

Transcript of oral history interview with

# Steve Lukin

Gladstone / Maplewood Fire Department, 1977-present



by Kate Cavett of HAND in HAND Productions  
and Bob Jenson, President, Maplewood Area Historical Society  
for the Maplewood Area Historical Society

Interviewed December 20, 2013

at

HAND in HAND Productions' office in Saint Paul, Minnesota

© Maplewood Area Historical Society  
2014

*This project has been made possible by the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through the vote of Minnesotans on November 4, 2008. Administered by the Minnesota Historical Society.*

All pictures are from the Maplewood Area Historical Society

# ORAL HISTORY

Oral History is the spoken word in print.

Oral histories are personal memories shared from the perspective of the narrator. By means of recorded interviews oral history documents collect spoken memories and personal commentaries of historical significance. These interviews are transcribed verbatim and minimally edited for accessibility. Greatest appreciation is gained when one can listen to an oral history aloud.

Oral histories do not follow the standard language usage of the written word. Transcribed interviews are not edited to meet traditional writing standards; they are edited only for clarity and understanding. The hope of oral history is to capture the flavor of the narrator's speech and convey the narrator's feelings through the timbre and tempo of speech patterns.

An oral history is more than a family tree with names of ancestors and their birth and death dates. Oral history is recorded personal memory, and that is its value. What it offers complements other forms of historical text, and does not always require historical corroboration. Oral history recognizes that memories often become polished as they sift through time, taking on new meanings and potentially reshaping the events they relate.

Memories shared in an oral histories create a picture of the narrator's life – the culture, food, eccentricities, opinions, thoughts, idiosyncrasies, joys, sorrows, passions - the rich substance that gives color and texture to this individual life.

Kate Cavett Oral Historian

HAND in HAND Productions

Saint Paul, Minnesota

651-227-5987

[www.oralhistorian.org](http://www.oralhistorian.org)

KC: Kate Cavett

BJ: Bob Jensen

SL: Steve Lukin

SL: My name is Steve Lukin<sup>1</sup>. I'm the fire chief for the city of Maplewood<sup>2</sup>. I became interested in firefighting back in the early Seventies and then I applied to become a member of the Gladstone Fire Department<sup>3</sup> in October of 1977 [the board didn't meet until November when I was formally accepted] and from there my career has just moved forward.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Steve Lukin** was a Gladstone, then Maplewood firefighter November 15, 1977 to present; district chief in 1996 to 2000 and then Department chief to present with over 37 years of service and counting.

<sup>2</sup> **City of Maplewood** was incorporated in 1957 from New Canada Township in Ramsey County, Minnesota. New Canada Township was organized in 1858 and named by the earliest settlers who emigrated from Canada. It was largely dairy and truck farming until post WWII veterans built homes and sought the comforts of suburbia. Maplewood was named for the maple tree which was a favorite of the township supervisors and for the nearby Maple Wood School and Maple Street. Gladstone, the earliest commercial neighborhood was platted in 1886 and established a volunteer fire department in 1943. Parkside was a neighborhood that established a volunteer fire department in 1958. The city has a total area of 17.99 square miles.

<sup>3</sup> **Gladstone Volunteer Fire Department** Chronology—Appendix A

I started out as a paid-per-call firefighter. Actually, they called them volunteers then. I started out my career as a firefighter and went through the ranks to become an engineer,<sup>4</sup> a captain, a district chief, an assistant chief and then the chief of the Gladstone Fire Department until 1997 when the city decided that it was time to merge all three independent fire departments together. At that time, the city of Maplewood entered into a process to hire a new city fire chief.

I applied for the full-time fire chief's position for the city of Maplewood and did not get the job. An individual by the name of Joel Hewitt<sup>5</sup> did get it,

and I became a district chief at the time.

Basically, I was still in charge of the Gladstone Fire Department. They had three district chiefs:

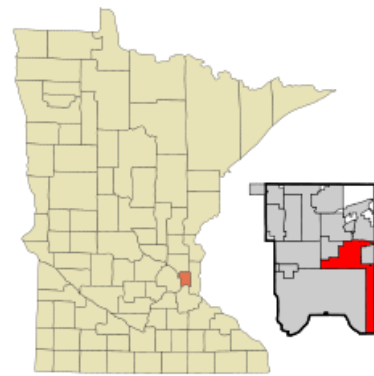
one that took care of the old Parkside

Department<sup>6</sup>, one that took care of the old

Gladstone and one that took care of the old East

County Line Department<sup>7</sup>. This was all still as

paid-per-call firefighters. In 1999, I applied for and became the full-time assistant chief for the city of Maplewood and then in about 2000, the chief there at the



City of Maplewood, MN

---

<sup>4</sup> The **engineer** drives the fire truck and operates the pump to ensure there is adequate water in the hose to the firefighters.

<sup>5</sup> **Joel Hewitt** was a Roseville firefighter 1976 to 2004 (including 7 years as chief); Maplewood Fire Chief Department 1996 to 2000; St. Anthony Fire Chief 2000 to 2004; Moorhead Fire Chief 2004 through 2010. He was first fire chief of Maplewood Fire Department; and initially had no personnel or stations until the 3 Fire Departments agreed to consolidate that became effective January 1, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> **Parkside Fire Department** Chronology—Appendix B

<sup>7</sup> **East County Line Fire Department** Chronology—Appendix C

time, Joel Hewitt, decided to move on, which he did and I was given the opportunity and was promoted to chief. And that's where I've been ever since.

KC: It's been a lifelong career.

SL: It has. It has been a fantastic career. I look back and I have some regrets, more family regret type of a thing. [I put the department many times first rather than my family.] I've had so many wonderful people to work with. I mean, back in the old Gladstone days – and that's kind of the neat thing about it. When I first joined, you did things together. We hunted and fished together. It was a camaraderie. I mean, we would hang out late at the stations and talk and probably why my wife was not keen on the whole deal [of being a firefighter].

And the ladies were very active. My wife, I think she might even have been president for a while of the Ladies Auxiliary. I know she was very actively involved so they played a huge role in the overall beginning of the Gladstone Fire Department. When we'd have major fires, they bring water out and coffee and those types of things. And as time went on, that kind of just went away because our jobs just got so much busier. We added medical service to the departments and that just really bloomed into a whole lot more. So that's pretty much how I started.

KC: When you applied to be a firefighter – a “fireman”, I would imagine in 1977.

SL: Yes. It was right at that borderline, you know. It was like you were a firefighter but there was still a lot of fireman thing was still a big part of it, you know. I guess it was probably right in that, starting to get into that transitional stage.

KC: What did you expect you were going to be getting into?

SL: Well, as a kid growing up in Maplewood (which I did – I've lived there all my life) you would chase the fire trucks. If they got into your neighborhood, you

would chase them and watch them and you know there was always something exciting about it and watching what these guys did, so that's kind of how I got into it. The real reason I think I got even more interested in it is that my wife (her mom was the first police officer for the city of Maplewood) and so by dating Kath at the time, I got to meet so many of the cops and I met Denny Cusick<sup>8</sup>, Schaller<sup>9</sup>, Hagen<sup>10</sup>, and all those guys were on the fire department at the time.

I worked for Harvey Stanke, Stanke Service Station, which was down at the corner of County Road B and Highway 61 and that is a long time ago. I think he'd been there since the early Twenties. His dad had the station and so on. So I worked for him and the guys would come down there.

At one point, I took it over from him and then I had the station and then all the cops would come down and hang out. It was the greatest alarm system you could ever have. I offered free coffee and these guys would always be in there so we had a cop car sitting outside a lot. But anyways, the long and short of it is, through Kath and her mom [Pat Ferrazzo<sup>11</sup>] and then through athletics, were very active in the athletic stuff. My three brothers and I were very active in sports so we got to know a lot of these guys. They encouraged me to do more and more sports and I played hockey for the police department hockey team and

---

<sup>8</sup> **Dennis Cusick** was a Gladstone firefighter 1969 to 1984; was chief 1981 to 1984; with 15 years of service. And was appointed as a Maplewood police officer May 1, 1965; promoted sergeant April 1, 1968; lieutenant August 1, 1969; resigned September 30, 1982, to become Chief of Cottage Grove Police until 1998, with 33 years of public service.

<sup>9</sup> **Dick Schaller** was a Gladstone firefighter May 11, 1954, to January 11, 1982; with 27 years of service.

<sup>10</sup> **Tom Hagen** was a Gladstone firefighter February 8, 1955, to May 8, 1981; with 26 years of fire service; and was appointed Maplewood police officer June 1, 1957; promoted sergeant in 1958; lieutenant July 1, 1960; deputy Chief October 1961; and retired July 1, 1984, with 29 years of police service.

<sup>11</sup> **Pat Ferrazzo** was a Maplewood Police officer

so I got to know even more people and it just moved forward kind of like a rotation type of a thing until a point where I was old enough to do it.

So I really got interested and then Kath and I got engaged. I wasn't on the department yet. We had our wedding date all set and I got on the department and so we had to find an apartment that was close enough to the station. Station 7<sup>12</sup> (at the time we called it), actually it was Station 170.

The number of the station, 170, was related to the trucks so when dispatch dispatched you, the main station was 170. Gladstone was 120 and then the trucks were like 179, 176, you know, those types of things.

KC: You were at Hazelwood.

SL: I was at Hazelwood, the one on County Road C and Hazelwood and so we had to find an apartment and there weren't any around in that area so there was a four-plex there, so we took one of the four-plexes and moved into that. It was a little controversial, but we liked it. We liked the area and we weren't far from where we grew up. We never knew each other really when we were younger and we grew up about two blocks away from each other so we didn't move far out of where we had grown up. Her folks still lived there then and my mom and dad did also and actually still do.

I went to the fire station and did my interview and I my first interview was with Bill Mikiska<sup>13</sup> and Jim Franzen, and if you do talk to Jim, he'll say that one of the things he laughs about this – both of them were in the interview, but

---

<sup>12</sup> **Hazelwood Fire Station** at 1530 East County Road C, Maplewood, was part of the Gladstone Volunteer Fire Department.

<sup>13</sup> **William "Bill" Mikiska** was a Gladstone firefighter May 8, 1973 to 1984; chief in 1982; with 11 years of service.



there was only one guy doing the talking and that was Bill Mikiska. I believe Jim was the district chief of station two and we called them that at Station 2 [1900 Clarence Street] or Gladstone Station and then Bill Mikiska was the district chief at Station 7 [1530 E County Road C], so both of them interviewed me. I anxiously waited for the phone call and I think I got it the next day saying, "You're on and come on up." And that's kind of how it all started.

So I got on the department and got very active and gave it 100% and any time the alarm went off, I was gone. I left anything and everything: birthday parties, Christmases, etc. I mean I look back at it now and it's a disease. Not everybody gets the disease, but I truly believe it's a disease. You just get caught up into that service, you get caught up into the excitement, you get caught up in knowing you can help somebody – and once you've got it, I don't think you can ever get away from it. To be honest with you, I don't know how I'm ever going to retire, but—.

We had probably been married three years and had been living in that duplex and we decided we were finally going to build a home. And the question was well, where are we going to build this home because it can be too far away? As a matter of fact, it has to be as close to the station as it can be because back in those days, everybody came from their home so first at the station meant you got first on the truck. Well, if you wanted to be in the action and really be able to be an interior firefighter, you'd better make sure you were on that first truck because the second truck was hitting the hydrant, venting the roof, etc. It wasn't that inside-let's-get-to-it business.

So anyway, luckily enough Pudge Trepanier <sup>14</sup>, (who had been on the Department) actually had a lot next door to the fire station on Hazelwood and we finally worked it out with Pudge and we ended up buying the lot. We built our first home there and we lived there for at least fourteen years, maybe fifteen years. Then we decided it was time – my wife wanted her dream home and it was time to build that dream home. Again, you can't go too far, I mean at that time it was still the paid-per-call where you still had to get up there fast. Anyway, so we built our new home where we are today which is probably no more than three blocks away from the station, if even that. So we haven't moved far and I guess when I say that is all of our moves, everything that we did was simply because we were hubbed at that time around that one station to make sure I could stay on the department.

One funny thing is that in the four-plex we had on County Road C, it was just two houses up from where firefighter Pudge Trepanier lived and I'll never forget it. A lot of times, I could get out of my driveway quicker where I was and I'd be going down the street and Pudge would be standing out in the street waiting for me so I'd slow down and open the door and he'd jump in and we'd head up to it. There was one time we had an actual working house fire. The call came in as that and I'm shooting up the street and we're going to get there first. I opened the door and I think Pudge is in the car. He isn't in the car and I'm gone and I'm about, I don't know maybe fifty, sixty feet down and I look and he's not in the car and he's running behind me trying to get in – [Kate laughs] Anyways.

---

<sup>14</sup> Eugene "Pudge" Trepanier was a Gladstone/Maplewood firefighter from May 8, 1973 to February 21, 2003; with 30 years of service.

But there was a lot of that and those were some of the really good times and I mean we did a lot of training at the time.

Fire services evolve so dramatically and in the last five years it's been huge. But when you go back to the early Seventies, or even back to Al Schadt's<sup>15</sup> era, they didn't even hardly have SCBA's when they went to the house fires.

KC: SCBA?

SL: That's your mask. That's your self-contained breathing apparatus that you would have. You had your tank on your back and the mask. You could go in and not get the toxic fumes and gases.

And I remember I had – my first thing was a rubber coat and that didn't last long. I think I only had that a year and we finally started getting into the newer equipment and coats. We all had the big rubber boots that you still had to pull up, where today we have the full bib turnout gear.

KC: You've lived through it all.

SL: I have, you know. I've seen a huge transition in the fire service from the beginning to the end where I started. I've seen a huge change in, I mean, all three of the departments and I wasn't that the involved in the other two, but in Gladstone's and how we all evolved and issues we faced.

At one time, you could get paid-per-call firefighters or volunteers. It was pretty easy but we maybe only did 300 calls a year. This year, we're probably



Turnout Gear

---

<sup>15</sup> **Al Schadt** was a Gladstone firefighter June 28, 1949, to March 1, 1981, was chief 1965 to 1968; and city fire marshal 1968 to 1985, with 36 years of service.

going to be at 4800 calls and so you look at that, the time commitment, the training requirements, the new certifications, NFPA<sup>16</sup> (which is the national fire standards that are out there) and you know all those types of things makes it really, really impossible [to be only a pay-per-call/volunteer].

Then there are the changes in the demographics and the city (which has gotten older). But I think one of the other reasons we've had trouble getting people overtime is that most people, the husband and wife both began working, and the kids are in sports. I'll be very honest with you. One of the big things that hit us, probably back in the mid-Eighties or so, was when soccer started to be really big. All of a sudden, these kids who didn't really play football or softball, soccer was the way to go and it was amazing how a lot of the families who didn't really have active kids were then active in soccer so it took away from their time to be a part of the department. Husband and wife working and sports, those were all part of the things that started that decline in being able to get paid-per-call firefighters.

KC: The culture has changed. Stay-at-home wives created a lot more free time for husbands to be involved.

SL: Oh, absolutely. And we were in that. My wife's a teacher and I was a teacher for a while and then I ended up moving into another career and I was still on the fire department and we raised three girls. Oh, absolutely. They were active in skating and sports and you had to find time. When we first started, you hate to say it was a hobby, but when I started it was only 300 calls a year if even that in some

---

<sup>16</sup> **The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)** is an international nonprofit organization established in 1896. The company's mission is to reduce the worldwide burden of fire and other hazards on the quality of life by providing and advocating consensus codes and standards, research, training, and education. With a membership that includes more than 70,000 individuals from nearly 100 nations. NFPA is the world's leading advocate of fire prevention and an authoritative source on public safety.

cases. You would maybe get a call a week, maybe two calls a week, so it wasn't that bad. But today, the Maplewood Fire Department averages about fourteen calls a day. So it is a huge change in the environment, so you have to treat it now totally as a part-time job if you want to do it versus back then you could make it a hobby.

After a call, we'd all hang out and go over to the pop machine that we had there that if you hit the empty button, you got a can of beer out of it. [Kate laughs]. The fire station was something that you brought the guys in on. It was a club as well as that but we provided a hell of a service to the community at a very reasonable if not almost a cheap rate as far as the cost to the citizens and that. But again, as time changed, things changed. I mean, laws changed. "Hey, you know what guys? We're way too busy. You can't have beer in the fire station anymore." You know, those kinds of things changed and as those things changed, that whole club mentality kind of slowly dissipated because you didn't have that any more.

You know, we'd get a call at nine o'clock on Friday night and we may sit up there until two in the morning just talking. Well, today, the call is over and you're home because you got so many other things to do. You've got to get to sleep.

The other big thing that really changed the fire service was daytime firefighters. Back in the Sixties, Seventies and even the first early part of the Eighties, you had three shifts. You had an afternoon working shift, a daytime shift and an evening shift. You'd be hard-pressed today to find many businesses or manufacturers that have a midnight shift. Well, that's where we got our daytime guys, these guys that worked 11:00 to 7:00. They would come home and go to sleep but then they'd get up for calls and so we had those guys during the

day. As the shift thing went away and everybody went more to afternoons and days, then really even afternoon shifts went away more to day shifts, it became almost impossible to get daytime firefighters anymore and then we would use some of the city people from Maplewood PD, some of those guys, but as the city got larger, the calls got bigger. All of those things were really the focuses to why, at some point in time, the city finally decided that we've gotten large enough, the city has gotten bigger, a lot of things were in place that it was time to take a look at having it become a city department.

KC: Last night I was watching a video that you had done, and unfortunately it doesn't put a date to it, but you're being interviewed by a city manager about some research that had been done and changes that were going to take place. And what struck me was someone who wants to be a firefighter today really wants a medical career, and then to play at firefighting a little bit, because most of her calls seem to be medical. And you have to be a paramedic<sup>17</sup> to join Maplewood Fire Department if you're going to be full-time. So that's really a medical career.

SL: It has changed. The police department started the paramedic program in 1974. Denny Cusick, at the time, was a sergeant or a lieutenant, I can't remember and Denny was really big in getting the whole program up and running. Then they

---

<sup>17</sup> **Paramedics** are advanced providers of emergency medical services and are highly educated in topics such as anatomy and physiology, cardiology, medications, and medical procedures. Their skills include administering medications, starting intravenous lines, providing advanced airway management for patients, and learning to resuscitate and support patients with significant problems such as heart attacks and traumas. Paramedics complete a two year degree program (between 1,200 to 1,800 hours), and are required to hold additional certifications such as Basic Life Support, Advanced Cardiac Life Support, Pediatric Advanced Life Support from the American Heart Association, and are required to attend a minimum of 24 hours of continuing medical education annually for their state certification and 36 hours of continuing medical education annually for their national certification. Paramedic education is accredited by the Commission on Allied Health Education Accreditation. Paramedics work primarily in urban and suburban communities. About 95% of paramedics are fully compensated employees.

found out that the call volume started to increase for the police side of it because they were transporting and it was taking them so much time out of the city and they are running into problems. So, they came to the three fire departments and said, “Here’s what we want you to do, we want you guys to take the ambulances. You become EMT<sup>18</sup>s and then you respond to the call and we’ll respond to the call. We can send one police paramedic in the ambulance if we need it. If it’s a BLS call, you’ll be trained and you guys can take the call without us.

KC: BLS?

SL: Basic Life Support and ALS is Advanced Life Support and that’s where you need a paramedic involved. It isn’t a lot of difference but there are some treatments, i.e., giving medications, certain things that they have to do and go along with.

So anyway, at that time then, they came to us and said, “Hey, you know, we need your help”, and the departments balked at it. It was going to add calls and there were some of us that were all on board with this and went to EMT training and became EMTs. So as that kind of evolved a little bit, I would say it added at least another 25-30% calls on per year that we didn’t have before so we started adding some of this. In those early days it didn’t really strain the department but as of today, 80-85% of our calls are medically related. Our fire calls are actually down or stay pretty steady so we don’t see that much of the fire side of it like we used to. The other big thing too is that the change in sprinkler

---

<sup>18</sup> **Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)** can serve in the patient compartment of an ambulance. EMTs use medical equipment such as automatic defibrillators, deliver trauma care and are educated in a simple way over all injuries and diseases. EMTs form the backbone of EMS—Emergency Medical Services delivery in the United States. Most work in a team with more advanced providers. EMTs usually complete a course that is about 150 hours in length for 9 college credits, are required to hold a Basic Life Support certification from the American Heart Association, and are required to attend a minimum of 12 hours a year of continuing medical education.

systems now, the codes that the cities have. You have sprinkler systems/you have better monitoring systems. The only thing I'll say about a lot of the new construction it's lightweight, so unfortunately when we do get fires and some of the residential homes, you don't have a lot of chance of saving them because of the materials they're made out of. I think in the next three to five years you'll probably see it as a standard that you'll have to have sprinkler systems in regular residential homes.

But you're exactly right. So back then, having the paramedic side of it really started get rolling a little bit more. Some guys left because they didn't want any part of that and then there were some of the departments, and I believe it was Parkside who said, "All right, from this day forward anybody who joins has to be an EMT - anybody that was on before, it's your option to do it." So I mean some of the departments did a little bit to try to make it a little bit better, but that's when, after maybe three to five years of that, you started to see a little bit of the strain because of the call volumes increasing and that type of thing as the city got larger, grew and more development came in.

KC: Did you see the direction it was going to go? I mean, obviously you have lived with it, you have intimately been involved in making decisions as having authority position, but when it started happening, were you able to see the direction or did you kind of just go with it?

SL: Yes, to be very honest with you I think in the early years, I don't think anybody really thought it was going to get as big as it did. I would say it probably wasn't until the mid-Eighties that everybody started to see the viability of where the medic program was and how it was changing. It probably wasn't really until into the 1990s, maybe '90 to '95, where you started to see that really where the problem came was that the police department was having a hard time getting



police paramedics and then they went into a training mode. I hate to say it, but as the city police department got bigger, some of the crimes changed a little bit as we became not so much a suburb as we did more of a first ring city. We became more of that and so that started to change when you had two officers on a car stop and it was a felony stop and one was a paramedic. It was pretty hard to pull him off the call to go to a medic call and so they were running into some issues too, and so then they started looking at how can we make this bigger and that was all part of the transitional change. It's been a great run, I mean, with the police paramedic program. It has served the community well and it's gone through its courses of evolution as well and we're to a point now where that's probably something that will go by the wayside in the next year or two.

KC: So there still are police paramedics.

SL: There are, but very few. Probably for the last five years they've been a great insurance policy to us and what I mean by that is, when we get really hammered or we get all of our people actively involved and we don't have enough, we have a few of them out in the street that can respond so we have had them as kind of our backup. But through attrition for them - those that have retired and those that got promoted to other positions, it's become more difficult for them so I think today, there's maybe only two of them on the street, maybe three and so it's not like we can count on them like we did earlier. It was a great addition and if there was any way we could keep that going we'd surely like to but it's pretty hard to find police officers today that want to be paramedics and then to be able to take them off the street for an hour if they go on the call because an average call for us is about an hour from the time we get assigned to the time we get back in service.

KC: Let's go back and talk about some of those early days in Gladstone. What was one of the first fires you remember?

SL: Sure. First fire was Christmas Eve and it was a fire up on Frost Avenue just a few houses down from White Bear Avenue. I was pretty new at the time actually. I may have only been on not even a year yet and it was a working basement fire and we had flames coming out of the basement window. No one was home at



SCBA unit

the time so we got there. For the first year or so, you were the hose puller and then you got to put your SCBA<sup>19</sup> on as the training got going. Anyways, so I'm standing and we were making entrance to the basement because you went through the back door and it went straight down into the basement and we went to the back door down there and we went in and I'm standing there and just going to pull the hose, going to do my thing.

All of a sudden, it was Dick Juker<sup>20</sup> and it was Wayne Lindahl.<sup>21</sup> They both yelled at me and grabbed me. "Grab the hose - you're going in with us." And I was, "Wow, this is cool. This is going to be really cool." so I grabbed it and I went down with them. There were three of us on the hose line and I was the last one. You kind of spread out a little bit so you can get the hose. Anyways, those guys were down in. Now I'm way down in the basement and we're down there

---

<sup>19</sup> A **self-contained breathing apparatus**, or SCBA, is a device worn by rescue workers, firefighters, and others to provide breathable air in an IDLH (immediate danger to life and health) atmosphere.

<sup>20</sup> **Richard "Dick" Juker** was a Gladstone firefighter December 14, 1965, to March 30, 1994; with 28 years of service.

<sup>21</sup> **Wayne Lindahl** was a Gladstone firefighter December 8, 1970, to February 1, 1993; with 22 years of service.

and all of a sudden I hear this big bang and thud kind of off to the side of me and Dick and them were spraying water and we finally backed out. We thought we had it knocked down and it was still going in a few spots. Anyways we pulled back out and we get back up. We got the fire out and Dick is saying, "Hey, good job - you did great. You were down in there and everything." I said, "You guys hear that big thud?" And they go, "Oh, yeah. Did you see that?" And I go, "No." We go back downstairs. The floor truss joists had burnt through. The refrigerator fell through. Yes and so that was kind of an eye-opener to really to say this isn't all fun and games. That really sunk home pretty good that you're really in dark. I mean, you can't see anything. You have no idea what's in there, how the basement is designed and that was probably my baptism I guess you could say into the fire service. From that day forward – awareness is 150% of anything you do in the fire service and that's kind of really how it started and I couldn't have gone in with two better firefighters at the time.

KC: But at this point, you had completed Firefighter I?

SL: Yes. Back then, there wasn't all this Firefighter I, Firefighter II stuff. You went through training with them and when the district chiefs kind of felt you had enough, then you kind of went in. I'll be very honest with you, there were times too that if there were only three or four people there, you did it. You just went, and you did it.

Yes, Firefighter I. Firefighter II<sup>22</sup> probably didn't come in until, I want to say maybe four or five years after I was on the department. Yes, that finally started coming in through the colleges, junior colleges at the time were doing it.

KC: Did you go through those?

SL: Absolutely. I went through Firefighter I, Firefighter II and Firefighter III. I went through my officer courses and that at the time. Since then, we've kept all of our certifications up. I was an EMT back in 1977 and I've kept that up all the time. I really believe that even as the chief today or any of our chiefs, we have to be available. I mean, there are still times that I still actively go into a working house fire. When you get there and somebody else is in command and you need help, we still have to be able and ready to do it. I'll be very honest with you, I'd rather be inside than outside any day of the week.

KC: Talk about the last fire that you were actively at.

SL: You know, it has been a while. I get accused of getting involved when I shouldn't get involved by the firefighters and what I mean by that is maybe the fire is really winding down and I'll hand command off to somebody else and I'll go in and help them mop up and those kinds of things. You know, I'm trying to think of the last one I was really actively in that I went into. It's been a while. I've done a lot of cleanup after the fact - we've gone in after the fire has been knocked down. Let me think on that, I got to think, good question though.

KC: What do you mean by cleanup?

---

<sup>22</sup> **Firefighting I and II** classes were taught at several technical colleges in the metro area. Starting in 1972, ISD 287 Vo-Tech (since 1995 called Hennepin Technical College) sent instructors to local fire departments (including Maplewood's volunteer departments) for training in basic firefighting procedures that had been established by the National Fire Protection Association. In the early 1980's, 916 Vo-Tech (in 1996 became Century College) began teaching these procedures which eventually became Firefighting I. Firefighting II was later established for more advanced firefighting skills.

SL: What we do is we go in and after we have the fire under control or knocked down we call it, then you have to go in and hit the spot fires. There's always going to be embers, other stuff going in. You've got to pull the ceilings and make sure the fire is out. We don't want to have to go back the next day or two hours later. We put a fire out and the call comes in that it reignited itself. We call that warranty work. We hate warranty work in the fire service, so we really do what we can to make sure that when we leave, it is totally out. And there's times too, if we're short people and we're still fighting the fire, one of us will rotate in to be a part of the crew to do that.

KC: So if there is an alarm that's called and the word comes back that it's a major fire, you take off for it.

SL: Actually, we respond. The chief is sent to pretty much every fire call that we get, because we have take-home cars and because we can usually get there sometimes before everyone else – it depends. Sometimes we don't. So we can give a good size of the building, what's happening, what we have so we can put a strategy into place on how we're going to attack this and how we're going to get this thing handled before the trucks even arrived, so that's a good thing.

KC: How many chiefs you have?

SL: Right now we have five. There are two assistant chiefs and two battalion chiefs and every one of us has a car to take home and then we respond as we need.

And you asked, how do we know when we get a big fire? Usually, because we respond on those types calls and over the years – you can kind of tell based on what dispatch says. "We have a fire alarm in an apartment building, no sign of smoke or fire." And then you think of the building. Or "We just had multiple calls on smoke coming out of a window." That's a whole different

concept, so you kind of, over time, have learned what to listen for and kind of get a good idea and probably 99% of the time you can hit it.

KC: So you're pretty much monitoring at all times.

SL: Yes and if we do, we have a protocol set in that we have what we call an all-call today. And what that means is that if it meets these certain criteria [sic] when somebody calls into the dispatcher, they do an all-call, which means to us it has a very good possibility of being a working fire or it is a working fire and we respond accordingly and we always respond to those.

KC: So you happen to be the chief – when you show up at a fire, do other people defer, step down, so you're the chief in charge, or will you let one of the battalion chief's continue?

SL: Oh, absolutely not. That's one thing we pride our department on and that is that all of our chiefs and even our captains, I mean, pretty much all of our officer staff can stay in charge of the fire. Now in many cases, what will come in is that if we are not the first one there and we have a short enough crew, we may tell them "Well, all right, we'll assume command now and you can become part of that working crew," because we need some of those guys that are closer in there to be actively involved whether it's a car accident or whatever the case may be. A lot of times, we let them continue on if they're there and we may sit in the car with them and support them or we may become a Division A Officer or Division C (that's places around the building) to be actively involved or we may even suit up. Because during the day; it's happened to me and it's happened to all of the chiefs, that if one of the chiefs are involved – I'll suit up and put the tank on and I'll become one of the crew and we'll actually go in and fight the fire.

It's a lot of everything but I really pride our department on that. We have some good depth and I have four great chiefs that I have no problems whatsoever with if they are in charge and leaving them in charge. I go back to what I say... I'd rather be inside than outside so any opportunity I can that I know we are okay, I will go in. [Kate laughs]

KC: So in the early years, were there any really big fires that you were involved with?

SL: Yeah, there were a couple at Mogren's, a huge pole barn building and office building that they had. That was a big fire we were involved in and we had a number of house fires. I was not on the department at the time of the big GEM fire<sup>23</sup> but I didn't live far from there so I walked up and I sat on the big hill on the east side of GEM and I watched the whole thing for hours.

Over the years that have just gone by, there have been so many of them. We had a big service station business in Gladstone that burnt to the ground. I was part of that and there were a fair amount of the larger fires.

---

<sup>23</sup> **GEM Store Fire** The GEM Department Store was located at 2280 Maplewood Drive, the southeast corner of Highway 61 and Highway 36, was a discount department store for members. A fire destroyed the store on August 28, 1967, noted for large plumes of dark smoke visible for many miles and shutting down Highway 61 to pump water from nearby Keller Lake.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 30, 1967 ☆☆ THIRTY-SEVEN



THE FLAG STILL WAVED as flames and smoke billowed from the GEM, Inc., store in Maplewood. The building, at 2280 Maplewood Drive, was destroyed in a spectacular blaze Monday afternoon. Nobody was injured. Loss has been estimated at \$1.5 million to \$2 million, but the official amount won't be known until a report is completed on all the merchandise and leased departments of the store. — Staff Photo by Flynn Ell.

KC: Do you remember one of the early fires where you were a captain or you were chief where the first time you were walking in being in charge?

SL: Yes. We had, it didn't seem like much, it was a garage fire when it came in and when I got there, it was a garage that was attached to the house. I was the first officer on the scene in the truck and I took command of that and we made an interior attack and we didn't realize how far long it had been burning and how



far it got into the house. So at one point we could see and I could see in and I finally made the call. I said, "All right, it's time to get everybody out of there. We're not going to lose anybody in this." So you hit the air horns and you get everybody out of the building and everything.

And it was funny. I can't remember who the officer was. I want to say it was Jim Franzen, but I'm not positive. He came up to me and he said, "Why are you pulling everybody out?" And I told him why and it probably wasn't 10 minutes later and the roof started to collapse and by no means was Jim questioning, but he was getting me to think, "Why did you really do this type of a thing?"

It all goes back to the awareness piece. I mean, when you're the commander and you're outside, whether you're a captain, no matter who you are, you have to think of the big picture and you cannot be focused – you have to be looking at everything that is going on around there. That's really, I think – what really helps to make someone a good officer is having the ability to do that.

KC: How did you learn to do that? I think it's a certain type of mind that has the capacity to do that.

SL: That's a good question. You know, I don't really know. I had some really great teachers: One was Bill Mikiska. Bill has been gone now for quite a few years but he was a great resource and I looked to him quite a bit for that. Jim Franzen was another one and we had some great firefighters I listened to. Ed Dietz<sup>24</sup> was on the department. Eddie was good and so was Jack Oswald<sup>25</sup>. I mean, a lot of

---

<sup>24</sup> **Ed Dietz** was a Gladstone/Maplewood firefighter December 16, 1975, to May 1, 2008; with 33 years of service.

<sup>25</sup> **Jack Oswald** was a Gladstone firefighter May 8, 1973 to August 4, 1993; with 20 years of service.

these guys who had been around for a while – if you watched them and listened to them and got an idea, it really helped form a little bit of where you were headed. There was also a lot of experience in Al Schadt and Dick Schaller<sup>26</sup>. Some of those guys that had been on a long time ago and so you just – I don't know, you just kind of maybe acquired it.

KC: After the fire, when you'd go back to the station and the beer would flow, would people rehash the fire?

SL: Oh, absolutely. Oh, God, yeah. If that fire was a closet fire, by the time we were done hashing it, we had four buildings burnt to the ground. Absolutely. And those were some of the great days too when you'd do that. You'd go back and, "Hey, did you see that down there, man. I hit the corner of that room and it just –" and all that and I would say 40% truth and 60% was ad-libbed, you know, to what was really happening. But those were the things that really helped and that's what really brings guys together.

I will say this and I still truly believe it today, is that what we really look for is people who people can trust. That's a huge part because if you've got somebody on the end of that nozzle or you have somebody behind you that in the heat of the battle is going to bail on you or doesn't have the foresight or doesn't have good knowledge, that's dangerous and you don't want to do that. And through my whole career, I can't think of maybe two or three people that I've ever had even on our department – or even back in the Gladstone days – that you would think a little bit twice about or you'd put them in a position that you

---

<sup>26</sup> **Richard Schaller** was appointed police officer July 7, 1956; promoted sergeant in 1958; captain July 1, 1960; chief October 1961; and retired April 29, 1982.

can watch them in case something went wrong. We always were able to get good people.

KC: Without naming a name, do you remember a time where someone came on and they didn't have the skill set and you couldn't trust them?

SL: Oh, absolutely.

KC: How do you flush them out?

SL: They usually flush themselves out. They just didn't fit in with the group and it showed and when I say that, it's not necessarily always going in. There were some people who didn't really care to go in. They would go in, but that wasn't their big thing and see, I'd rather go in than be on the outside but some of them made great engineers. I mean, they knew those trucks, they knew how to pump, and that was kind of the other thing you looked for too. When you got on the scene and you knew who was pumping, you knew you had your lifeline because that's your hose. When you saw who was doing that, that was one worry you didn't have because if something were to go wrong with that truck or you lost water, you weren't at all afraid because they knew what they could do to change this, to change that so that you could continue to have those things. So yeah, I mean, everybody found a little niche. But yes, there were some people that just didn't work either way and they didn't last long. I mean, they kind of washed themselves out.

KC: Now in the current fire environment, how do you help your firefighters find their niche? Because it's a different type of a world. You don't just get to float around.

SL: Yes and it has become much tougher to do that. Going back to the days when I joined, I had an interview with the guys. It probably didn't last more than 10

minutes. “Yeah, I think he fits in. He’ll be one of the good old boys. Yeah, we’ll mark him down.” And I got the phone call. Today, that’s really changed – and we had to. We do huge background checks. I mean, running an ambulance service today, we have to know who is in the back of those ambulances. We have kids in the back that are by themselves and we have vulnerable adults back there. We have to make sure that the people we have today have the integrity – so we do a huge background check on everyone as much as you would on a police officer. We also do psychological tests. If we feel that this is something that they can’t do, if this is something that they can’t be able to withstand, the unfortunate scenes that we see with accidents and death and all that, we try to wash that out as much as we possibly can in the beginning.

Then when they come in, you don’t have the option anymore of just saying, “All right, I’m just going to kind of be the driver and the engineer of this truck.” Today, you have to kind of be able to do it all. So when we train, everybody has to train on everything and that’s why our new training center is going to be outstanding when that gets up and running this year. Everybody has to be trained in all the different aspects of it and we still do have people that wash out. We have people that get on and just find that this medical stuff is not for them.

It’s hard. I mean, when you deal with death – and we deal with it on an ongoing basis – it becomes hard. You lose a little child. That becomes hard. And we do everything we can to support everybody when those kinds of things happen so it is a different when you add the medical side to it, it is a whole different piece. So we do lose people yet today and we do what we can to get them all the help they need in regards to training and everything but there are times that we have to say, “This just isn’t going to work for you.”

KC: Do you still have volunteers?

SL: No, we haven't had – actually, even back when I joined, this whole volunteer thing – a true volunteer. I always use this – Out East is really where it started. A true volunteer – and earlier on in Maplewood, it was that way.

A true volunteer is someone who receives no dollar amount or anything.

Now, we didn't get much. When I first got on – when I first joined – we got fifty cents a call. So you might say you're volunteering, but –

KC: It's a stipend.

SL: Yeah, it's a stipend. You might say you were volunteering and what they did is they would take in a little budget. They'd say, "All right, we're going to put \$5000 into the kitty this year for pay." Then based on the number of calls they figured it was fifty cents a call. So, if you went on 10 calls, you got fifty cents for the 10 calls and then they started a little pension plan which has gotten to be considerable for many members of the department. But then they put a little pension in, and at the time, you had to put on 20 years. At the end of the 20 years, you got a little bonus thing. So that was a big thing too so you weren't in it for the money. There was nobody that was in it for the money. You were in it for the camaraderie. You were in it to do a service to your community. You were in it for the excitement. You were in it to meet people and learn and obviously over the years that has changed dramatically too.

When I say you got it per call back then, it was fifty cents and if you were out on the call for four hours, you got fifty cents. So it was kind of that back and forth kind of a deal where today you get an hourly wage and go from there.

KC: So today you have a lot of part time.

SL: Yes. Actually we were a paid-per-call department where everybody still used their pagers and responded from home. Back in 2002, we really couldn't cover our days anymore, so we started hiring some full-time folks. We hired six and that was going to be our daytime coverage and then that wasn't even enough so we continued to add a few more full-time. Then in 2011, it really became where we couldn't get paid-per-call people either. We'd gotten so large and the number of calls, the amount of training, it became a pretty big thing.

The other problem that we ran into was that we were, based on the demographics – like, take Gladstone for instance, it's the oldest part of our community. Well, there weren't a lot of young people in there, so we couldn't get people to respond. Now we maybe would have younger people farther away but it didn't fit because you needed to live within that five or six minutes of the station in order to be able to get there in time. So what we really thought is we've got a lot of great people on the department but they're assigned to a specific station and we said, "Let's look at some other things." So we put this huge group of firefighters together from each station and came up with our new model that we have today and we've been doing it since March of 2011 and it's been working fantastic. It is where they sign up to work shifts at any of the three stations and so you sign up and you have to work thirty-six hours a month. So you go in and you schedule yourself where you want to work and that way there we've been able to take talent from those other areas. We can move them. You're not caught into living there and the other thing we did is, by doing that, we don't have to worry about finding people only within six or five minutes of a station. They can live wherever because they're coming back now to work those specific hours for us.

And so we have a lot of Oakdale firefighters. We have some from Inver Grove Heights and Roseville. I mean, we have them from all over now that sign up to work for us so our talent is much better. They get to use their skills at two different places, so their talents are much better and at the same time, there's a lot more availability of firefighters doing it this way.

KC: So a shift is twelve hours or twenty-four?

SL: We have it set up where some are four – well, our full-time staff all do twenty-four-hour shifts. Our part-time staff can work four-hour, six-hour, twelve-hour or twenty-four hour shifts. So we try to make it as flexible for them as they can to get their thirty-six hours in.

And we have very few people that put in thirty-six hours. I think our average firefighters puts in forty-eight to fifty-four hours a month. We have some that put in over hundred hours.

KC: Some of your part-time?

SL: Yes, part-time. They love to do it, they want to do it. If we could let them do 200 hours, they'd do 200 hours.

KC: So in other words, full-time firefighters, they just might work for several departments part-time and not get benefits?

SL: Yes, actually most of them on our part-time staff. I think we only have two that are full-time somewhere else. The rest of them are either paid-per-call or part-time firefighters for Oakdale, Stillwater – other departments.

KC: So if you had two or three departments and you worked a lot of hours, you are full-time firefighter. You're just not assigned full-time to one department.

SL: Correct.

KC: And I imagine you don't pay benefits to your part-time.

SL: No we do not.

KC: So that's a good model for the city's budget.

SL: Absolutely and the big thing that we have there is the fact that it fits in other people's schedules too. Actually, what it did do, a lot of our firefighters we were hearing early on saying, "I love what I do. I want to be here for 20 years but the wife wants her dream home. Well, we can't find it in Maplewood but we can find it a little bit farther out in Oakdale" or wherever it may be or Woodbury. But they were caught living within our limits, so when we did this, we had three or four of the guys instantly buy new homes and look for new places to live. We might have lost them earlier in the process had we not been able to do some of these things and we picked up some great talent. I mean, it's just a positive for us because it's a lot less training that we have to do because they're coming from other departments already trained and it's a matter of just showing them the Maplewood way. You know, putting water on the fire is the same no matter where you go. It's just some of our policies and that we have to do so it's been a real asset and a plus to us.

KC: You have to manage the budget.

SL: I do.

KC: Is that one of the more fun parts or more difficult parts? Because crisis calls is something that's hard to manage.

SL: You have your good budget days and you have your bad budget days. I will say that the city of Maplewood for both police and fire, I should say public safety as a whole, has really done an outstanding job over the years. Do I want more? Absolutely but I can't really complain that I haven't gotten what I needed. It



may have taken a year or two to put it all together but they've done very well for us. They understand the need, the service we do and I think a lot of it has to do with our firefighters. I mean, if our firefighters didn't perform good service to the community, I think it would be a lot harder for us to ask for the dollars we have. I have an excellent group of people who I look after and they do fantastic so that's much easier to sell to the council and to the others. It hasn't been all that bad. Do we have some challenges? Yes, we have some challenges but we work through those.

KC: I have the illusion that fire response time is one of the keys that evaluates a fire department.

SL: It is and I'm not sure that that's always the right way to do it either. Years ago it wasn't as bad and then for a while it was. Right now, I think we're averaging about six minutes and maybe thirty seconds citywide which is a pretty good response time. But again to some individual homes, it might have been longer just because of the demographics. If all of our ambulances are out on service on other calls or one is way up on the north end and has to go to the south end there are going to be longer response times, but on an average, we're about six minutes and thirty seconds. I think that's what it was in 2012.

KC: For fire or for medical?

SL: Both. That's our average for all calls and so I mean we don't do too bad in that actually. The big thing I always say is that if it even took you a couple minutes longer to get there, the key is once we get there, the service we provide. So it's kind of like a double whammy. We need to get there in the best possible time but we also have to have the best capable people to provide the service because if I get there in one minute and the service that I deliver to you into the house when you are having a heart attack is substandard, time doesn't mean anything

at that point. So we really pride ourselves on the fact that we can get very qualified people, both EMTs and paramedics, on the scene in a good time amount or reasonable time and then they provide excellent service.

The other thing we've really done is we take as much use of technology and change as we can. For instance, in the years past, you'd do CPR and you need four or five people in the room because you'd get tired in a minute and have to change off. Well, going to the new Lucas devices<sup>27</sup>, which is an automatic CPR machine that we can put on very quickly in a matter of seconds, you put that on and do it and we can have less people that we even need on the call than we used to have on the call and you get consistent CPR for hours. This machine is constant, it's consistent and you get the best possible care you can.



And there are other things that we've done over time even in the fire service. One is, I'll call it a grenade but that's not what it's called. Our district chiefs have some – we have them in our ambulances that we can use when we get to a house fire and it may be an extra minute or two before the truck. We now have some of the little canisters that we can pull a pin on and throw it in through the window and it will actually either put the fire out in some

---

<sup>27</sup> LUCAS™ Chest Compression System is a safe and efficient tool that standardizes chest compressions in accordance with the latest scientific guidelines. It provides the same quality for all patients and over time, independent of transport conditions, rescuer fatigue, or variability in the experience level of the caregiver. By doing this, it frees up rescuers to focus on other life-saving tasks and creates new rescue opportunities. LUCAS began development in Sweden in 1991, and was introduced in the US by Medtronic Ltd. in 2007/08.

reasonable time or it will slow it down. So we've got other tools that we can take to make up for some of the time differences if we need to do that.

And so there's a lot of change in technology today that's out there for us to do but I would say yes, response times are important. But what's even more important is the skilled people that we provide to the scene because like I said, I could be there in a minute and if I don't have good quality people, that minute doesn't do you much good. It might as well be 30 minutes.

KC: What's in this grenade that you –

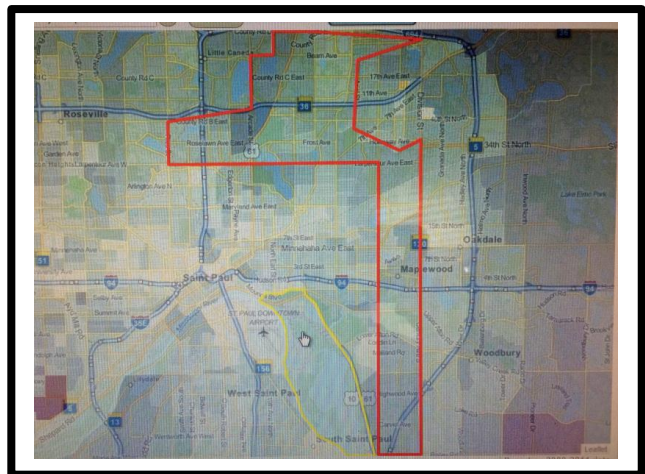
SL: Oh, it's a new product that's out there and what it does is it basically takes the oxygen out of the air. In your triangle, you need fuel, heat and you need oxygen to keep a fire going. By throwing what I call a grenade in there, it eliminates the oxygen so it doesn't have anything to burn so it actually drops the fire temperature. So it's just another tool that we added to our toolbox. We are thinking at some point these may even become valuable to actually having as a homeowner like your fire extinguisher, having one of these that if you walk downstairs and you see that there is a fire in your laundry room area or something like that (not that we want people to stay), but it might be something like your fire extinguisher. You can grab this quick, throw it in, close the door and get out...so there's a lot of technology.

I do believe, like I said earlier, in the next three to five years probably not older homes but any new construction, I think you're going to see sprinklers for the cost. I would put one in my home hands down.

KC: Are you responsible for doing the technology research, always being on top of it, or is that something –

SL: Yes, we do that as a team. We send a lot of our chiefs. We even send our captains and firefighters to different schooling and training and as they pick up and see stuff, and with the world today of technology with the computers, we get inundated. And there is stuff out there that you look at it and you go, "Yeah, okay." There's so much that gets thrown at you and so you do have to evaluate it and we really do. Before we go out and spend any kind of money, we'll really take a good look at it. We'll see who else has been using it and sometimes we won't even be the guinea pig. We'll let somebody else try it for a year first in other department and if it works, we'll jump in on it.

KC: I watched a video in which you talked about moving from serving an area that is only within the city limits, to fire districts. A Fire District would serve an area that is not determined by city limits, and may include several cities. Do you think that is something to consider? The current city limit around Maplewood is challenging.



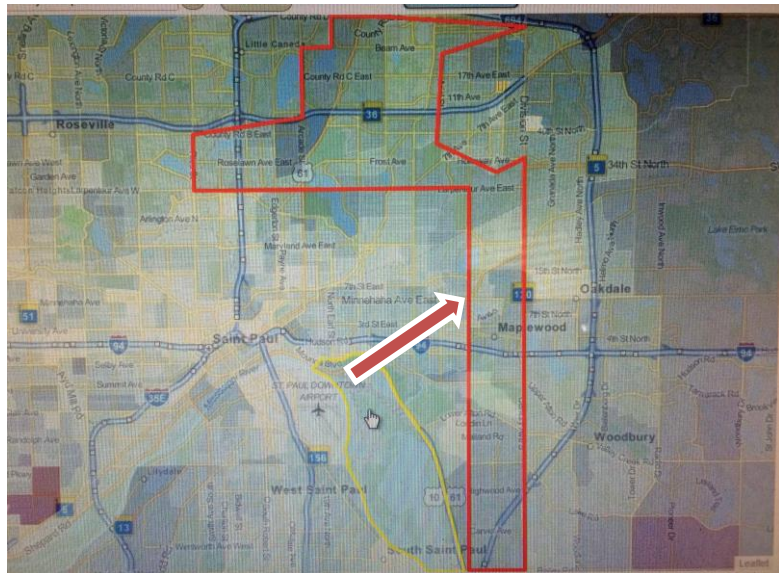
City of Maplewood boundary in red

SL: And that's the unfortunate thing about the city of Maplewood is the shape. Most cities are pretty much square or in some kind of a box. We have this long leg which provides us with way more challenges than other cities may not have. This is just Steve thinking out loud. I truly believe that the future for the fire service will be moving in the direction of fire districts for many reasons; geographical shapes of cities, call volumes, financial considerations, personnel needs and the fact that equipment is becoming more and more expensive today. In order to purchase a fire truck, you

have to spend anywhere between \$400,000 and \$500,000 to get a truck that will meet the needs of a fire department today which puts a burden on many cities. The city of Maplewood, for all practical purposes, is 100% built out so the incoming dollars from new construction/new taxes are limited which in the years to come will prove to be a real problem in funding all city departments. I have had conversations with local area fire chiefs who agree with me that the future the fire service is going to be in consolidation of fire departments. I doubt that this will happen in my career but it only makes sense for all departments to continue to provide the best service possible they're going to have to be some significant changes. The fire district method has been proven out west to be of value and if it works for them I believe it can do the same here. Not only would we form a fire district but it would also be a taxing district which would allow for dollars within cities to be freed up to be used for other worthy causes. When someone calls 911, it's due to an emergency whether it is a medical or fire related type of an emergency they really don't care where the ambulance or fire truck comes from or what it says on the side as long as they get there in a reasonable amount of time and provide outstanding customer service. but these are only my thoughts from a firefighter who's been around for over 38 years.

And here's a prime example: We're building that new fire station on 3M<sup>28</sup> campus.

It's right on McKnight Road [600 McKnight Road, Maplewood, MN].



We had people across the street who were so excited that we're building this new station and on the other side of the road is the city of Saint Paul so they came and said – and it was one of these things that was like, “No, we will not be responding to your house if it is on fire.” But let me rephrase that. “If we know your house is on fire or you run across the street and tell us it's on fire, absolutely we will respond, but if you call 911, we won't get it, Saint Paul will get it.” We share ambulance services now. We go into Oakdale; Oakdale comes in us.

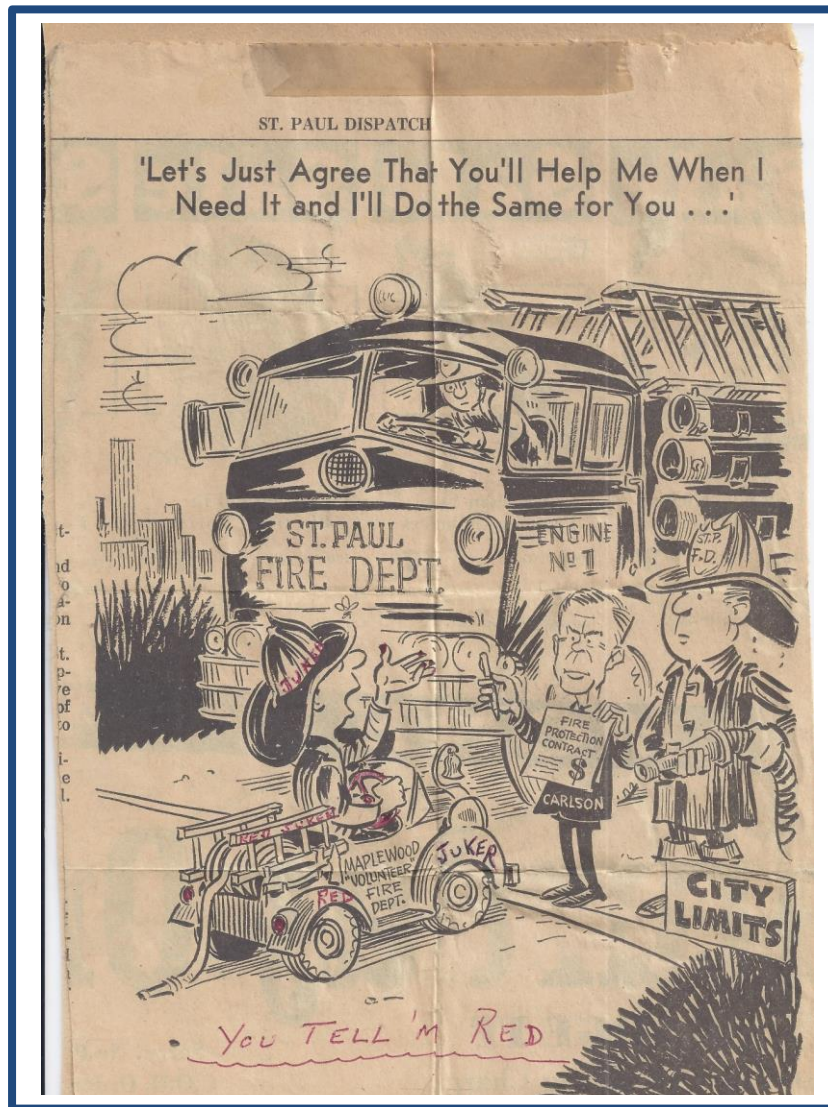
---

<sup>28</sup> The **3M Company**, formerly known as the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company, is an American multinational conglomerate corporation with headquarters in Maplewood, Minnesota. The company was started in 1902 in Two Harbors before moving to the east side of Saint Paul around 1910. In 1952, they bought land in New Canada Township (later Maplewood) between McKnight Road and Century Avenue to allow expansion for their research laboratories and headquarters. In 2014 the 3M Center of 475 acres has over 50 buildings and the company employs over 88,000 worldwide, produces more than 55,000 products. In 2013, Maplewood and 3M announced a joint decision to locate a Maplewood fire station in the northwest corner of the 3M Center.

We go into Saint Paul; Saint Paul comes over here to us. We really believe at some point you're going to have to put these things together and you forget about boundaries whether they are county boundaries or whether they are city boundaries. If there's a station there, you should draw a circle and it shouldn't matter that you don't go this side of the street because it's not your city. We really believe that when we do some of these things that it will provide much better service and it will be much more cost-effective when we do this. So to be very honest with you, [Chief] Jeff [Anderson from Oakdale] and I talked a lot about this and actually where we placed this one station on 3M campus is where we were looking. So at some point if we do fire districts, we have a station in place as we start to redo this and Saint Paul the same way. I mean, we really tried to look at what we can do in the future.

But that's kind of my crystal ball thinking.

KC: I've seen a cartoon after one of the major fires – I don't know if it was the GEM fire – where Saint Paul. The little Maplewood truck is saying to big Saint Paul, you know, "You'll help us, we'll help you." So what used to be Saint Paul not helping is looking more like everybody is –



SL: Oh, yes. You go back years ago and that may have really been the case and we didn't get a lot of help from Saint Paul years ago. Today we flow back and forth. You wouldn't know the difference to be honest with you. We have a great relationship with Saint Paul. We do a lot of stuff. We train together. They're actively involved in our new training center that we're going to be building so I



mean our skill level and everything that we have, a lot of our policies and our standard operating procedures are the same and the same thing with Oakdale. Also, our medical service with HealthEast<sup>29</sup> with Dr. [Peter] Tanghe with Dr. [Ralph J.] Frascone with Regions<sup>30</sup> are seamless really and that's the way it's going to continue to grow. We're going to see more and more of that rather than less and less.

KC: So if you look back to when you're this three – five year firefighter at Gladstone, any vision of all of this? Now by that point, you know how to fight a fire and your vision is beginning to run.

SL: My vision at the time was to become chief of the Gladstone Fire Department so my vision wasn't as large at the time because you have to remember we still had three independent fire departments. You had Parkside, Gladstone and East County Line. I think all of us knew at some point we'd probably become a city department. When or how, I think was probably – at least three or four years when I was on, we didn't have that crystal ball going but we all kind of did because it was harder and harder every year to get people.

But going back to your other question. My first five years on the department I just wanted to be that guy that was first on the fire. I had the

---

<sup>29</sup> **HealthEast Care System** is a non-profit health care provider organization located in St. Paul, Minnesota and the surrounding suburban area. It includes four hospitals, 14 clinics, medical transportation and a variety of other outpatient services. Founded in 1986, it's hospitals are Bethesda, St. John's, St. Joseph, Woodwinds.

<sup>30</sup> The City and County Hospital opened in 1872. In 1923, it was renamed Ancker Hospital in honor of its late superintendent Arthur B. Ancker. Over the years it encompassed twelve buildings over several acres with a mailing address at 495 Jefferson. In 1965 it moved to 640 Jackson Street and was renamed Saint Paul Ramsey Hospital, renamed again in 1977 Saint Paul-Ramsey Medical Center. In 1986, the hospital becomes a private, nonprofit facility and was no longer county-operated; in 1993 it merges with HealthPartners; and in 1997, renamed **Regions Hospital**.

nozzle and I was going down those steps to put that fire out. That was really where I was at with it and that's when I think the disease hit me – that you couldn't get out of that. I mean, that's where you wanted to be and I'll be honest with you, as you get older, it gets tougher. These young kids, it takes a lot out of you.

We still require everybody to take a physical agility test and if you can't pass that from me on down, you have to get some assistance. And if you can't do it within a certain timeframe, you're no longer a member of the department. Because we really believe that you've got to be able to help each other and be physically fit in order to do this job.

KC: So as chief, you have to take the same physical agility test as a twenty-year-old?

SL: Absolutely. We require everybody on the department to do this and at some point in time and you have so many minutes to get this done. At some point my minutes getting it done might go up a little higher, but right now, knock on wood, I'm hanging in there with those younger guys, [Kate laughs] but that may change here.

KC: How does that kind of policy in working side-by-side affect or influence your ability as being a leader for all your men?

SL: You know, everything I found out in the past – to be a good leader, you also have to be one of those that they can understand you'll be right there next to them if they need you. And there comes a point in time that you have to separate that a little bit, but I mean I'm not opposed to loading hose after a fire, even if I've been in command and we got to pick up. I'm there and I'm capable of doing this. My job as command is over. I jump right in and do that with the men and I think that's really important that you're not one of those that think you're above

them. You have to be working with them but at the same level. And the big picture, they have to understand that someone has to ultimately make the decisions and someone will ultimately make the decision, that's pretty much how it goes down.

KC: As you were learning this, when was there a time where it was hard to make the decision, where you made a decision that you look back and say, "That wasn't the right decision"?

SL: Absolutely. I've apologized a lot of times. I mean, I still believe that's one of the things that's important. You know, as the leader, my job is really to create a vision, to make sure that that vision is going in the right direction, getting input to change it or not change it and yet it's there to support the staff. We need to do what we need to do, give them the tools, give them the training, do everything we can within my realm of budget and capabilities and that to give it to them and to help them grow in the job they do. If I need to pull hose off of that truck in order to get this job done to provide service to this community, then that's what I do and they understand the same process goes back and forth and I think they appreciate that. I think that's something that they like to see.

The other good thing I think of it is, at least in my case anyways, is that I've been there and done that. So they know what I know that they're doing and so it helps and I think when they come out and talk to me and say, "This isn't working." - all right, bad call on my part. Let's regroup. Let's come up with another idea here and I'll solicit that. All of our officers will do that. We'll get together and will go, "You know, guys. We're not going anywhere here. This just doesn't seem to be working. Let's come up with a new strategy plan and let's do something here to get this accomplished." So I think that's good, too.

And I do get criticized. Although I will say this: I do get criticized by sometimes doing a little too much – being actively involved. They’re going, “What are you doing this for?” And I go, “You know what? I love to do it, I want to do it, and I’m going to do it.” And there’s been times that they’re, “What are you doing on the nozzle?” And I would come back to them, “Because they needed me, of course.” And I’ve come back and said, “Because I’m the chief.”  
[Kate laughs]

That’s one thing I pride myself on though is that I can’t live on an island either. I have to have people who work with me, good people. I try to surround myself with good people. If I have a flaw, I try to find somebody who can complement and build on that flaw that I have so that we have a pretty good all-around group of people right even to my administrative assistant. I’ll be honest with you, I can’t spell very well so I find somebody who can really complement me on that.

KC: So when – after five years, you wanted to be chief of Gladstone?

SL: That was my goal.

KC: That was your goal.

SL: Mm-hmm.

KC: How did it feel when you made that goal?

SL: I wasn’t chief very long, because at that point, Dick Peterson<sup>31</sup> – actually, Howie Weber<sup>32</sup>, then Dick Peterson and I had a great mentor in all of them and I also had another great mentor in Dennis Cusick. Denny had become the police chief

---

<sup>31</sup> **Richard “Dick” Peterson** was a Gladstone firefighter 1973 to 1997; was chief 1994 to 1995; with 24 years of service.

in Cottage Grove, public safety director, and Denny had been around so he was a great mentor to me as well and provided me with a lot of good insight. But it felt like I had accomplished something. It was a good feeling.

Back then, to become chief, it was a voted position. So those were good times. There were some bad times going through that too because before like any election, "Hey, take Joe out and buy him two beers and now he's happy and he's going to vote for you." But it wasn't a lot of that back then but there was some of that. But anyways, long and short of it, it was very rewarding. You know, I'd accomplished one of my goals.

Then it was probably only about a year when the whole process started. The city decided that they were going to make it become a municipal department. Well now my challenge, my goal meant that I wanted to be chief of the whole department and that was my dream. I'll be very honest with you, I have succeeded and I'm living my dream job. I can't think of anything more rewarding, anything else I would have wanted to ever do than what I'm doing now and that's why I mentioned earlier, I think for me, the day of retirement is going to be tough. I don't know what I would do any differently. I love the people. Oh, yeah, there are days and I've always said that if there are more days when I get up in the morning and don't want to come to work, then it's time to change careers. There were times in the city of Maplewood, which you're well aware of, I lived through some pretty tough times and even during that, the days still didn't come up enough that I said I wanted to change.

---

<sup>32</sup> **Howie Weber** was a Gladstone firefighter June 1973 to May 1995; was chief 1992 to 1993; with 22 years of service.

KC: How did it feel when you didn't get that first chief's job for the city that you applied for?



Joel Hewitt

SL: Oh, that hurt. That was tough and it was not because of who got it. I mean, he was very capable. Joel [Hewitt] was very capable and I knew he'd do a good job. It was just this thing that I had all these people saying to me, "Oh, you got it. You'll fit in good" and it's like anything else and then all of a sudden the day of reckoning comes, and it's like, "Whoa." And I will say this and

I give my wife a lot of credit, she has a good insight into people and she kept telling me, she said, "These guys are building you up - be careful - don't get too high." I didn't listen to her and I believed I had the job. Hell, when I walked into the interview, I was ready to sign and so it was really tough. It hurt.

However, I truly believe though that because I love the fire service so much and what I had is that once it was over, three or four days of the shock and I got right back into it and I supported, followed and we moved forward and we did everything we had to do because I couldn't have lived without it. I couldn't make that decision because some people said, "Tell them to pound sand and quit." I couldn't do that. There was no way I could get out of this fire service. It goes back to what I said earlier, it's like having a disease and I couldn't get out of it. I was shocked that I got the opportunity from Joel which I thanked him very much and it was a great opportunity to be the assistant chief and when he decided to move on and I became the fire chief, I was thrilled to death and I'm thrilled to death today.

KC: So the second time around that you got to apply for chief and got it.

SL: Yes. Oh, absolutely. I mean, that was another huge day. To be very honest with you, had I not even gotten it then, I still would have been very happy, because

even being the assistant chief there was still a great job but yes that was probably the highlight of my whole career.

You know, it's funny and I mentioned earlier how my wife's always been very supportive, but there's always been, "I wish you would have done something else" kind of a deal, too. And I go back and I think over the times I do this, we went on an anniversary one time and rather than doing what we needed to do, we sat wherever we were at in the room or whatever we were doing and we were putting my resume together to apply for the assistant chief's job. Then one other time, we were on vacation doing something and we spent more time filling out another one, you know, that kind of thing. My career kind of took over – what I wanted to do in life kind of overshadowed hers a little bit.

KC: When you were assistant chief under Joel Hewitt, this was a paid-per-call –

SL: No, that was a full-time position. When we formed into the new department, I became a district chief, but that was still a paid-per-call position. And then Chief Hewitt got the okay to hire a full-time assistant chief and then I applied for that and I got that and then a year later when he moved on to St. Anthony I was promoted.

KC: So he did the tough couple years of trying to bring the departments together, which had to have been the no-win situation.

SL: Oh, he did. Absolutely. And he didn't leave for that reason. Joel could have stayed on. He did a good job. Obviously, during any kind of transition like that, there's going to be winners and there's going to be losers. And some people left, some people stayed. I think he did a pretty good job. The only thing I'll say that probably made it harder for him than it would have been for somebody, and maybe not, was that he just didn't have that – what's the word I want? The

history of the department. He probably didn't know as much of where some of the skeletons were buried and who to watch out for kind of a deal but he still did an outstanding job in getting the department to where it was before he left and we were on a forward movement and we just needed to continue that and I basically built upon where he left off.

KC: There were some really hard years in Maplewood.

SL: There was.

KC: What years were those?

SL: Well, those were the years that a new mayor came in, Mayor Longrie<sup>33</sup>, and she brought in her own city manager [Greg Copeland]<sup>34</sup>. And you know, when you wake up one morning and find your name in the newspaper on a hit list that you're going to be fired and you're told about it, it makes it tough and you start looking to see what's happening, who's doing what to whom, where are we headed and then, I'll be very honest with you, I was asked out of the clear blue....the city manager said, "We're going to eliminate one of your assistant chiefs." and that happened to be Chief Svendsen, Rusty Svendsen<sup>35</sup>. I couldn't do it and I finally went into him and I said, "I'm realizing I could lose my own job over this." And I said, "Look, if it's about money, I will take a cut in pay to see what we can do to keep Rusty." That didn't cut it either. He wanted no part of that and I still don't know what his whole mentality was on it. He really didn't give me other than, "This is what we're going to do and you're going to do it."

---

<sup>33</sup> **Diana Longrie**, was the first female mayor of Maplewood, 2006-2009.

<sup>34</sup> **Greg Copeland** was City Manager of Maplewood 2006-2008.

<sup>35</sup> **Rusty Svendsen** was a Parkside/Maplewood firefighter from August 4, 1981, to November 1, 2002; April 10, 2000 to January 1, 2007; with 21 years of service..



And so I finally said, "You know, I'm going to disagree with you, but obviously you're the boss and you can make the final call." And the hardest thing I had to do was I got cornered by the Pioneer Press, I believe it was, and they basically asked me and I said, "You know, I totally disagree with the direction that City Manager Copeland is asking me to go, however, I took my case to him and the answer was still no and so we'll move forward with the department and we have to continue to do that."

So those were some really tough times and I think if you remember, John Banick<sup>36</sup> was the deputy police chief at the time. There were some things going on there, so we both lost – police and fire lost the spot where nobody – well, I think I had a good idea that it was politically motivated, I think at some point, but whatever the case. Those were some tough years. Those were years that I never want to live again.

KC: How many years was this?

SL: It was about four years.

KC: Four years of the stress.

SL: Yes and it was –

KC: How many of those were you questioning whether you'd have a job tomorrow?

SL: Every day and it wasn't like every day something would come up, you know, but the way the whole thing, you could see how it happened and the way it went through. You couldn't get it out of your mind. Every day you could have been out of a job and there was never anything that you – it wasn't that you had done

---

<sup>36</sup> **John Banick** was appointed police officer November 21, 1983; promoted to sergeant on January 21, 1995; promoted to lieutenant on November 21, 1998; promoted to deputy chief on February 8, 2003; position eliminated as of January 1, 2007.

anything wrong to not have a job. If that group decided that this was the way they were headed, then that was the way they were headed and it got tough.

And it wasn't just me. It was other departments and it moved all the way on down even to the firefighters themselves. We had full-time people at the time and they were all like, "Well, what the heck?" And, "Why and where are we going to go and what's going to happen?" So it was some pretty stressful years not only for me, but for my family too. To see some of the stuff that was in the paper and your name is attached to it and your family and your kids have to go to school there and it's not something I'd ever want to live through again.

KC: How do you deal with that type of emotional attack? I lived in the East Metro Area. I remember a sense of the craziness of Maplewood city politics and all the weird attacks going on. How do you live with that emotional attack? How do you keep yourself strong to be a leader of a department?

SL: You know, it was one of those things is – and I think for me, it was the fact of the love of the job. Like I said, it was a disease. And I don't think if I had that disease, I would have been able to muscle through that. You know, we had a job to do, no matter what they did upstairs or what they were going to do. We still had a job to do to provide service to our community, and that was my goal. I mean, that is what I was hired to do, and so we had to focus on continuing to do that. It would make a lot of new changes in upward progress during those years? No, probably not. It was more we stayed even keel, but we continued to do what we needed to do, and we needed to continue to provide outstanding service. Did I come up with new big brainchild ideas and bring it forward? No, we didn't do that. But it was a time that we needed to – and over time, getting towards a little bit later in those years, it got a little better. I mean, whether – and I can't speak for them, because obviously I wasn't in their shoes, but whether they were looking for

fault and never could find any or whatever the case may be, or they really determined that maybe it's not as bad as people have told us or we think it is or whatever the case may be, but they were very stressful years. They took a lot of toll, not only on me but also on my family, and I regret putting them through it, but should I have quit? I probably should have bailed out like everybody else did but I had I have this disease and I couldn't. [Kate laughs] I couldn't give it up and I'm very thankful that I did it. It probably took years off my life but if you were to ask me if I would do it again today, if it all started again today, I think my answer would be I'd have to get out this time.

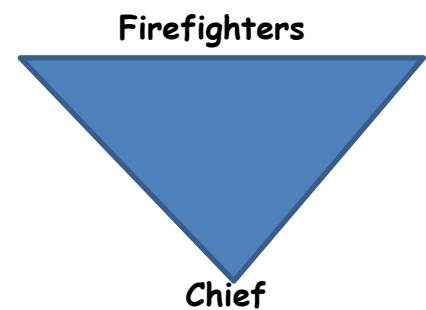
KC: Well, we learn from experience.

SL: Absolutely and I don't think I could put my family through it again or myself.

KC: During those years, what was a high point? What was something that reminded you that you really wanted to continue with your commitment to the city, with your commitment to the industry?

SL: It was all the people who worked with me and for me. Everybody kept as much of a positive attitude and everybody focused on their job, we focused on the business that we needed to do and made sure we provided it as best we could. And I think that really helped not only for me but everybody else there. Yeah, did I still have to go in, did I still have to go to council meetings, did I still have to listen to it, did I still have to see stuff in the paper? Yes. But the number one thing that they couldn't take away from me was my integrity. And the biggest part of that for me was that during all of this, we never lost quality service to our people at all and I think that to me (and it wasn't due to me) it was due to all those folks doing the day-to-day work out on the street. They were the ones that were making sure that was happening.

KC: As chief, you have to have an unusual perspective. It has to be very broad. It has to be looking at the city. It has to be being aware of budgets, being aware of new technology, and I think fire and police are in an unusual diagram where in many industries, the head of the department is at the top of the triangle and then it just goes down to the workers. But in public safety, your line staff have to be just as smart as you and have to be able to make really, really critical decisions in any moments, which means they're always thinking, so they're always able to criticize. So it's the upside down triangle of the line staff being larger, kind of going down to the chief.



KC: How do you deal with always being under scrutiny? Because a really good department where people are thinking all the time, but these really smart people that are line staff don't have all the information that you have.

SL: You know, and that's a really good question and I go back to what I said earlier. I always try to hire people smarter than I am because that makes me look smarter and so that's always been a good thing for me. To me, and you are exactly right about the upside down triangle, you are on the bottom holding this big upside down Christmas tree and it goes like this on a day-to-day basis. One of the big things is that we try to keep everybody informed. Communication is always a big thing and I still probably don't do anywhere near the kind of job I should do but it's something that we realize.

The other part of it too is that we try to solicit. When we made this change in 2011, we tried to solicit as much input from the grassroots of every firefighter/EMT we had to our full-time staff to our captains. We got everybody as actively involved as we could to get that information to see where we were

going. Now did we make everybody happy at the end of the day? No, but did we make the vast majority of them? Absolutely.

And part of that triangle thing that you have to keep in mind is that you have A-B-C-D players. Hopefully, I don't have any F players, but you've at least got those kinds of players. And years ago I learned that I spent the vast majority of my time working with the D and C players and I actually went to a seminar here probably eight or nine years ago and the guy really pointed out to me, "Look at where you spend all your time. Then look at who's doing all your work." And I went back and I looked at it and know I'm spending all my time with these eight or ten C and D players and I'm not spending any time with my A and B players. Well, that's not the way it should be. I should be supporting them versus dealing with this. So, I really made a whole change, a change in my management style saying "You know what? I'm going to have to deal with you but it's not going to be like I have been." So when we looked at this, we were trying to see what we could do to make it and keep our A and B and C players. That's where we wanted to be and that was our focus. So the people that we had, the management team, were all on board with that. I looked and when I've hired new people from there, I want people who have a vision, who are looking for a future in the fire service and who are willing to take criticism. You can come in and say anything you want to me in my office. I don't have an issue with that because I don't have all the answers and I've told everybody that hundreds of times. The bottom line is that if you can't come in and give me a better change or an answer to what I have, okay, I may not buy into it. But if you can, I will.

Here's a prime example. A couple of the new guys came in, the new chiefs and one of them that was there in this whole part of this change and they said to me, "Chief, we have a million-dollar ladder truck. It's our big ladder

truck that we have. We really think that we need to make that a rescue truck.” And I say, “What?” And they say, “Yep.” And I say, “All right, what’s the reasoning for it?” And they say, “Well, when we get out on the highways and freeways, we need to block that off because firefighters get killed all the time with cars that don’t pay attention coming through there. What could we get that’s any bigger than this fifty-foot fire truck and hundreds of thousands of pounds and we park that there?” And I say, “Yes, but it’s a million dollars. You’re going to put a million-dollar truck out so somebody can smack into that?” And I went back to my old days and everything. I said, “All right, if you can convince me that this is a good idea, do it.” So they brought in this kind of stuff and they did it and I said, “You win. Let’s go for it.”

And so those are the kinds of things too that I guess in my management style I kind of pride myself on. I’m open to change and I love change as long as it’s good change. Now we’ve made some bad changes and that’s okay too because we’ve learned from and then we turned around and make good change and that’s a good thing. I embrace change. I think it’s really cool. I love to do new things and so when these guys came up with the truck idea, my first instinct was, “Well, you’re not putting \$1 million truck out there and letting somebody smash into it.” [Kate laughs] “No way are we doing this.” But then they came back and said, “You know what? If we save one firefighter’s life...” “Oh, now that’s changing the whole ballgame here. “ “And if we do this we can eliminate this. We got more room on this for this equipment and so on,” and after we were all said and done, “Let’s do it.” So those are kinds of things that we bring up from the bottom. Do I have to make decisions without asking them? Absolutely. And do I do it? Absolutely, I mean, it is the name of the game and at the end of

the day, being the chief, I still have the final say-so on what we do and don't do and I try to do the best I can.

KC: What was a direction or change that you made that ended up not being a good change and you had to make the adjustment?

SL: You know, I think it probably goes back probably in our first couple of years. What we did is when we hired our full-time staff and they became unionized and we had our part-time staff. But at first we said, "All right, if you're full-time captain, you only have authority of those full-time people. If you're a part-time captain, you don't have authority of the full-time people." And it didn't take me too long to figure out that that was a wrong move. Okay, how does this fit into our scheme of things? If you're good enough to be a captain for the part-time why aren't you good enough and vice-versa. So probably even less than six months, maybe eight months, I finally said, "This was a horrible, horrible decision on my part, and we're changing it." And I'm lucky I did it when I did because had it been a year or two down the road, it might have been a lot harder to do. "You are a captain, you are a captain and everybody has authority over everybody based on your rank and I don't care whether you're full-time, part-time or whatever time you are." So that was one of them. I look back at that and really, "What was I thinking?" [Kate laughs] But lucky I caught it in time. It wasn't a big, huge deal.

KC: What was one of the changes that happened that was most surprising to you, that has happened since 1977?

SL: Well, I would say probably one of the biggest surprises was the fact when the city just out of the clear blue said we wanted to [have it be a city department]— I don't think anybody really saw that coming. I think everybody in the back of their mind knew that this was going to happen at some point in time. But in '96, I

think it was, I think everybody was pretty surprised that all of a sudden they came and they said, "You guys are going to be done. We're not going to renew your contracts and we're going to form a city department. But we want to meet with you." And I was a part of that negotiating team on how we all put it together and that, as were the chiefs of the other two departments. It wasn't like, "Hey, guys, we're thinking about this, maybe in a year." It was they just came in and said, "This is all over. We need to put this together and by 1997, we will be a municipal department." and that was going to be the end of it, so that was one of them.

That was a big thing. I think another, probably one of the bigger changes was when we, in Gladstone, we kind of got away from everything was a vote to see who was put into a position. When we eliminated some of those things, those were big-time changes and some significant. I will say this, and this might sound really petty and it might sound really kind of ironic, but probably one of the other biggest changes that we went through which was done by Chief Cusick at the time, Denny was chief, was that everybody got their first W-2 form for being a firefighter. In the past, you didn't make enough money, you didn't report that money and no one went looking for it. Going way back to years ago and then all of a sudden Denny had his foresight saying, "You know, guys, we're going to get caught here sooner or later. Sooner or later we're all going to be in big trouble here." You also have to remember too, our budgets were growing. I mean, we were getting almost a half a million dollars as the Gladstone Fire Department and when you were getting fifty thousand, seventy-five, yes, people weren't looking, but when we were getting that big and we were making more money, we were now probably up to six bucks a call and it was starting to get to be a larger dollar amount and we had people quit. People walked off, and said,



“No way.” We had people that said, “I’m not taking it.” “Well, we’re submitting –”

I would say that and taking the beer out of the station [in 1983]. In the early days these were probably the two biggest things because when we took that beer out of the station – again, Denny did that too so he was a pioneer in making two pretty significant changes.

It wasn’t to say, now and then we couldn’t go buy a case of beer and have a beer in there but there wasn’t beer in those pop machines anymore in either of the stations and those were – back then, when you looked at it, why the guys were there, those were two pretty traumatic times. “You’re not going to make me pay taxes on my money from the fire department.” “Yeah, we are.”

KC: So that would have been someplace between 1983 and 1984. Those were the years he was chief.

SL: Somewhere in there, yes, probably right in there. That was when Denny did it.

KC: And he was also on the police department.

SL: He was. He started out as a sergeant and then he became a lieutenant and he did it getting the job of public safety director in Cottage Grove.

KC: So he left Maplewood.

SL: Yes he left Maplewood and that was where he finished his career out. I think he must have put twenty-some-plus years on in Cottage Grove.

KC: And he was the one that envisioned the paramedic police department.

SL: He’s the one who actually –yes, he started it actually. He was one of the first of the four paramedics that went through the paramedic training and at the time, Saint Paul Fire was just getting into it too and so they were all training together

down at Regions Hospital. Like I say, I knew Denny very well at the time so I would do a little bit, go in.

KC: What was one of the changes that you foresaw coming and when it solidly was in place, you kind of [breathes sigh of relief]? It was good.

SL: The last big change we made back in March of 2011 when we knew we were in deep trouble being able to cover our calls out of all five fire stations. The big thing that came out of that, which we weren't planning on – I mean, and that was the ironic part. We weren't planning on closing any fire stations. When we went into this, it was "How are we going to provide service level and what were all the models?" We looked at every opportunity. We looked at giving it to the city of Saint Paul. We looked at turning our EMS program over to Alina<sup>37</sup> or HealthEast. Everything was on the board. Everything was on the table to take a look at. At the end of the day, and it took us a year to do this because we looked at – we got demographics of the aging of the community and where our stations were, as we looked at it, we realized that the only model that was going to work for us was this part-time model. Then we started taking a good look at our call volume and where they were and it started to look – and we go, "Well, we have two stations that are totally out of place." Now, going back to when they were both built in the Seventies, they probably were in the right spot for the people who could man them, that type of thing. Even in Parkside's area, I mean that was still a younger new community – development in there, but that's become aged.

---

<sup>37</sup> **Allina Health System** is network of health care providers based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Allina owns or operates 11 hospitals (including United Hospital in Saint Paul) and more than 90 clinics throughout Minnesota and western Wisconsin. In addition Allina Medical Transportation covers 8 regions and over 80 communities providing medical dispatch, 911 pre-arrival instructions, and emergency and non-emergency ambulance response.

So anyways, we said, "Look, if we're going to put people in the stations, we can eliminate that four to six minute drive time that these people have to go to get to the station to get on the truck by having the stations a little bit further away and not sacrifice our response times." And so as we really took a look at that, we said, "This makes even more sense now going into our new model." Knowing what we were doing, that this is going to be a big undertaking and when you go out and read articles in there, chiefs have lost their jobs over closing fire stations. That's not something that is well-[received]– but again, it went back to that this is what we needed to do to survive. This was our model. We did our due diligence in our homework. I mean, we had our ducks in a row and so if people asked, we could do it. We knew it was going to be tough. We knew it was going to be tougher in some cases on those retired firefighters that lived in those areas yet because that has been a huge icon in their neighborhood.

A funny thing is that over the years, even when I was first on, we would reply to a house fire and they would say, "Yeah, so how many full-time firefighters do you have?" The people in our community had no idea that we were just your neighbor running up to the station to do it. Especially in the south of Maplewood where there was a bigger and more expensive development, when they moved in, they all thought we were a full-time fire department. They had no clue. They had no idea that we were just your neighbor running down and getting on the truck.

So when we did this and that, it was kind of ironic and we did community meetings to have people come to talk about the station closing. Most of them were worried about response times which we were totally on there and we explained to them where we were at but we also said we have applications here and anyone who would like to sign an application is welcome to do that.

Nobody signed anything on this. They walked and it just went to the point and we pointed it out. We asked everybody to raise their hand. "How many of you, both the husband and wife work?" Just about everybody in the room did. "How many of you have kids in sports?" "I do." "How many of you have sports three nights a week?" Everybody raised their hand. "Saturdays?" "Yes, I'm on hockey tournaments. I'm gone forever." Those were the kinds of things and as people looked around the room looking at it, it really came to the point that, "Yes, I can see exactly where this is, why you're doing what you're doing." So the station closing became secondary, however, we did know though that we could live out of the one where we are. We needed to get something in that, like you mentioned earlier, that crazy leg we have. We knew we needed to get something a little more central in that leg and we would have liked to have been just over the border on 94 but we tried to get some county property but that wasn't going to happen. So, when 3M – we talked to them and we just went by a shot to ask them if they'd be interested, and they said, "Hey, we've got these four acres we'll never be able to develop or use but something that would be good to the community, let's talk about it." and that's where we are today. The station will be up and operating by November of this year.

KC: Is that where your new training station –

SL: That's down on Century and Highway 5. That's a little farther away but it is two separate locations.

So I would say that's probably been the most challenging, it's been the most exciting. There were days where you went home and I go back and I'm thinking, "Man, what am I doing? What am I doing this for?" My job was so much simpler but the problem was is that we realized – and not only myself, but the others and even a lot of the paid-per-call firefighters, and some of them have

retired since then, really realized that there was no way we were going to keep up with our call volumes going up, with a lack of manpower that were going to be – so it was either that we were going to be caught in a crisis mode and trying to just do something to piecemeal it together or we were going to be very proactive and come up with a good plan that will do it and would come up with a good plan. We've made some tweaks to it and we'll probably make a few more over the next three years but it was definitely the right move.

KC: I hear a lot about community. One of the things I'm hearing consistently is community service, community involvement with the old Gladstone. Gladstone was about a club within the community.

SL: Absolutely.

KC: So did that influence your style of management and working with community and making changes to the overall?

SL: You know the big thing that I had to overcome was the fact that you couldn't always be the good old boys club anymore. If we were going to survive this, if we were going to move forward, even back when I was even Chief of Gladstone, we needed to continue to do this right. We couldn't afford to get ourselves in some major litigation over something as stupid as we were still drinking beer in the fire station or whatever it could be. So I mean, we really needed to look at that. So, as we progressed forward, we had to have that vision. We had to look in a crystal ball and there were days that I would look into it and it was blank. But there were other days that you looked into it and you could see light at the end of the tunnel and so there were some good things but we knew that in order to provide service, we needed to be progressive. We knew that we were going to have to hire full-time staff at some point. We put together a great strategic plan. We did one in the early Seventies and we just did one in 2011. We knew we

needed to have a direction. We knew we needed to have input from all the players and we needed to look at where we were going to be in the future. My only hope that someday when I do retire is that someone can build upon where we're going and not have to go tear down to rebuild and that's really kind of what I really believe we're on the right track for at this point in time.

KC: You have people in your organization that you're mentoring to take your place?

SL: Absolutely. If I left tomorrow, I know there are some good people here that we wouldn't skip a beat.

KC: Are they a lot younger than you?

SL: They are a lot younger than I am. [Kate laughs] And you know, it's a funny thing too is that when we sit in the room together, I kind of say it is their problem, not mine because I always say, "I must be thinking as young as you guys because I hope you're not thinking as old as I am." But a lot of our visions, and that's one thing too is that I'll throw out my vision, and I'll say to them, "All right, throw your vision out there." And it's amazing how you can have that one circle and



you can have – connect this like the Olympic rings, you know? You can have them all overlap in some cases and it's amazing how far we all overlap into kind of like – I'll say mine is the main ring, how sometimes we overlap and how

sometimes we don't overlap and then I've got to rethink, "Okay, is it me or is it them?" And it goes back to that truck type situation I mentioned earlier. But overall, we do that. I look at it now – ten years ago, I probably wouldn't have said this, but I look at it now and it can't be Steve's vision too much now into the future because Steve's not going to be here. It needs to be a combination of their

visions and mine because some of them, if not all of them, will be taking over at some point. So if I've got a vision that doesn't meet anything with their vision and we go my way, then exactly what I mentioned earlier, they'll have to tear down stuff to rebuild rather than start rebuilding from when I leave and that's what I hope they'll end up being able to do."

KC: How does that feel for you?

SL: It feels good. I'm lucky I guess or maybe however you want to look at it but I hired a great assistant chief, BJ Jungmann<sup>38</sup>. BJ was with us for a few years, three years and then all of a sudden he went and became the chief of Burnsville. Now, that's a bigger city than Maplewood. BJ at the time was maybe twenty-eight years old and I think he was probably one of the youngest full-time chiefs ever hired. I've got a great fire marshal and assistant chief, Butch Gervais<sup>39</sup>. Butch started on the department a year after I did and so Butch and I have got a lot of that stuff, so when I need to go and say, "Hey, remember when this happened way back when?" "Yeah." "How did that really turn out?" And I've got something to cushion and he's been a real good source to get information from and work with. The unfortunate thing there though is Butch is probably going to retire at the same time close to me or maybe even before me. I don't know.

---

<sup>38</sup> **BJ Jungmann** was Oakdale Fire Explorer before he was Oakdale firefighter 2000 to 2012; Burnsville firefighter 2006 – 2008; Maplewood Assistant Chief 2008-2011; and Burnsville Fire Chief 2011 to present.

<sup>39</sup> **Clarence "Butch" Gervais** was a Gladstone, then Maplewood firefighter November 1977 to the present; Fire Marshal 1999 to present, Assistant Chief/Fire Marshall 2009 to present; with over 37 years of service and counting.

Then we have other good young chiefs. My assistant chief of EMS Mike Mondor<sup>40</sup> is another very young individual who has a lot of good vision and lots of good thoughts. He continues to improve our excellent EMS program and is always looking to make positive changes and that's been a good thing too.

I've always had this kind of – at least my philosophy, I guess if you want to call it that, has been we have a path that were going to go on and if we veer to the right or to the left that's okay as long as we keep moving forward. If we have to stop, that's okay too as long as we don't go backwards.

KC: So there is an assistant chief that's just over EMS?

SL: Yes.

KC: Also a firefighter?

SL: Yes. Oh, he's got to do everything I've got to do and he's got to be in command. He's got to go in and be a firefighter. Yes, absolutely.

KC: And he's a paramedic?

SL: He's a paramedic.

KC: What was one of the first EMS or medical calls that you went on?

SL: Oh, I hate to talk about this. [Kate laughs]

KC: Good, then it's a good question.

SL: Yes it is and it isn't. It was early on and probably I was on a year-and-a-half or two years and it still bothers me a little bit. I got my daughter dressed, my oldest one. She was probably six, seven years old and I'll never forget it. She had long,

---

<sup>40</sup> **Mike Mondor** is a Maplewood Assistant Chief—EMS May 9, 2011, to the present, with over 3 years of service and counting



beautiful curly hair, blonde curly hair, you know and she was about yay tall and everything. I put on that – you know that My Little Pony? That morning she got up and she put her My Little Pony underwear on and she had her little dress on and I took her to daycare. I don't know how all that happened but somehow before I headed to work a call came in that there was a pedestrian struck. I was back at the house, jumped up, went up to the station, got in the ambulance and we went up there. As we got up there and we went around his car, we turned and we looked. Here's this little blonde haired girl laying face down in the driveway and I jumped out of the back like I always do and I'm going to run and I almost like I just stopped dead in my tracks and I looked at her. Then as we finally – we made motions to get closer, I went down there a little closer and as we moved her, she had a little dress on and as we moved her, because we had to check her and lift her, she had My Little – and we hadn't turned her over yet and she had the exact same underwear on that my daughter had on. That hurt. I mean, it was like my mind went – first of all, "This can't be my daughter because I just dropped her off at daycare or is it?" And as we went through it – and she was hurt pretty bad, I mean she was hurting pretty good. Anyways, we got her in the ambulance and took her down to the call and it took a while. That was probably the first hardest one I've ever had and I still think about today. It still goes back to me and I can see it as plain as day. It is burned into my head. I can see exactly everything that happened and the good news is she did survive but that was probably one of the toughest.

And the other worst one that I can probably say I've ever been on was when we had an infant who was abused. That was another tough one and we knew who did it and that individual was still there in the room. You had to

focus on doing this versus going over there and just taking care of business in another way.

But again, after all that, there isn't much I haven't seen. I mean, it's been some pretty ugly stuff, but you know, you lived through it. Kids are always hard. I don't care what you say. That's usually – on any firefighter, any paramedic, any EMT, children are always the hardest ones to deal with.

KC: Do you call in the police then or do you do early investigation?

SL: No, the police are always with us. We have such a great rapport. They respond on the vast majority, if not all, but a large percentage of the calls, so they're always there with us as well or get there pretty quick thereafter.

KC: Was that in the early days, too, when it was Gladstone, before –

SL: Yes.

KC: So the police would often get there, I would imagine, when you were still volunteering, before you could get there, because it could take six minutes to get to the station and then from the station –

SL: Yes and the vast majority of time, they did, unless they were caught way in the south end. One of the medics was, but yes, back then they were there far earlier than we were.

KC: What were the call times back in the Gladstone –

SL: You know? They would vary. I mean again, you have it – we would have four minutes to – I would say probably the average probably isn't – times of days were really different. Nights were always a little bit better than daytimes but I would say they were probably in the eight minute range, somewhere in there. There were some a lot shorter too depending. Again, one of the things that kept

your call volumes a little better in check was that guys always hung out at the station so you didn't always have that drive time. They were there and hanging out and doing whatever, and remember back then, we repaired our own equipment, our trucks and so you always had somebody up tinkering, doing something. A lot of times we didn't have that drive time.

KC: Two o'clock in the morning.

SL: Yes. You still had your drive time then, although there were times that we're up there at two o'clock morning too. [Kate laughs]

KC: Now I have had some of the more senior Gladstone officers tell me that the call would come in and then it was their job to get dressed and get out the door, because it was the wife's job to call the next person.

SL: Those were the really early days. Now I was never part of that. I got on when we had the pagers so I can't live about that. And absolutely, that's what they did. Actually, it got so far that there was a gal – and I can't think of her name – right across from where the station is now and she had a grocery store. She would get the calls and as the guys would pull out of the station she'd run out and hand them a sheet of paper with the address on it. That's how it originally started way back in Al Schaller's, back in those days of the first charter members of the department. That's how they got their information. Today, we get them on computers in our cars.

KC: Well, there have not been a lot of women.

SL: No, there hasn't been a huge amount. Over the years, I'd say that we've probably had about ten women totally. But right now I have two women that are full-time firefighters with me.

KC: But the percentage still is very small compared to others. Why is it in Maplewood – Maplewood is kind of a traditional community. Why have women not been as significant in the numbers?

SL: I don't think we get the applications like we get for guys. And I do – basically, we pick the best people for the job. I mean, we need to be sure we get the best qualified people and it really has nothing to do with your stature, whether you can pull a 400-pound guy out because I'm not sure I can pull 400-pound guy out. But it all has to do with whether or not you have the skills, the training and the necessary abilities to do those. And going back to when it was the paid-per-call days, we had women on the department and we trained them and they were able to go through that and do it. I don't know.

It even goes back so far as to say even why – even the minority side of it. Why don't we have as many Blacks or Asians? I don't think they get into that profession. They don't see that as something they want to do.

But yes, we've hired two great females that have been doing a fantastic job for us and when we go out for a full-time person, we'll get thirty or forty applications.

KC: There were some women that volunteered with Gladstone?

SL: Yes.

KC: So did they stay?

SL: In the early years, it was that – I always said I would never have wanted to be the first woman on any fire department because everybody had you – “We got John over here who weighs 300 pounds and is six-foot tall. We want to see you pull him out of a building.” I'd always say, “You've been around here twenty years. Let's see you pull him out of a building.” Another guy, you know. And you have

some of that, but you know what? I think we all understood that this was the way it was headed and it was a good thing. We had some really good females – Amy was one of them. There wasn't anything she couldn't do that the guys were doing and it was never really about that. In some cases, there was only a bathroom and a shower and so now you had – my God, I remember we had to add a sign to the door. And it was like "Men/Women." It was like, oh, my God. These guys couldn't close that stinking sign. We had to put a lock on the bathroom door. Yes, we had to put a lock on the bathroom door. [Kate laughs] It was just those kinds of things.

KC: So if you have women on the full-time department that worked twenty-four-hour shifts, do you have to have separate male, female –

SL: Oh, absolutely. Yes. Right now, all our stations have a men's shower room with everything and the ladies' shower room with everything and you have your locker with the key so you can leave your stuff in it. Then each dorm has independent sleeping quarters and then your door locks so we have that now. We have those at all our stations and the new stations that we're designing and everyone will have their own bunk room and their own bathroom.

KC: What was one of the calls that you went on when things were in transition between Gladstone and the municipal? And all of the departments are working together when –

SL: What I will say and I'll give a lot of kudos to all the firefighters at the other three departments, during this transition, and what I think is outstanding, is the citizens would have never known this was going on. I mean, when you really think about it, what we could have done. We could have really made things ugly for the city if we really wanted to. We could have slowed our response times. We could have gone to the home and complained to the homeowner and

screamed that they are doing this to us and nobody did that. So I think that overall, everybody really felt that our number one goal – and that’s really when all these guys became city. There were some changes we had to make and some people handle change and some people don’t but I think for the most part they all had a common goal and we never lost sight of the fact of that. No matter what was happening internally, the service to our customers was still number one.

KC: Did Gladstone still have yellow fire trucks?



Gladstone Fire vehicles

SL: We did and we don’t anymore and that was another huge change. We were one of the few – actually. There were some white ones in the early years and they went to yellow, but Parkside and East County Line were red and ours were yellow. So the whole thing came into play. “So what color are we going to do our trucks in?” So as a district chief, I said, “They all have to be yellow.” And we had our meetings and we went back and forth. I said I didn’t care. A truck is a truck and it was part of that whole culture thing. Same way with helmets, some had yellow helmets and some had black helmets. How are



we going to do the helmet thing? So one point we finally said, "All right, we've got to regroup." So we put some small groups together to look at some of that basic stuff, and we said, "We're all agreeing. Whatever we buy is what we buy and everybody is on board."

The patch. That was another big thing. You had three different patches.

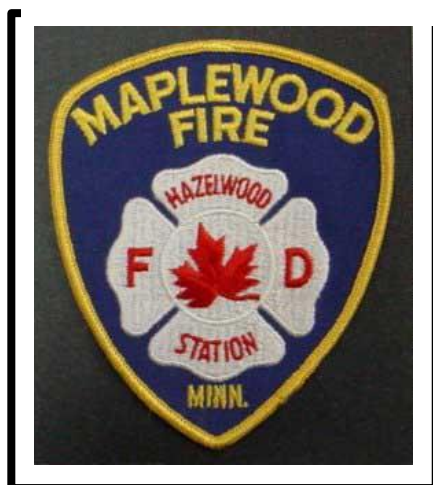
## Gladstone Fire Department



1956



1978 -1997



c. 1985 - 1996



Helmet Sticker

# Parkside Fire Department



# East County Line Fire Department







Maplewood Fire  
Department patch  
1997 - 2014

And actually, we're changing our patch. We finally had enough of it. We said, "Some think when we originally did this—maybe it's a little bit gaudy. Some think there's not enough information. Some think that it really doesn't represent the fire and EMS service that we do today." So we're actually coming out in 2014 with a new patch. We actually had a contest and people could design it. We tweaked it and we think we've got a pretty good-looking new patch.

Maplewood Fire  
Department  
New emblem  
2014 forward



It was even back in there, what was this patch going to look like? One thing though that I will say – for me, it was that there's two things that I've always wanted to make sure I do. I can never forget where I came from okay and that is key because if you're going to lead an organization you can't forget how you got where you got and what you did to get there. And number two is that you can't forget what they are doing inside the house unless you've been in there to do it yourself. So when they're screaming at you that, "Hey, we've got heavy heat and we've got smoke." You can live that. I mean, you're not sitting there trying to think, "Well, what does that mean?" You can live that so you can help make some of your decisions and that based on what they're seeing and those are two huge things.

KC: You said you have to remember where you came from. You said where you came from was being trained as a teacher. So you graduated from college.

SL: Stout, in Wisconsin.

KC: You grew up in Maplewood, went to Stout, came back and taught in Maplewood?

SL: No, actually I taught in Saint Paul for a few years and then I finished – both my wife and I were teachers and we both kept getting laid off each year and you couldn't get a home loan with getting laid off each year so we finally decided we both looked to get out. I got the first job out and she stayed in and so I ended up

– my last years were at White Bear Senior<sup>41</sup> and then I ended up getting a job at Cenex<sup>42</sup>. It's now changed I believe to Cenex Harvest States.

KC: And you referred to the service station?

SL: I did. When I was in college – actually, before I was in college, I went to school at 916 Vo-Tech<sup>43</sup> when it was still that and I went to work for Harvey Stanke who had that station on the corner. It was just Harvey and I pretty much that did it for years and years and then when Harvey decided to retire he offered me the station. So he gave it to me on a lease and I took it over and I ran it, I think for about three years and then the whole pricing war and everything really started to get it. It wasn't really what I wanted to do. It was a good job and I was having fun. I was single and I had all the toys you can imagine because I was doing really pretty good but it really wasn't what I wanted to do and so I finally at that point decided I was going to go back to college and that's when I went to Stout and I got my degree in education and went to work for Saint Paul [Public

---

<sup>41</sup> **Stillwater Area High School** (SAHS) is a public school located in Oak Park Heights, Minnesota and is part of the Stillwater Area Public Schools - District 834. As the oldest high school in Minnesota and the first accredited by the North Central Association in 1903, Stillwater Area High School claims a special sense of history.

<sup>42</sup> In 1931 Farmers Union Central Exchange was founded in Saint Paul, Minnesota. That core cooperative company later became **Cenex**, a combination from the last two words in its former name. In 1998, Cenex merged with Harvest States Cooperatives to form Cenex Harvest States. In 2003, the cooperative changed its legal name to CHS Inc. CHS Inc. is a Fortune 100 business owned by United States agricultural cooperatives, based in suburban Saint. Paul, Minnesota. It owns and operates various food processing and wholesale, farm supply, Cenex brand fuel, financial services and retail businesses.

<sup>43</sup> **916 Vo-Tech** was an Area Vocational Technical Institute at 3300 Century Avenue North in White Bear Lake began in 1969 and in 1996 was merged with Lakewood Community College to create Century College to provide post-secondary education in technical and occupational areas, including adult extension programs to prepare for or upgrade employment skills, such as firefighting.

Schools<sup>44</sup>] and then eventually finished my career in education at White Bear Senior.

KC: How many years were you with Cenex?

SL: Fifteen.

KC: What did you do?

SL: I was in their TBA – tires, batteries and accessories and lubricants department. I was one of the salespeople. I went out and did purchasing and sales. Then we went out and I traveled to North and South Dakota, Minnesota and that kind of stuff to work with our reps we had out there and then eventually I ended up being the manager of marketing or sales and marketing for that portion of it.

KC: So was it hard to be a volunteer firefighter when you're traveling?

SL: Oh, absolutely. You had your percentages and that's why when I was home there wasn't anything I didn't go on. But it was tough then and no matter what you did, as soon as you walked out the door and started to get in your car to drive someplace you had to be to, a big house fire would come in and you missed it. It never failed. It just never failed and you hated to miss those. I mean, that was huge. If you missed one of them it was just like somebody stuck a knife into you. [Kate laughs]

KC: You didn't miss your wedding though.

SL: No, I didn't miss my wedding. But I missed – you know, I look back and I still to this day apologize to the girls a lot and I feel bad and I have two grandkids now and I'm doing my very best to make sure that what I did to them, I don't do them. I left Christmas Eves, opening gifts. I would leave birthday parties. You

---

<sup>44</sup> **Saint Paul Public Schools** is a school district that covers all of the city of Saint Paul, Minnesota.

name it. Suppers at the table. We'd go out to eat and I just – the disease gets to you and I just leave them there. I'd get in the car and, "Call your mom and dad. They'll come and get you." I look back at it and I go, "Man, I did some pretty stupid things." [Kate laughs] Some sad things too, like I say, probably as a father, I wasn't by far the best father to the girls that I could have been because of the – I call it the disease.

KC: Your wife was somewhat used to this culture of public safety response. Her mother was a police officer.

SL: Absolutely, yes. She remembers her mother getting called out at night to have to go search a female or getting called to do something. Or they'd bring her to the house way back then and her mom would get up and they'd do it at the house and she would get called in. Yes, absolutely. She grew up in that public safety environment. All the cops would come over to the house. Back in those days, it was a close-knit family too, even on the police side. Pretty much everybody lived within the community or within a short period of it and they would party together, did things together and camped together.

KC: Have your daughters shown any interest in public safety?

SL: Absolutely not. One's a teacher, one's a nanny and the other one is in park and recreation.

KC: That's still public service.

SL: You could say that, yes, but not in police and fire, no.

KC: What are your forward-looking plans? Do you have a plan of retirement?

SL: No, I don't. I shouldn't say that. I'm getting up there where I need to think about that. I'm probably on that three to five year plan. If I hit the lottery tomorrow, I'd probably still be on that three to five year plan kind of a deal. I

don't know, I'm still enjoying it. Things are going good and we're moving forward. I love the job I do and I still have to work. I'm not one that could sit around and there's no way I could sit and do nothing. I think my wife will probably either at the end of this year or the end of 2014 will probably retire after about thirty-nine years in teaching. So we'll see what she does for a little bit and then maybe I'll decide what we're going to do but I don't have any definite plan.

BJ: Can you recall any of the changes to equipment or fire practices that came about because of big fires? And I'll tell you that I heard with the GEM fire, the lack of a snorkel and being able to get up on top led to the first snorkel truck. Are there other cases that you know that Gladstone in particular, that they changed their equipment or their practices because of a big fire?

SL: I don't know if it was as much of a big fire but maybe a lot of fires. One of them we did is that we went to positive ventilation. We did a whole new process where you put a fan in the door to help ventilate the house. So rather than go in and fight it with all of this in, we break a window in the back of the house or in some portion of the house, put this big fan in so that we would blow those gases and smoke out to make it better. That was a huge change for us in the fire service and that came about by going to a lot of fires.

Another big one too that really came about for us was foam, when we started using foam again. Everybody was looking at it and we started to use it more and more and that came out of all fires but mostly in the overhaul. In other words, we're trying to get in those small crooks and crannies so we didn't have to go back and do warranty work. That was a huge thing. Plus foam at the time was something new coming out and it started to show its worth. We use it now as an interior attack from the very beginning in many cases and it will help considerably.



So those were probably the two – and then the change in the pumps, the change in the size of the trucks. All of those things played a role. When I joined we rode on the back of the tail board. I mean, you'd put this big strap in, and I was small, and I would hang on and we'd hit a bump and my feet would come right off. We had

dips in the road that you knew they were coming, man. You grabbed that strap and hung on for dear life because you knew you were coming off the thing. I just look back and say, "How in the heck didn't we lose anybody on those?" But everybody had that kind of stuff in mind and then we went to enclosed cabs and we went to a whole different kind of pumping.

KC: How tall are you?

SL: I'm about 5'5 1/2", 5'6". I try to say 5'9" but nobody believes me. [Kate and Bob laughs]

BJ: The other question I had is your two biggest customers would be 3M and maybe Maplewood Mall<sup>45</sup>. Has that relationship been pretty good with those two organizations and the fire department?

SL: Oh, yes.

BJ: And do they request things of the fire department. I suppose there all sprinklered now so they have less dependency on fire equipment. But how do you work with the two bigger organizations in Maplewood?

---

<sup>45</sup> **Maplewood Mall** is a super-regional shopping mall located in Maplewood, Minnesota. Maplewood Mall opened in 1974. It was later renovated and expanded in 1996 and is thought to be in the top six malls in the metropolitan area in terms of visitors.

SL: With 3M, we have a great, great partnership with them. We have actually from time to time, tested a product or two of theirs for them. The big thing for them is they have a great fire brigade, I guess you could say or a fire grouping within their own big complex there. So I mean, they check their stuff on an ongoing basis and we do all their inspections for their new buildings when they build them and anything new that opens. They couldn't be a better group to ask to work for. Actually, we probably go there less on fire calls than a lot of other places because they keep everything in very good shape compared to some of the apartment buildings that we end up to quite a bit, so that has always been good. We still have medicals there. Any given day, there could be 10 to 14,000 people in that complex. They've got a great security staff so when we get to the gates, we will follow them right into where we need to go. We do a lot of training over there with them on specialized stuff as well as we do walk-throughs of their buildings and see what they have such as their high danger stuff, where it's at and what they're doing to protect it. Safety for them is one of their number one objectives.

And Maplewood Mall, the same way. I mean, we always had a good rapport with them. We don't get a lot of calls there. We'll do some of the stores maybe a little bit more but the mall as a whole, they keep very good maintenance of their stuff as well and we don't go there very often on fire calls. Medicals, yes, we have quite a few medicals there.

KC: What's your legacy, Steve? What legacy have you left?

SL: That I left it better than it was and that people will look at me and when my name comes up and says, "He did everything he could to make it a better place." And I'm not looking for kudos, I'm not looking for this huge going out, I'm not looking for people to say, "He was the greatest fire chief in the world." What I



really want to do is to be able to, for my own self-worth and for myself, is to be able to say, "I gave it 150% and I walked away making it a better place than I found it."

KC: Thank you.

SL: Thank you.

## APPENDIX A

### Chronology of Gladstone Volunteer Fire Department

Gladstone Station: 1955 Clarence Street

and

Hazelwood Station: 1530 East County Road C

- December 11, 1942      First meeting to discuss starting a volunteer fire department held at the Gladstone school. 16 men attended.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- November 23, 1943      An organizational meeting was held. Six officers were appointed so training could begin by the North Saint Paul Fire Department.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- February 8 & 12, 1944      The department was incorporated with 27 volunteers and Leonard Foeller elected as the first chief.  
Source: Document, MAHS 2013.0004.0035
- May 7, 1944      Open house held in Gladstone for their first fire engine - a 1923 Pirsch fire engine that was purchased for \$1,000 from the Excelsior Fire Department.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- August 12, 1944      First fire run to a grass fire at 1794 Flandrau Street. Three men extinguished the fire in 30 minutes.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- September 16, 1944      Construction was started on a station with donations from local citizens.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- October, 1944      The department began charging New Canada Township for fire calls at \$35 for the first hour and \$25 each additional hour.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.0006.0017

- November 10, 1944      The Women's Auxiliary was founded.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- December, 1944      The 2-stall, 26' x32', concrete block fire station was completed, except there was no money for doors and windows. Windows were covered in tarpaper. Canvas that could be rolled up and down on a roller were installed over the doors. Windows and doors were installed in Spring after another fundraising effort.  
Source: History, MAHS 2013.0001.0103
- May 20, 1945      Open house for the completed 2-stall (26' x 32') fire station. Cost was less than \$2,500. A siren was located on the roof and could be activated from Pfeiffer's Grocery Store – which received all fire calls. Firemen hearing the siren would race to the Store to get the address and run across Frost Avenue to the fire station.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- c. 1945      There were only 14 fire hydrants in Gladstone located along Flandrau Street and White Bear Avenue. Rent was collected from residents on the street to pay Saint Paul. These were the only locations where the fire truck could be refilled with water.  
Source: History, MAHS 2013.0001.0103
- 1948      They had 32 members.  
Source: Letter, MAHS 2013.0001.0104
- 1951      Station was enlarged to 3 stalls.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- 1957      New Canada Township residents voted to incorporate as the Village of Maplewood. Village Council Meetings were held in the Gladstone Fire Station until a new city hall was constructed in 1965.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.0006.0017

- 1958 Gladstone Fire Station had 40 men and 4 pieces of equipment.  
Source: Newspaper, MAHS 2006.1430.0001
- 1970 Station was enlarged with a 4<sup>th</sup> stall to accommodate the new snorkel truck and a meeting room, small kitchen and restrooms.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- July 25, 1972 An organizational meeting was held at Holy Redeemer Parish Center to consider improving fire service to the rapidly growing north end of Maplewood and the Maplewood Mall. This led to creating Hazelwood Fire Station as a substation to Gladstone.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- October 3, 1972 Bill Mikiska was elected as the first district chief of Hazelwood Fire Station.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- September 15, 1974 Hazelwood Fire Station's 2-stall building was completed for \$192,000. Fire truck #124 was transferred to Hazelwood from the Gladstone Fire Station and a second truck was rented from Parkside Fire Department.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001 and 2006.0006.0017
- 1974 Firefighters were asked to drive ambulances to assist policemen who were trained as paramedics.  
Source: Oral interview of Dick Juker and Joe Waters
- 1975 Maplewood police officers were trained as paramedics by Regions Hospital with Dennis Cusick, both a Maplewood police officer and a Gladstone firefighter, as champion. Later, training was done through 916 Vo-Tech.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.0006.0017  
and verbal from Chief Steve Lukin
- 1977 Pagers were given to members to alert them to fire calls.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001

- 1978 New Advanced Life Support vans were purchased by Maplewood and housed at the fire stations and driven by the firefighters to assist the police paramedics. Gladstone firefighters were required to become EMT's and Parkside and East County Line firefighters could become either an EMT or a First Responder.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.0006.0017 and verbal from Chief Steve Lukin, Dick Peterson and Dick Juker.
- 1979 Gladstone and Hazelwood stations had a combined membership of 58 men. Hazelwood had two pumpers, a rescue squad and a boat with motor.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- ca. 1981 – 1982 Firefighting classes were started at 916 Vo-Tech. Previously, ISD 287 Vo-Tech instructors from Hennepin County would conduct classes at local fire stations, including Gladstone, Parkside and East County Line, as early as 1976 on basic firefighting. These classes became Firefighting I. Firefighting II was added later.  
Source: Oral interview with Chief Steve Lukin and Dave Klocek.
- 1993 Gladstone Fire station had 29 members.  
Hazelwood Fire Station had 24 members.
- January 1, 1997 Gladstone, Parkside and East County Line Volunteer Fire Departments merged to create the Maplewood Fire Department and all firefighters were required to become EMT's.  
Source: Oral interview with Steve Lukin
- 2001 A new fire station constructed at 1955 Clarence Street and the department is relocated.  
Source: Report, MAHS 2012.0009.0391

July, 2005

The Gladstone Volunteer Fire station is demolished.

Source: Maple Leaves, MAHS 2011.0010.0021

**Gladstone Fire Chiefs:**

1944 – 1947 -4 years Leonard Foeller

1948 – 1951 -4 years John Cottrell

1952 – 1964 -13 years Alwin (Al) Schilla

1965 – 1968 -4 years Al Schadt, became City Fire Marshal 1968 to 1985.

1969 – 1975 -7 years Robert Finberg

1976 – 1979 -3 years Tom Kansier

1979 – 1980 -2 years Jerry Kasmirski

1982 -1 year William Mikiska

1983 – 1984 -4 years Dennis Cusick

1985 – 1991 -7 years Jim Franzen

1992 – 1993 -2 years Howard (Howie) Weber

1994 – 1995 -2 years Richard “Dick” Peterson

1996 – 1997 -1 year Steve Lukin

January 1, 1997 Gladstone joined the Maplewood Fire Department with Joel Hewitt as their first Chief

## APPENDIX B

### Chronology of Parkside Volunteer Fire Department

2001 McMenemy Street

- June 1958            First meeting with 14 men. Bob Westbrook elected first chief and their first engine was a 1947 pumper purchased from Gladstone Fire Department.  
Source: History, MAHS 2013.0001.0117
- January, 1959        They went under contract with Village of Maplewood for fire service.  
Source: History, MAHS 2013.0001.0117
- May, 1959            Completed construction of 3-stall building on a 9 ½ acre site.  
Source: Newspaper, MAHS 2013.0001.0117
- 1962                 There were 40 members.  
Source: Newspaper, MAHS 2013.0001.0117
- 1988                 There were 42 firefighters and 3 multi-purpose fire response vehicles.  
Source: History, MAHS 2013.0001.0116
- 1995                 Negotiations to consolidate all three volunteer fire departments into Maplewood Department.  
Source: Letter, MAHS 2013.0003.0093

## APPENDIX C

### Chronology of East County Line Volunteer Fire Department

East County Line Station - 1177 Century Avenue

Londin Lane substation - 2501 Londin Lane

Noted for their annual Halloween parties for children and families of the community.

- October, 1942      First meeting at the home of Frank Kass to discuss creating a volunteer fire department.  
Source: Newsletter, MAHS 2012.0009.0564
- November, 1942      At a second meeting, Ruggles Sanders was elected fire chief with 14 charter members. The first homemade equipment was a 1929 Dodge truck chassis with a soda acid water tank purchased for \$250 from Lindstrom, MN. Later, a portable fire pump was added.  
Source: Newsletter, MAHS 2012.0009.0564  
and History, MAHS 2013.0001.0115  
and Newspaper of June 30, 1982
- 1946      Chief Sanders went to Merchants State Bank to get the department's first loan of \$3,500 to purchase the first pumper truck.  
Source: Newspaper of June 30, 1982
- 1946      They purchased a 1946 Ford pumper with a 500 gallon tank built by Flour City Fire Equipment Company.  
Source, MAHS 2013.0001.0115
- April 12, 1947      The department was incorporated.  
Source: Newsletter, MAHS 2012.0009.0564
- December, 1947      A 2-bay station was constructed on land purchased from John Geisinger.  
Source: Newsletter, MAHS 2012.0009.0564



- c. 1952 Building enlarged to 4-bays.  
Source, MAHS 2013.0001.0115
- Early to mid- 1950's They began contracting with townships for fire protection, including today's southern Maplewood, Oakdale and Woodbury. These areas included the 3M Center and Landfall Village.  
Source, MAHS 2013.0001.0115
- 1954 Fire station was expanded with another 40' x 60' addition.  
Source: Newspaper of June 30, 1982
- 1957 The fire district included Landfall, Woodbury, Oakdale and the southern leg of Maplewood that was south of North Saint Paul and east of McKnight Road. Oakdale and Woodbury eventually started their own departments. He's not certain what happened to Landfall.  
Source: Verbal from Bob Bade, former fire chief of East County Line.
- Late-1960's – Building enlarged to add offices and meeting spaces, a hose  
Early-1970's drying tower and additional bays with higher doors.  
Source, MAHS 2013.0001.0115
- 1975 Maplewood police officers were trained as paramedics by Saint Paul-Ramsey Medical Center (later known as Regions Hospital) with Dennis Cusick (both a Maplewood police officer and a Gladstone firefighter) as champion. Later, training was done through 916 Vo-Tech.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.0006.0017 and verbal from Chief Steve Lukin
- October, 1977 Firefighters were asked to drive ambulances (station wagons converted to hold a stretcher) to assist the police paramedics.  
Source: Strategic Plan for Maplewood Fire Department

- October 1977 A substation of East County Line was planned and built on Londin Lane and Lower Afton Road. 5 ½ acres were purchased by Maplewood to provide faster response in southern Maplewood and keep insurance premiums low. It's estimated that \$260,000 is needed to construct a building.  
Source: Letter, MAHS 2011.0010.0172
- 1978 Four new Advanced Life Support vans were purchased by Maplewood and housed at Parkside, Gladstone, Hazelwood and East County Line fire stations. They were driven by firefighters to assist the police paramedics. All new firefighters were required to become EMT's but a few old-timers were allowed to remain with their First Responder training.  
Source: History, MAHS 2006.0006.0017 and verbal from Chief Steve Lukin, Dick Peterson, Bob Bade and Dick Juker.
- November 6, 1979 Maplewood voters pass a bond issue to construct a new station on Londin Lane.  
Source: Newspaper, MAHS 2014.0001.0311
- ca. 1981 – 1982 Firefighting classes were started at 916 Vo-Tech. Previously, ISD 287 Vo-Tech instructors from Hennepin County conducted some classes at local fire stations as early as 1976. Also, John Rukavina of Roseville fire was instrumental in starting classes at local stations by local firefighters. These all evolved into Firefighting I class at 916. Firefighting II was added later.  
Source: Oral interview with Chief Steve Lukin, Dave Klocek and Bob Bade.
- June 30, 1982 The equipment used by the department includes: three pumpers, one rescue squad, a city owned Snorkel truck, a tank truck, a grass fire unit, a utility van with cascade air and salvage equipment, one basic life support ambulance and two advanced life support ambulances.  
Source: Newspaper of June 30, 1982
- 1986-1988 Additional remodeling of the station.  
Source, MAHS 2013.0001.0115

- 1995 Most firefighters were required to be EMTS-- Emergency Medical Technician.  
Source: Oral interview with Steve Lukin
- June 1996 Tentative agreement to consolidate with Gladstone and Parkside volunteer fire Departments Into Maplewood Fire Department.  
Source: Letter, MAHS 2013.0001.0109
- January 1, 1997 Gladstone, Parkside and East County Line Volunteer Fire Departments merged to create the Maplewood Fire Department and all firefighters were required to become EMT's.  
Source: Oral interview with Steve Lukin

### CHIEFS

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 1942 - 1964 | Ruggles Sanders                                   |
| 1964 - 1965 | Harvey Brockman                                   |
| 1965 - 1972 | Herb Johnson                                      |
| 1972 - 1972 | Don Hove  |
| 1972 - 1976 | Bob Bade  |
| 1976 - 1978 | Bob Murray  |
| 1978 - 1979 | Bob Bade (2 <sup>nd</sup> time for 7 years total) |
| 1980 - 1985 | Duane Williams                                    |
| 1986        | Dave Selbitschka                                  |
| 1987        | Bob Miller  |
| 1988        | Dave Selbitschka                                  |
| 1989 - 1996 | Larry Bush  |

# INDEX

<p>Banick</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">John.....49</p> <p>Beer in Fire Station ..... <b>13, 26, 57, 61</b></p> <p>Community ..... <b>6, 13, 26, 59, 61</b></p> <p>Cusick</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Dennis ..... 7, 14, 44, 56, 84, 86, 89</p> <p>Dietz</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Ed 25</p> <p>Equipment</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Hoses..... <b>5, 18, 27, 42, 43, 89</b></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Mask.....<b>11</b></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Pumps .....<b>27</b></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">SCBA - Air Tanks .....11, 18</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Turnout Gear.....11, <b>70</b></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Ventilation .....<b>78</b></p> <p>Family6, 7, 8, 12, 32, 46, 47, 60, <b>64, 67, 74, 76, 77, 78</b></p> <p>Female Integration .....<b>67-70</b></p> <p>Ferrazzo</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Pat .....7</p> <p>Fire Calls, Dispatch , Telephone, Siren.... 8, 21, <b>30, 33, 58, 67</b></p> <p>Fire Stations</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">600 McKnight Road.....<b>38, 60</b></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Gladstone Station at 1900 Clarence Street.....9</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Hazelwood Station at 1530 East County Road C., 9, <b>10</b></p> <p>Fire Trucks.....<b>54, 70, 79</b></p> <p>Fires</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Cleanup .....20</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">GEM Store Fire .....23</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">House Fires ..... <b>16, 18, 24, 42</b></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Morgen's Fire .....<b>23</b></p>	<p>Franzen</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Jim .....8, 25, 86</p> <p>Gervais</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Butch.....<b>63</b></p> <p>Hagen</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Tom .....7</p> <p>Hewitt</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Joel..... 5, 6, 46, 47, 86</p> <p>Howie</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Howie .....44, 45, 86</p> <p>Juker</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Richard ..... 18, 84, 85, 90</p> <p>Jungmann</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">BJ.....63</p> <p>Lindahl</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Wayne .....18</p> <p>Medical</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">EMT, First Responder, Paramedic .... 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 41, 52, 57, 58, 64, 66, <b>64-66, 85, 90, 91</b></p> <p>Mikiska</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">William ..... 8, 9, 25, 84, 86</p> <p>Mondor</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Mike .....<b>64</b></p> <p>Oswald</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Jack.....25</p> <p>Patches, Emblems.....<b>71-73</b></p> <p>Peterson</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Richard .....44, 85, 90</p> <p>Schadt's</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Al.....11</p> <p>Schaller</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Richard .....7, 26, 67</p>
--	---

Stanke	
Harvey .....	7, 75
Svensen	
Rusty .....	48
The National Fire Protection Association .....	12

Training..	12, 15, 19–20, 25, <b>28, 30, 32, 57, 60, 75, 80</b>
Trepanier	
Eugene Pudge .....	10
Wages .....	29
Women's Auxiliary .....	<b>6</b>