

A Brief History of the Upper Captiva Fire Department

Prior to the 1960's, small fish camps and ice houses were the only evidence of modern settlements on Upper Captiva Island. Circa 1967, advertisements for the island were showing up in newspapers and periodicals around the country. The Island had been discovered.

In 1972, after a few minor fires and some medical events, the pioneers of the island took the first steps to form some type of emergency response organization. Soon the Upper Captiva Homeowners and Environmental Protections Association (UCHEPA) was formed.

Five years later, Lee County donated the first emergency vehicle, a 1948 Army ambulance. Unfortunately, it was lost in a brush fire a year later.

1979 was the first year of the Upper Captiva Fireman's Fund, an organization created to accept contributions from homeowners. With a donation-based revenue stream, the UCHEPA changes its name to Upper Captiva Volunteer Fire Company. Long-time islander Russ Reed was named the department's first Fire Chief and on November 22, 1979 Pine Island Fire Department donated a 1953 pumper to serve as the department's first fire truck.

Changes were in motion. Articles of Incorporation were signed during January 1984 to form the Upper Captiva Volunteer Fire Department Inc. The original signers were: John and Jane Pugh, Bud Brillhart, Shelby Creagh, Peter McKinny, Barbara Miklavcic and Russ and Thelma Reed. Land was donated by Safety Harbor Club for the first fire station and SHC assisted with the development of the volunteer department. On April 27, 1984, a fire broke out at one of the SHC townhouse under construction. The condominium complex was a total loss, and the fire department lost its first pumper in the fire.

Soon after the condo incident, a group of Islanders formed the Friends of the Volunteer Fire Department to help raise funds to support the fire department. Saint Patrick's day would never be the same.

When 1988 rolled around, Upper Captiva Volunteer Fire Department hired the first paid Fire Chief, Andy Anderson. After years of training the volunteers and upgrading the equipment, the department applied for it's first Insurance Service Office (ISO) rating test. All of the hard work paid off. On September 28, 1989 the ISO approved the department with a 9/8 rating. Certificates of occupancy and insurance premiums became obtainable. Sadly, tragedy struck in April of 1990, when Chief Anderson was lost in a plane crash off our coast, along with San Carlos Fire Chief Carl Drews and his brother-in-law.

Funding the department was still a problem. After years of work, Florida Legislation enacted Chapter 90-397 Laws of Florida, which created what is now known as Upper Captiva Fire Protection and Rescue Service District. Registered voters of the Island passed the local resolution and adopted the creation of the District. The transfer of Boards happened on January 5, 1991. The newly elected Commissioners were: Susie Scott, Jack Hunt, Louise Shaw, Grady Scott and Virginia King.

Construction for the fire station started on September 18, 1995 with a ground breaking ceremony attended by the Islanders. Nine months later on June 17, 1996, the station was in service. After 1,700 plus emergency calls, hurricanes and tropical storms, the fire station still stands as a simple reminder to visitors that the unexpected will happen.

Now into our nineteenth year as a District and thirty-seventh year overall, your Fire Commissioners, Staff and Volunteers continue to serve this community with pride. Public safety, awareness and education will continue to be our goals. We strive to improve our commitment and services to all who call Upper Captiva Island home.

Yours in Public Safety

Richard Pepper
Fire Chief
May 15, 1991 to present