In this issue of the *Trumpeter* we salute the firemen and firewomen of the Klamath Falls area who have been faithfully serving the community for more than 100 years. We call these men and women firemen, because they put out fires, many times risking their lives as they do so. But wait. They do so much more than put out fires and rescue stranded cats. Ask anyone who has had a heart attack or other medical emergency and had to be whisked away to the hospital emergency room. People who have made that trip know what we are talking about. When the ambulance comes hurrying down the street, the big red fire engine will not be far behind. In this centennial year, our hats are off to these dedicated individuals.

Today’s fire department has come a long way since those early days when it consisted of two hose carts and enough volunteer firemen to pull them. These same firemen then went out and raised the money to purchase their much needed equipment by selling tickets to the annual Fireman’s Ball. Today’s firemen hurry to fires in bright, shiny fire trucks, working out of a half dozen modern fire stations located at strategic points throughout the city and its suburbs. To the firemen of the area, congratulations for a century of faithful service to the community. —Jack Bowden

**Klamath County Fire District No. 1 Mission Statement**

The mission of Klamath County Fire District No. 1 is to prevent or reduce the potential for fire ignition, injury or sudden illness, or life threatening situations and to minimize or control the loss or severity once an incident occurs.
HOSE CARTS

At the beginning of organized fire service in Klamath Falls, hose carts were used to transport hose and limited amounts of equipment to the fire. These carts were hand drawn and fire department personnel would run with the hose cart, not to the fire, but to the water source, such as a hydrant. Once at the hydrant the “plug-man” would grab the end of the hose and connect it to the hydrant while the rest of the men would pull the cart toward the fire. At the fire, a nozzle would be hooked to the end of the hose and the tools would be used to fight the fire. – Monte Keady

![Early Klamath Falls firemen at work.]

During the early years, fire fighting, rigs such as the one in the above photograph, were man powered. Pictured here, from left to right, are Keith Ambrose, former Klamath Falls, fire chief, a man by the name of Twilliger, (First name unknown) Len Royce, (Prominent Klamath rancher), Ed Goven, (Later a county commissioner) Jess Hunsaker, and George Tugnot. (Photo courtesy Klamath County Museum)
Like most of the towns and cities throughout the West, Klamath Falls has been subjected to a number of devastating fires over the years. Early buildings were mostly of wood construction and crammed tightly together almost assuring that once a fire got started it would take a number of adjoining buildings along with it before finally being extinguished. All too often an entire town would be reduced to ashes before the raging flames were brought under control.

On September 6, 1889 fire destroyed a large section of the town, burning the general merchandise store of Martin and Reames, Baldwin and Forbes Hardware, Judge Smith's hotel, Forbes Saloon, and the R. B. Hatton Saloon, in addition to a number of lesser structures. The total loss in this fire was estimated at $162,550. with a mere $37,500. being covered by insurance.

Life had hardly returned to normal when on April 8, 1892, another fire struck, burning the Grand Central block, destroying several businesses in the process, with a loss in excess of $20,000.

Fortunately up to 1920 the fires resulted in little or no loss of life. That was about to change. On September 6, of that year, the Houston Hotel, located on the northwest corner of 2nd and Main Streets caught fire. In the ensuing holocaust at least nine people
Perhaps the best known fire to hit Klamath Falls was the burning of the White Pelican Hotel on October 26, 1926. This magnificent, four story structure, at the intersection of Main Street and Esplanade was the show place of Southern Oregon. Built in 1911 by the Klamath Development Co., at a cost of $400,000. Local residents pointed it out as a sign to the rest of the world that Klamath Falls had finally come of age and its loss was felt keenly by the community.

Of course there were numerous lesser fires in which individual structures were destroyed. Neither were all the fires confined to the downtown area. Saw mills were especially vulnerable and burned with annoying regularity. Ewauna Box Co., Big Lakes Box Co., Chelsie Box Co. all suffered loss from fire, and the Pelican Bay Lumber Co. mill was twice destroyed by fire as were a number of smaller plants in the outlying area. As with most of the smaller towns Klamath Falls had an
When there was a fire the firemen had to go even in the snow, tire chains and all.

all volunteer fire department but although they fought valiantly they were no match for a fire once it began sweeping thru a town.

Prior to January 1901, a measure of fire protection was provided by two local "hose companies," as they were called, which operated separately of one another. Then, on January 28, of that year the two companies were merged forming the Klamath Falls Fire Department. It was at first an all volunteer operation with H. L. Boggs serving as fire chief. The total number of firemen at that time is unknown, but a group photograph of the Klamath Falls Fire Department taken in 1912 shows a total of 22 men.

Interestingly, money to fund the department was not provided by tax revenues. The firemen were all unpaid volunteers and funds to purchase protective clothing and other equipment was raised by the sale of tickets to the annual Firemen’s Ball. Tickets cost one dollar and citizens were encouraged to purchase a ticket even if they did not intend to go to the ball. An ad appearing in March 1905 Klamath Republican stated,

"If your house were on fire you would naturally expect the fire department to come to the rescue, yet you have no right to expect this if you are unwilling to give at least $1. toward furnishing them with equipment with which to work. The members do not get a cent for their services but are willing to devote the necessary time for the protection of the town, therefore they should receive the encouragement of every citizens. Do not wait to be called upon, but get your dollar ready and buy a ticket whether you attend or not. If you ever do attend a dance, do not miss this one."
Engine No.3

Engine #3 is a 1930s model American La France Fire Truck. It is reminiscent of the old Model “A” and “T” with rounded fenders and spoke wheels. It was in service for many years and finally taken out of service in the 1980s.

During its service life it saw duty on some of the biggest fires ever. Engine Three holds the record for pumping the most water of all local fire apparatus to date. I say this with authority because during times when Mills Addition in Klamath Falls would flood they would set it up and pump the floodwaters into the lake. It would be set up and pump at capacity for 24 hours a day, day after day. The firemen would ferry gas out to the engine while it pumped. The engine would sometimes be left as a lone sentinel to pump unattended during the worst of the flooding.

Today Engine #3 is retired from response and pumping. It has become the parade engine. All efforts are being made now for the preservation of this engine. It is no longer allowed too pump and is driven only often enough to keep it lubricated. Engine #3 is a shining showpiece that represents the history and a tradition of local fire service. -Monte Keady
Klamath Falls
Fire stations in the 21st Century

Station No. 1  South Suburbs.
9.16.2005

Station No. 4 Campus Drive
9.16.2005

Station No. 2  South Suburbs. 1979
9.16.2005

Station No. 3 Shasta Way. 1963
9.16.2005

Central Station  North Broad Street
9.16.2005

Wocus Station (Closed in 1992)
9.16.2005