



Chief

Stuarts Draft Volunteer Fire Department Chief W. K. Weaver, Jr., checks the valves on one of the SDVFD's fire trucks. Weaver, the current chief, has been with the fire department for the past 28 years.

(N-V Photo by Haun)

Today's Chief Has New Responsibilities

(Third in a series of five articles profiling the chiefs of the Stuarts Draft Volunteer Fire Department.)

The current chief of the Stuarts Draft Volunteer Fire Department, W. K. Weaver, Jr., is also a lifetime member of the department.

Weaver first joined the SDVFD in 1960, at the age of 23.

Raised on a dairy farm in Waynesboro, one of 14 children, Weaver was Cohrns Hardware store one day when the SDVFD got an emergency call. Because of a manpower shortage, they asked for his help.

That fire sparked an interest that became a lifetime job, involving the next 28 years of his life.

In 1978 he served as assistant chief and temporarily as chief when Charles Harris resigned. He was officially elected chief in March, 1979, serving until 1984.

He was re-elected chief in 1987 and serves as chief today.

During Weaver's term as chief, two major barriers - race and sex - were broken allowing more volunteers into the department. Today both blacks and women are welcome as volunteers in Stuarts Draft Volunteer Fire Department.

The fire that made the biggest impression on Weaver was a six-alarm fire that took place late one night, just before midnight. The fire was in the Grand Piano furniture store in Waynesboro. Fire companies from all around the area responded to it, he said.

"They had just had a big sale that day, and we fought all through the night on into the morning to try and contain it and get it out," Weaver said.

"We were trying to save the surrounding buildings. We managed to save the L B & B building and the David Brooks Sports Shop, which were on either side

of it, but we lost a small shoe store next to Grand Piano, as well as the furniture store."

The most stressful call he ever had, he said, involved home on top of a mountain where the fire was already "fully involved" and the word he had said a woman was trapped inside. "Fortunately, we found out later the woman had managed to escape and was uninjured," he said.

Two other major changes during Weaver's time at the department have been the purchase of the old Draft School from the county which is today the SDVFD building and School House Restaurant, and the installation of the Central Dispatch System. This system allows all calls for Augusta County Fire Departments to be directed to one dispatch system.

The best thing about being chief, he says, is the "closeness of working with my men and others ,

all with the same idea in mind to save property and help others.

Firefighting today, he said, quite another story compared 38 years ago when the department was formed.

"More hazardous materials being transported as well as us in our area. More plastics and new materials are being used in homes using different types of gases and fuels and new industrial development. All of these things call for new and safer ways of fighting fires than just using water," said.

Firefighting is even more hazardous today, he said. "Safety is of the greatest importance training for fighting toxic and dangerous gas fires or chemical spills."

Weaver would like to be remembered as a man who "took his best fighting fires and taking chances to help others in need