

Weaver a Blazing Success As First Chief of SD Fire Co.

(This is the first in a series of five articles that profile the chiefs of Stuarts Draft Volunteer Fire Co.)

Stuarts Draft, late 1940s, a house is on fire.

The roads leading to the house are unpaved and bumpy, so the house is destroyed by the time a fire department arrives.

Community members, concerned about the welfare of their friends as well as themselves, decide to lessen the trauma of fire by forming a fire department in Stuarts Draft.

"We were having a lot of fires and losing many houses. Something had to be done," said Ralph Weaver, the first chief and one of the founders of Stuarts Draft Fire Co.

"People were more careless back then," Weaver said. "Fire prevention took the back seat."

As a result, the volunteer fire department, which was founded in 1950, responded to as many as eight structure fires week during its first years, Weaver said. Today, the company usually responds to one to two calls per month.

It was during Weaver's term as chief (1950-53) that firefighters underwent intensive training, the company's first engines were purchased, volunteers built the fire department and the bylaws of today were drafted.

Several times, Weaver used his own money to pay instructors from out of state and abroad to come help train the volunteer firemen, he said.

"We didn't even know what a fire truck was until an instructor/salesman from Richmond paid a visit and explained the functions and uses of a fire engine and the techniques of firefighting," Weaver said.

However, it wasn't long before Stuarts Draft Volunteer Fire Co. began equipping itself with needed items.

The department purchased its first firetruck, a 1940 model, in 1950 for \$525.50. About a year later, it bought an identical one. Air masks were purchased in 1953, and two-way radios were

community because the high rating lowered the premium rates paid by homeowners, businesses and industries, he said.

Weaver believes that through intense training and drilling, he had some of the "best-trained men in Augusta County."

"My firemen were out there day and night and succeeded as a powerful example to fire departments to come of what can be done when volunteers work together," Weaver said.

Although Weaver enjoyed being fire chief, he stepped down from the office in 1953 because "of a tight schedule and out-of-town business at the Weaver Hatchery." He later formed Weaver Insurance Co. of Waynesboro.

He was an active firefighter with Stuarts Draft Volunteer Fire Co. for a total of eight years. At age 63, Weaver is now a retired businessman and an honorary member of Stuarts Draft Volunteer Fire Co.



First Chief

This fire engine that Ralph Weaver is about to climb into is much

1953, and two-way radios were added in 1957, Weaver said.

Under Weaver's guidance, the fire company achieved the highest possible insurance rating. This success was felt directly by the

This fire engine that Ralph Weaver is about to climb into is much more complex than the two purchased when he was chief of Stuarts Draft Volunteer Fire Co. Weaver, who was an active firefighter with the department for eight years, was the company's first chief.

(N-V Photo by Singletary)