed to expire after five years, and the Board of Directors for Clackamas County Fire District #1 merged with other fire districts in the area to continue fire and rescue protection for the area.

The Portland/District #1 contract continued for the agreed upon 5-year period. In 1991 it was dissolved and a merger of District #1, Clackamas County District #71, Happy Valley and Redland Fire District was agreed upon and put into effect. All but two firefighters remained as Portland firefighters. District #1 became the survivor district and is now the largest operating fire district in Clackamas County.