

# Tucson Fire Department

## Closing the 20<sup>th</sup> Century 1970-2000



An arson fire destroyed Old Tucson Studios on April 25, 1995

**Al Ring**

**Bob Ring**

## Closing the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: 1970 - 2000

**As Tucson maintained steady growth in the face of challenging economic and social issues, the TFD responded with a more efficient organization; more effective firefighting apparatus; expanded training, medical, and safety missions; and introduced advanced electronics technology, while being confronted by an increasing number of arson fires.**

First we'll discuss what was happening in Tucson; then we'll continue the story of the Tucson Fire Department (TFD) in this period.

### Tucson Perspective

**Summary.** Tucson's growth continued at a steady pace while the city faced a number of challenging issues. The business climate was mixed; periodic severe city budget cuts were problematic. The Tucson Community (now Convention) Center opened in 1971, but the Pioneer Hotel fire in late 1970 seemed to signal a decline in the downtown economic picture. Urban renewal efforts started, but were fitful and largely unsuccessful. Social change and human rights movements flavored these years. Illegal drugs and illegal aliens became serious problems. Tucsonans became more sensitive to environmental issues.

A groundwater depletion crisis in the 1970s found a solution in the 1990s with the Central Arizona Project (CAP) bringing water to Tucson from the Colorado River. Tucson began a high technology revolution with the UA Planetarium and telescope developments, relocating aerospace companies, Biosphere 2, and UA space programs. The Old Pueblo began to appreciate its past with several historic preservation efforts, including Tucson Origins Historic Park. Shopping malls, luxury resorts, and art museums came of age in Tucson. Indian gaming began.



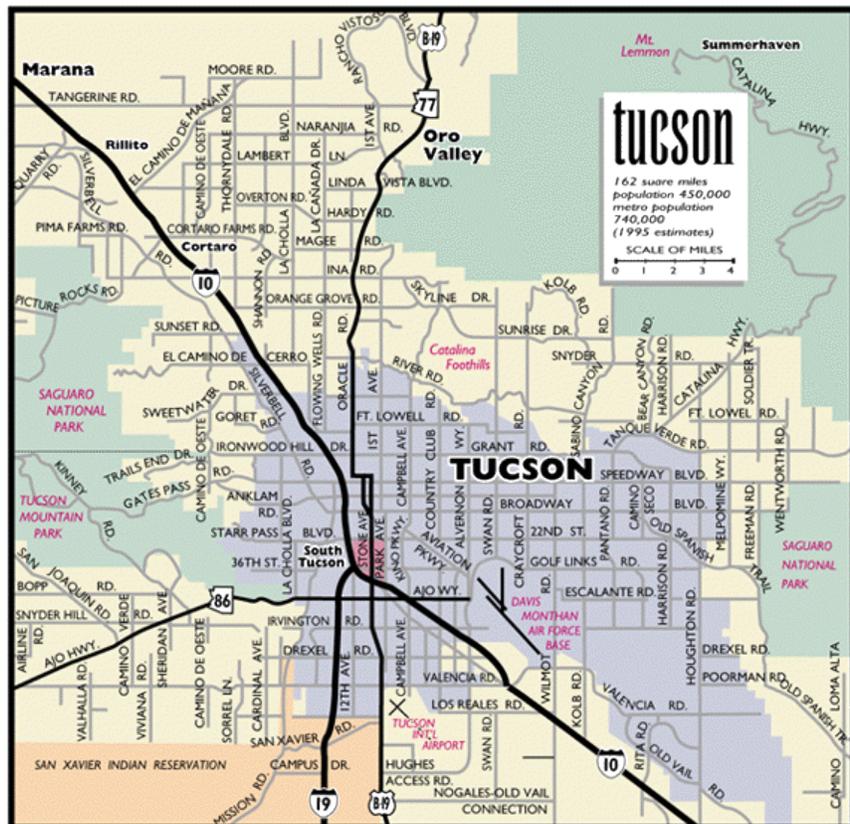
*1990 photo of Tucson from the air, looking northeast. The Tucson Convention Center is in the right foreground. Surrounded by tall buildings, is the dome of the Pima County Courthouse. Note the increasingly dense suburbs extending in all directions. (Courtesy of Ray Manley)*

Here are some of the milestones that helped define this period in Tucson:

- a. 1971 - Tucson Community Center built
- b. 1973 - CAP begins
- c. 1974 - Armory Park historic preservation
- d. 1975 - Center for Creative Photography opens
- e. 1975 - UA Planetarium opens
- f. 1975 - Park Mall opens
- g. 1976 - Gates Lear Jet and IBM come to town
- h. 1982 - Tucson Mall opens
- i. 1985 - Tucson Historic Preservation Foundation
- j. 1991 - Biosphere 2 opens
- k. 1992 - First CAP water to Tucson
- l. 1993 - Desert Diamond Casino opens
- m. 1996 - Museum of Contemporary Art opens
- n. 1999 - Tucson Origins Heritage Park founded

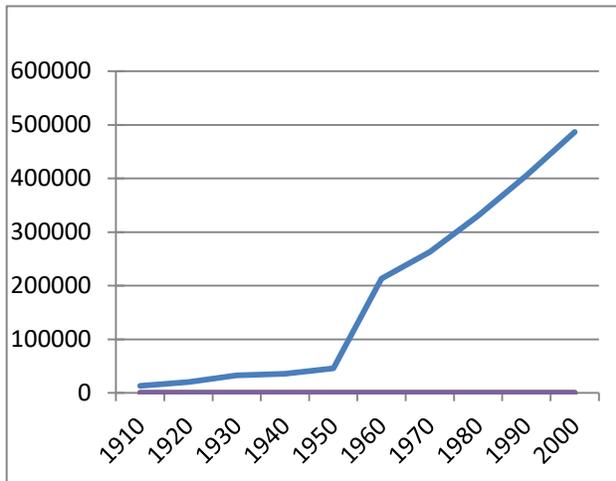
**Municipal Growth.** The city limits of Tucson continued to expand outward. From 1971 through 2000 metropolitan Tucson grew from 80.7 square miles to 196.3 square miles, increasing in size by a factor of 2.4. This was accomplished with 111 separate land annexations, conducted at a steady pace over the years. Tucson's largest expansion in this period was to the southeast.

The accompanying map shows the city limits in 1995. The metropolitan area generally extended to River Road in the north, the Tucson Mountains in the west, San Xavier Indian Reservation and Tucson International Airport in the south, and Houghton Road in the east. From 1995-2000 additional land was annexed to the southeast, all the way to Vail, including considerable acreage south of I-10.

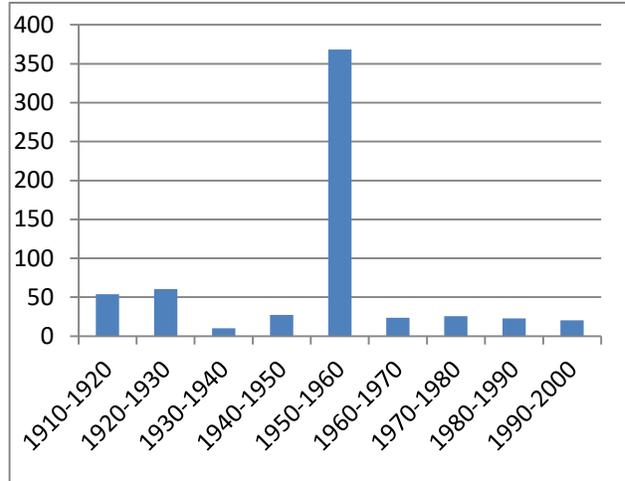


*This 1995 map shows the city limits of metropolitan Tucson. By 2000 the city extended southeast to Vail and south of I-10. (Courtesy of fortunebuilders.com)*

**Population.** Tucson's population continued to grow also, expanding steadily from 262,933 in 1970 to 486,699 in 2000, an increase of 85%. For perspective, the accompanying charts show population growth in Tucson from 1910 to 2000. The enormous population growth of 368% in the decade of the 1950s leveled off in the 1960s and continued at 20-25% per decade through 2000.



*Population Growth in Tucson.*



*Percentage Population Growth by Decade in Tucson.*

After peaking near 80% in 1960, the percentage of Anglos in the Tucson population continued to decrease in this period, dropping from about 78% in 1970 to about 55% in 2000. The percentage of Hispanics increased from about 17% to 37% in the same period.

**Water.** By 1970 Tucson pumped all its water from deep wells and the ground water supply from the aquifer was rapidly depleting. Many years of deferred capital improvements in the city's water supply infrastructure complicated the situation. The practice of buying up small, private water companies (servicing the suburbs) as the city expanded had worked for a while, but water officials still found it difficult to meet the demand. Moreover, the private company equipment often did not meet Tucson quality standards; there were considerable expenses to retrofit substandard hardware. Worst of all, water costs everywhere were skyrocketing due to increased energy costs and inflation. Tucson responded by raising water rates (causing considerable political turmoil) and instituting a water conservation program.

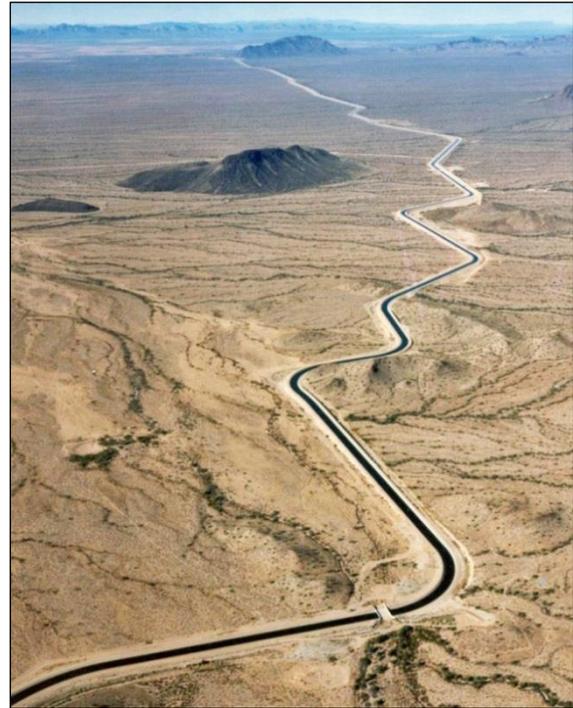
Meanwhile, something amazing was happening. In 1938 Parker Dam was completed as one of a series of dams to help control and regulate the once unruly Colorado River. Parker Dam's primary purpose was to provide reservoir storage for water to be directed to the states of California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, New Mexico and to Mexico.

Arizona approved the Central Arizona Project (CAP) to divert water from the Colorado River from Lake Havasu City into central and southern Arizona. Construction of the project began in 1973. Over a period of 20 years, workers built a 336-mile diversion canal, from the Colorado River to just southwest of

Tucson, and in 1992 officials “turned on the faucet” to start providing Tucson with water to supplement our limited groundwater.

Tucson officials had prepared for delivery of CAP water by building a water treatment plant (to kill any viruses and bacteria) and a 60-million-gallon reservoir southwest of Tucson.

But the CAP water was unexpectedly acidic and had a corrosive effect that released rust and dirt that had accumulated in pipes over the years. The solution, which took several years to evolve, was to “recharge” the CAP water by letting it seep into the ground aquifer, undergoing a natural filtering process, and then extracting it from the ground via nearby wells. A large-scale recharge facility, with three recharge basins surrounded by nine wells, was built west of Tucson in the Avra Valley. By 2001 this recharged CAP water, blended with groundwater, was being delivered to Tucson.



*This 336-mile canal of the Central Arizona Project brings water to Tucson from the Colorado River. (Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)*

### **Tucson Fire Department**

**Summary.** The TFD responded to the terrible Pioneer Hotel fire in December 1970 with accelerated expenditures for firefighting apparatus and additional firefighters. Over the period, as the city of Tucson continued to expand, the TFD kept pace with new fire stations, modernized equipment, and additional manpower, while adding new training, medical, and safety missions.

In 1970 the TFD had 12 operating fire stations out of the 14 that had been commissioned so far. Station 2 had been closed permanently and Station 13 was temporarily decommissioned. During the period 1970 to 2000, the TFD recommissioned and relocated Station 13 and relocated Stations 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 12. To service the expanding city, the Department also built five new stations, Stations 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19, for a total of 18 operating stations by 2000. Private fire companies like the South Side Fire Department (formed in the 1940s), Drexel Heights (started in the 1954), Rural Metro (organized here in the 1960s), Flowing Wells (formed in 1963), and the Northwest Fire District (founded in 1983) served the areas outside Tucson city limits.

The TFD had started limited first aid services in the 1920s and rescue missions in the 1950s. In 1974 the TFD expanded its mission to include “paramedic” service, and from that point on, medical “runs” became an increasingly large portion of TFD service to the Tucson community. The number of rescue calls in 1970 amounted to about 45% of all TFD calls; in 2000 EMS (Emergency Medical Service) calls had

reached about 85% of all calls. In 1994 the TFD began billing for advanced life support ambulance transport services. (More on EMS to come.)



*In October 1974 the TFD placed the first Arizona paramedic unit in service. The mobile intensive care ambulance was manned by seven fire department members. (Courtesy of Tucson Firefighters Association)*

Fire suppression and medical mission needs drove requirements for additional apparatus during these years. Following the Pioneer Hotel fire, there was an impetus to secure “higher-reach” apparatus, typified by the purchase in 1972 of the Calavar Firebird elevated platform that reached to a height of 150 feet. After a burst of spending in the 1970s, firefighting apparatus procurement, periodically limited by severe budget constraints, generally was able to maintain a level of two engine companies at Central Station, one engine company

at the other stations, and a ladder company at a third to a half of the stations.<sup>1</sup> In 2000 the TFD had been able to procure enough ambulances to operate a paramedic company at 14 of the 18 active fire stations.

Other new missions increased TFD overall effectiveness. In 1981 the TFD added Hazardous Materials (HazMat) capability to its expertise. And in 1986 the TFD organized a Technical Rescue Team to handle difficult rescues like trench, water, technical rope, confined space, structural collapse, and extrication of victims from automobiles, aircraft, trains, busses, etc. During this time period, a handful of specialized HazMat and Heavy Rescue vehicles were purchased to support these missions.

The TFD also added new support facilities during this time period. A TFD Training Center was completed in 1970, and for 27 years was the focal point for training firefighters. In 1997 the Training Center was replaced by a new Public Safety Academy,<sup>2</sup> operated jointly by Tucson’s Fire and Police Departments.

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<sup>1</sup> Typically in the TFD, an engine company operates one pumper fire engine; a ladder company operates one aerial ladder, aerial platform, or ladder tender (smaller, less expensive ladder truck).

<sup>2</sup> TFD training at the Public Safety Academy includes hazardous-materials mitigation, technical-rescue, driver-operator and incident command, wildfire suppression, flammable-liquids, and a host of other firefighting and safety subjects.

These TFD growth and change initiatives affected personnel requirements. The TFD began the period in 1970 with 279 uniformed personnel. A large buildup in the 1970s was mitigated by budget restrictions and hiring freezes in the 1980s, but by the 1990s, the rate of manpower increase had resumed at a steady pace. By 2000 the number of commissioned TFD personnel exceeded 500 individuals. Four men served as Chief of the TFD during this period.

In 1984 the TFD hired its first female firefighter. By the mid-1990s, 18 of 434 firefighters were women, including Laura Baker who joined the TFD as a firefighter in 1994 and would rise to the position of Assistant Chief in 2015.

Tucson experienced ten fires where damage was estimated at \$1M or greater, topped by the April 1995 conflagration at Old Tucson Movie Studios at 201 South Kinney Road<sup>3</sup> that did an estimated \$10M damage (see below). An increasing number of Tucson fires (reaching about 50% by the 1990s) were due to arson.

Advanced electronics technology also helped make the TFD more effective. In 1971 the TFD began adding Opticom units to all front line apparatus to provide traffic signal preemption at about 40 busy intersections around town. From 1972-1978, 50 solar-powered alarm boxes were installed, phasing out the old Fire Alarm Telegraph system. In the mid 1970s the TFD implemented an EMS capability to transmit EKG's by radio to hospitals while in route. In 1999 an Electronic Reporting System was started for medical reports and since has expanded to all emergency reports.<sup>4</sup>

Firefighter safety was improved in the late 1990s with the introduction of a Personal Accountability program as a means to track crews and individuals involved in fighting fires. Originally it was conducted with a status board and name tags that were manually adjusted at the command post by the incident status officer.<sup>5</sup>

Surviving 30 years of steady efforts to reduce ground water depletion through conservation, and by 2001, adding treated CAP water to the city water supply, Tucson seemed to have resolved its water problems for the moment. By 1999 the city's water infrastructure provided 3,640 miles of water mains 14,820 fire hydrants.

While the role of the TFD was expanding in the Tucson community, the organization also grew as a business. In FY 1970-71 the TFD budget was \$4.4M. The budget (including capital items) grew at near 20% annually through the mid 1970s, and then "limped" through difficult economic times in Tucson

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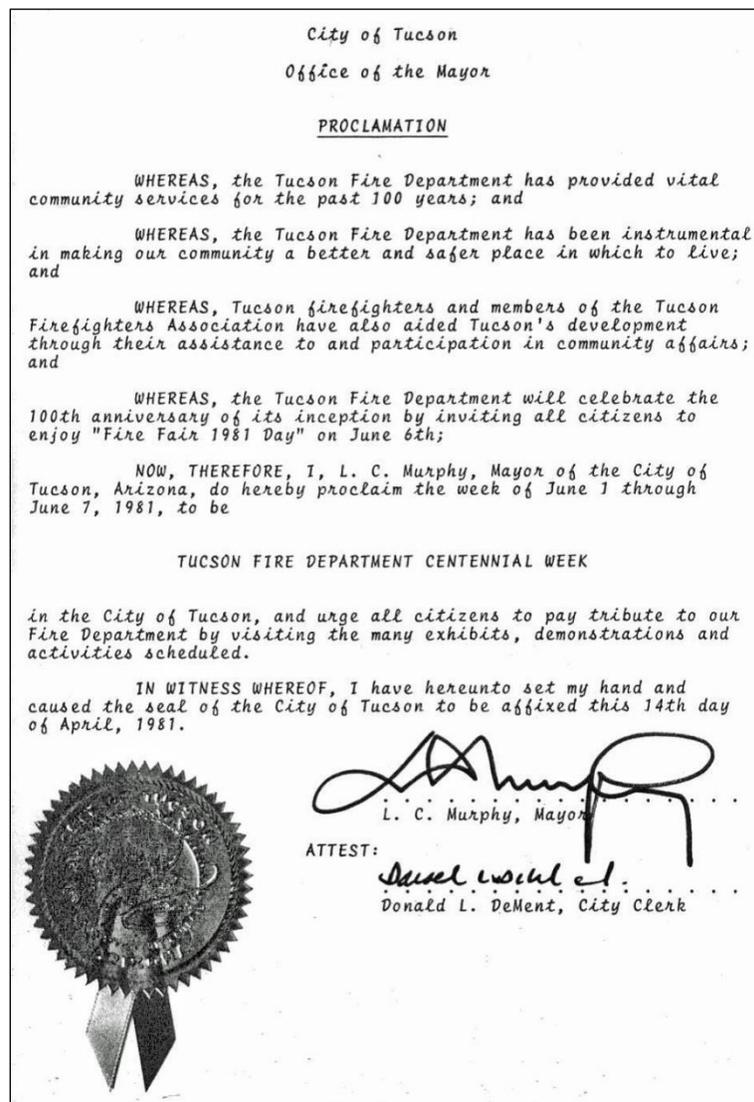
<sup>3</sup> Even though Old Tucson was well outside city limits, under a mutual-aid agreement, the TFD responded along with 13 other Pima County fire departments.

<sup>4</sup> The purpose of these online electronic reports was to increase accountability, improve medical billing, improve storage and archiving, dovetail with Medicare and hospital records, improve retrieval, and reduce paper retention and purging issues, basically bringing the fire service in line with most modern business services.

<sup>5</sup> Today the TFD uses a "passport" system that employs name tags, color coded for rank, attached to each firefighter's helmet and placed on a status board on each fire apparatus during operations. Firefighter assignments are tracked/changed on an electronic Mobile Data Terminal carried on each apparatus.

through the mid-1980s, to continue to grow through the 1990s at a rate of 5-10% per year. The FY 99-00 budget was \$37.3M - eight and a half times the budget of FY 1970-71.

The TFD organization "adjusted" over the years to more effectively address its expanding operations and new missions. In 1971 a Supply section was added to handle the multitude of apparatus and equipment maintenance issues. The paramedics and EMS services were initially placed in a separate Medical division, joining the Fire Prevention and Suppression divisions as the primary TFD organizational units. In 2000, looking to enhance efficiency in the face of increased medical calls, the Medical and Suppression divisions were merged into two Operations divisions that include two Battalions each. Training and Safety were also recognized in the TFD organization charts.



Tucson Mayor L. C. Murphy issued this proclamation in honor of the TFD's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. (Courtesy of the TFD)

In 1981 the TFD celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday as a fire department in Tucson. The week of June 1 through June 7, 1981 was designated “Tucson Fire Department Centennial Week,” by Tucson Mayor L. C. Murphy, and Tucsonans were invited on a congratulatory proclamation, to visit “the many exhibits, demonstrations and activities” at the TFD Fire Fair 1981 at the Tucson Fire Training Academy on East Ajo Way.

In 1988 the TFD completed its first project to restore a historic firefighting apparatus, the famous horse-drawn Nott Steamer that served the TFD from 1909 to 1917.<sup>6</sup>

**Fire Stations.** Here are the details of the seven fire stations that were relocated and the five additional stations commissioned from 1970-2000.

**Station 1** (fire headquarters) was relocated in June 1972 from 142 South 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, where it had been the home of downtown fire units for 63 years, to 265 South Church Avenue. In October 2009, Station 1 moved to the current Fire Central building, located on the west side of downtown at Cushing and Granada. Home to the Hazardous Materials Response Team, Station 1 is Tucson’s largest station in terms of apparatus and personnel.

**Station 4** was relocated in 1974 from the northeast corner of Grande and Alameda, where it had been since 1930, to a new multi-bay station at 1008 North Contzen Avenue in the Barrio Anita neighborhood. The need for coverage west of the Santa Cruz River dictated that Station 4 be relocated again in 1997 to 2102 North Dragoon Avenue.

**Station 5** was repositioned in 1983 from 1510 East Grant Road, where it had been since 1953, to a location two miles farther east at 2835 East Grant Road. The station is surrounded by schools, apartment complexes, and small businesses.

**Station 6** was originally housed near 5<sup>th</sup> Street and Swan Avenue in 1956. It was relocated to the corner of Bellevue and Venice in 1959, closed in 1983 when it was merged with the original Station 7 near Speedway Boulevard and Country Club Road, recommissioned in 1994 in a temporary building, and again brought into service in 1997 on the grounds of the Public Safety Academy at 10251 South Wilmot Road. Station 6 provides emergency services to new housing developments and three adjacent state and federal correctional facilities.

**Station 7** was originally located at 3202 East 1<sup>st</sup> Street, near Speedway and Country Club. Station 7 was relocated to 4902 Pima Street in 1983, encompassing a large service area that includes a mixture of residential neighborhoods, commercial businesses, and numerous adult care facilities. One of the busiest stations in the city in terms of call volume, Station 7 is the district headquarters for Battalion 2. The original Station 7 building was converted to a Tucson Police Department substation in the 1980s and is currently home to the City’s Ward 6 Council office.

**Station 12** was originally located in midtown, placed in service when the TFD took over the Catalina Fire Department in 1959. As a result of explosive population growth on the city’s east side, in 1965 Station

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<sup>6</sup> You can read the complete story of the Nott Steamer in a previous “Reflections” article, “Tucson’s Nott Steamer.”



Station 1  
265 South Church Avenue  
1972-2009



Station 4  
1008 North Contzen Avenue  
1974-1997



Station 4  
2102 North Dragoon Avenue  
1997-



Station 5  
2835 East Grant Road  
1983-



Station 6  
10251 South Wilmot Road  
1997-



Station 7  
4902 East Pima Street  
1983-



Station 12  
250 South Harrison Road  
1976-



Station 13  
7975 East Stella Road  
1973-



Station 15  
2002 South Mission Road  
1974-



Station 16  
7575 East Speedway Boulevard  
1976-



Station 17  
5270 Houghton Road  
1988-



Station 18  
1102 West Irvington Road  
1992-2000

*These are the fire stations that started service from 1970-2000. (Courtesy of the TFD)*



Station 18  
1855 West Drexel Road  
2000-



Station 19  
9700 East Esmond Loop  
1996-

*These are the fire stations that started service from 1970-2000, continued. (Courtesy of the TFD)*

12 was moved eastward to 7901 East Scarlett Street. Station 12 was again relocated in 1976 to 250 South Harrison Road. The Scarlett facility now houses a senior citizens center.

**Station 13** was originally located in 1960 at 341 West Ajo Way in a residential neighborhood. The station was decommissioned in 1965 as a result of the opening of Station 10 at Park and Ajo. In 1973 Station 13 was brought back into service and relocated to 7975 East Stella Road.

**Station 15** was built in February 1974 at 2002 South Mission Road. The station covers some of Tucson's most expensive mountain top homes and a world class resort, as well as Pima County Jail. The station also supports operations in the downtown area as well as the south and west portions of the city.

**Station 16** was built in March 1976 at 7575 East Speedway Boulevard, just west of Pantano Road. The station serves residential neighborhoods, ranch style parcels, and small businesses.

**Station 17** was completed in June 1988 at 5270 Houghton Road, between Irvington and Drexel. The station serves a large geographical area comprised of open space and widely-separated residential developments, although a great deal of future population growth is predicted for the area.

**Station 18** was originally accommodated in manufactured housing at 1102 West Irvington Road, beginning in April 1992. The station relocated to its current address at 1855 West Drexel Road in April 2000.

**Station 19** opened in February 1996 at 9700 East Esmond Loop in the Rita Ranch community. The station covers a large suburban community, along with schools, offices, and commercial businesses. The station also provides coverage to several large warehouse and industrial locations as well as the southeast sector of Tucson's freeway system.

By 2000 the TFD had 18 active fire stations. The accompanying figure shows how these 18 stations were distributed across metropolitan Tucson, and their assignments within the four operations battalions. There were 18 engine companies, two at Station 1, and one each at the other stations. There were seven ladder companies, assigned to Stations 1, 5, 7, 9, 10, 16 and 17. All but Stations 11, 12, 17, and 18 housed paramedic teams. The Hazardous Materials Team was assigned to Station 1 and the Technical Rescue Team was assigned to Station 10.

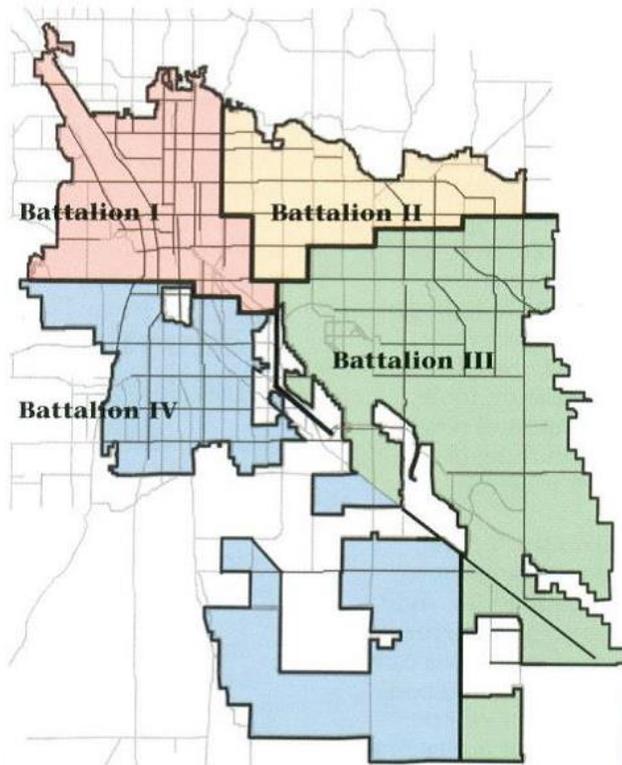
## Fire Station Locations



**Battalion I**  
**Station 1**  
 265 S. CHURCH AV.  
**Station 3**  
 24 N. NORRIS AV.  
**Station 4**  
 2102 N. DRAGOON ST.  
**Station 8**  
 250 W. KING RD.



**Battalion II**  
**Station 5**  
 2835 E. GRANT RD.  
**Station 7**  
 4902 E. PIMA ST.  
**Station 11**  
 4075 E. TIMROD ST.  
**Station 16**  
 7575 E. SPEEDWAY BL.



**Battalion IV**  
**Station 6**  
 10251 S. WILMOT RD.  
**Station 10**  
 801 E AJO WAY  
**Station 14**  
 5757 S. LIBERTY AV.  
**Station 15**  
 2002 S. MISSION RD.  
**Station 18**  
 1855 W. DREXEL RD.



**Battalion III**  
**Station 9**  
 6275 E. EASTLAND ST.  
**Station 12**  
 250 S. HARRISON RD.  
**Station 13**  
 7975 E. STELLA RD.  
**Station 17**  
 5270 S HOUGHTON RD.  
**Station 19**  
 9700 E. ESMOND LOOP

By 2000 the TFD had 18 active fire stations. (Courtesy of the TFD)

**Firefighting Apparatus.** Listing each piece of apparatus added to the TFD fleet (as we did for earlier historical periods in past articles), would be prohibitive for this 30-year period - there are simply too many to cover efficiently.<sup>7</sup> Here are some of the highlights.

Maintaining an overall “average” of two engine companies for Station 1, and one each for the rest of the active stations; a ladder company at a third to a half of the stations; and paramedic service at an increasing percentage of stations, the TFD purchased over these 30 years:

- a. 48 pumpers, plus a mini-pumper
- b. 10 aerial ladder trucks, two aerial platforms, an aerial tractor, and six ladder tenders
- c. Three combination pumper/ladder apparatus (Quints)
- d. 58 ambulances
- e. Two Haz/Mat vehicles
- f. Two heavy rescue vehicles
- g. A handful of other assorted special-purpose vehicles



*This 1973 “ladders up” photo shows how the Firebird platform towered above the other aerial ladders. (Courtesy of the TFD)*

After the disastrous Pioneer Hotel fire in December 1970, where the available aerial ladders could not reach the upper floors, the TFD priority was “higher reach.” In 1972 a Calavar Firebird elevated platform - that could be raised to a height of 150 feet - was put in service. Unfortunately, “because of costly and frequent repairs on the sophisticated machinery, the Firebird [was] more trouble than it was worth,” and the apparatus was sold at city auction in 1977.

Interestingly, the TFD apparently took advantage of apparatus sales, periodically buying multiple apparatus at the same time, like eight Ford



*These seven Van Pelt/Spartan pumpers were all purchased in June 1986. (Courtesy of the TFD)*

ambulances in July 1977 and seven Van Pelt/Spartan pumpers in June 1986.

<sup>7</sup> Every piece of apparatus purchased by the TFD since the Department’s beginning in 1881 is described on this website at “Apparatus, TFD Apparatus Information, TFD Apparatus History.”

For 20 years, from 1973-1993, the TFD purchased mostly lime green color firefighting apparatus, when it was thought in some places nationally that the lime color provided a higher degree of visibility. That changed in 1993 when the TFD resumed buying primarily red vehicles to get back to the traditional fire department color.

A representative set of apparatus, put in service toward the end of this time period, is shown in the accompanying figure.



2000 Pierce Saber Pumper



1999 Hackney International Heavy Rescue



1996 Pierce Lance Aerial Platform



1996 McCoy-Miller Ford  
E350 Ambulance

*These apparatus are representative of what the TFD had in service in 2000. (Courtesy of the TFD)*

**TFD Chiefs.** Four men served as TFD Chief from 1970-2000. Leonel Peterson actually started his term as Chief in April 1966 and served seven years in this period. Dean Holland, Richard Moreno, and Frederick Shipman served their full terms during these years. For several months the TFD was managed by Acting Chiefs: Deputy Chief W. D. Dearing, prior to the start of Dean Holland's term, and Assistant Chief Frederick Shipman, before he was approved as permanent Chief.

*The Chiefs of the Tucson Fire Department during the 1970-2000 Period.*

No.	Term as Chief	Name	Born	Died	Time as Chief	Comments
21	4/1966-7/1976	Leonel Peterson	1916 Claypool, Arizona	2007 Tucson	10 yrs. 3 mo	Chief during Pioneer Hotel fire
22	11/1976-3/1982	Dean Holland	1944 Denton, Texas		5 yrs. 5 mo	Youngest metropolitan Chief
23	4/1982-9/1992	Richard Moreno	1938 Tucson		10 yrs. 5 mo	Resigned under political pressure
24	2/1993-1/2001	Frederick Shipman	1944 Ventura, California		8 yrs. 11 mo	"Built national model fire department"

**21 Leonel Peterson (4/1966-7/1976)** - In April 1966, 50-year old Leonel Peterson, a member of the TFD since 1940, was appointed Chief of the TFD, a post he held for over 10 years before retiring in July 1976.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1970s Chief Peterson oversaw an enormous buildup of firefighting apparatus and personnel - Tucson's reaction to the devastating Pioneer Hotel fire in December 1970. In 1973 he initiated the "color change" initiative from red to lime green for newly purchased apparatus.

He managed the relocation of Station 1 (1972), Station 4 (1974), and Station 12 (1976) and the building of two additional fire stations: Station 15 (1974) and Station 16 (1976). Peterson also presided over the building of the TFD Training Center (1970), the introduction of the Supply function in the TFD organization (1971), and the enormously important start of paramedic service (1974). In addition, Chief Peterson implemented systems for priority traffic signal preemption, solar-powered alarms, and medical EKG transmittal systems in the 1970s.



Between the Pioneer Hotel fire in December 1970 and Chief Peterson's retirement in July 1976, the two highest damage fires that the TFD fought were: the Pima County Administration Building - downtown on West Congress in 1973 (\$540,000 damage), and Fry's Market on East Tanque Verde in 1976 (\$600,000 damage).

By mid-1976 Peterson "commanded a budget of nearly \$9.5 million and 400 men at 15 fire stations." While he was Chief, the TFD was recognized for its fire protection efforts and as a top department in fire safety.

<sup>8</sup> A more complete biography of Leonel Peterson, including his early years and service with the TFD from 1940-1970, appears in a previous "Reflections" article, "Unprecedented Tucson Growth: 1950-1970."

In June 1976 Peterson received a Fire Science Degree from Pima Community College to cap off years of education and training in his professional life. Chief Peterson “constantly strived for improvement of the Tucson Fire Department firefighting and rescue capabilities in the continued in-service training for all Fire Department personnel.”

Peterson spent a long retirement traveling in the U.S. and Mexico, enjoying his family, his church, and friends and pets. Chief Peterson died in Tucson on January 18, 2007.

**22 Dean Holland (11/1976-3/1982)** - When Leonel Peterson retired, Tucson City Manager Joel Valdez instituted “search” for a new TFD Chief. The process of identifying and interviewing candidates, both from within the TFD and outside, took several months; in the meantime Deputy Chief W. D. Dearing was appointed Acting Chief. For the first time in the long history of the TFD, an outsider was selected as Chief of the TFD.



Dean Holland was born in 1944 in Denton, Texas. He earned a Bachelor’s degree in business administration at Columbia College and at age 26 became Chief of the North Richland Hills, Texas fire department, the youngest chief in the nation. From 1973-1976 Holland was Chief of the Columbia, Missouri fire department, from which he resigned to take the Tucson job. When he came to Tucson at age 32, starting as Chief in November 1976, he was the youngest metropolitan Chief.

Chief Holland immediately started to expand the parametric service both by adding life support equipment to existing vehicles and by adding ambulances to the service. He also put emphasis on fire prevention versus firefighting, increasing communication of fire prevention measures to the public, and increasing business inspections and tightening city enforcement codes.

There were no fire station relocations or new stations built during Holland’s term as Chief. Apparatus emphasis was on new ambulances, aerial ladders, and toward the end of his term, pumpers. He was the Chief who replaced the Firebird Aerial Platform in 1977 when maintenance costs became too high. Recognizing Tucson’s rapid expansion to the southeast, he added a fourth fire district with headquarters at Station 10 near South Park Avenue and East Ajo Way.

Holland tried to run the TFD as a business, using management by objective, a quarterly reporting system, and annual reports to strengthen administrative command.

Chief Holland presided over the TFD’s 100<sup>th</sup> birthday party, encouraging, along with Tucson Mayor Murphy, participation in the TFD’s celebratory “Centennial Week.”

The four highest damage fires during Holland’s term as Chief were the Environmental Air Products fire on South Plumer in 1977 (\$600,000 damage), the Tucson Pipe and Supply fire on South Tyndall Avenue in 1979 (\$545,000 damage), the Wickes Midway Lumber fire on East Speedway Boulevard in 1979 (\$750,000 damage), and the Sunset Lumber Distributors fire on South Cherry Avenue in 1980 (\$1M damage.) In September 1980 Tucson was recognized for its “increased level of fire security” by the

Insurance Service Office, resulting in a “decrease in the cost of fire insurance for business and commercial enterprises.”

Not always seeing eye-to-eye with the City Council, Holland had applied for several fire-chief positions in the Midwest over his term in Tucson. Effective March 12, 1982, he resigned after five years and five months, to “take an executive position with a Texas Oil Company.”

Before leaving Tucson, Chief Holland had earned a private pilot’s license and a Master of Science degree in Executive Fire Leadership from Grand Canyon University.

After leaving Tucson, Dean Holland spent 25 years in the private sector in executive level positions in manufacturing and local government consulting, before taking another fire-chief job in Saginaw, Michigan in 2007, where he plans to retire in September 2016.

**23 Richard Moreno (4/1982-9/1992)** - Richard Moreno was born in Tucson on June 30, 1938, “an American of Mexican descent,” went to Safford Elementary School and Junior High School, and graduated from Tucson High School. He then joined the U.S. Marine Corps, got out at age 21, and joined the TFD in December 1959 as a firefighter, while continuing his education at the University of Arizona, where he earned a degree in Education.



Moreno spent 22 years with the TFD before being selected as its 23<sup>rd</sup> Chief. He was promoted to Engineer in 1969, to Captain in 1972, to Training Captain in 1973, to Battalion Chief in 1976, to Assistant Chief in 1977, and Deputy Chief in 1978. As Training Captain he managed operations at the TFD Training Center. With his educational background and his training with the TFD, he taught technical courses at fire departments across the U.S. As Deputy Chief, Moreno was in charge of Fire Prevention and Resources, which included the Training, Supply, Maintenance, and Technical Service Divisions.

After Dean Holland resigned as Chief in March 1982, Tucson City Manager Joel Valdez appointed Richard Moreno as Chief of the TFD in April 1982.

During his term of over 10 years, Chief Moreno oversaw the relocation of Station 5 further east along Grant Road, the relocation of Station 7 to East Pima Street, the building of Station 17 on South Houghton Road, and the commissioning of Station 18 on West Irvington Road - these moves in reaction to Tucson’s rapid growth to the southeast. He maintained the steady acquisition of new apparatus with emphasis on ambulances, for the expanding paramedic service, and replacement pumpers. Also, the TFD’s first Heavy Rescue and Haz Mat vehicles were put into service during Moreno’s term as Chief.

Chief Holland hired the first female firefighter in 1984.

While Moreno was Chief, the TFD fought four fires where the estimated damage was \$1M or more: the Naughton Plumbing and Home Improvement fire on South 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue in 1983 (\$1M damage), the Stray Cat Bar fire on East University Boulevard in 1983 (\$1.5M damage), the Miles Label Company fire on West

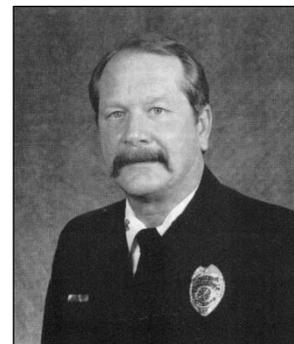
Flores Street in 1985 (\$1M damage), and the Oliver's Cleaner fire on East 7th Street in 1989 (\$3M damage).

In 1983 Chief Moreno supported the effort to restore one of the TFD's oldest and most famous fire engines, the horse-drawn Nott Steamer that served Tucson from 1909-1917.<sup>9</sup> In 1988 the completely restored apparatus was presented to the citizens of Tucson and is displayed today at Central Station.

In 1992 Moreno experienced a combination of political problems and low TFD morale that ended his career with the fire department. On July 15, 1992 Tucson's City Council asked Moreno to resign because he had supposedly failed to notify the proper safety agencies about fuel leaks in underground storage tanks in 1989. Even The League of United Latin American Citizens called for Moreno to resign because of this fuel leak / contamination issue endangering public safety. At the same time, the firefighters union called for Moreno's ouster with no confidence votes with complaints that "replacement equipment had been put on hold, and growth in the department's workforce had not kept up with the city's population, its area, or the number of emergency calls." The union also accused Moreno of "developing a labor-management environment that could be called adversarial at best."

Adamant about his innocence in the contamination issue, Moreno vowed to fight the charges, but on August 4<sup>th</sup> he told the City Council that he would resign "so the community can concentrate on correcting the problem instead of focusing on him, and because the controversy is tearing his department apart." So after 32 years with the TFD, Richard Moreno resigned as Chief, effective September 1992.

**24 Frederick Shipman (2/1993-1/2001)** - Fred Shipman was born on May 19, 1944 in Ventura, California. He was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1966 at age 21 while attending college in Boise, Idaho. He spent 19 months with the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade in Viet Nam, earning two Purple Hearts, two Bronze Stars, a Silver Star, and a Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry. After he returned to the U.S., he visited his parents in Tucson, decided to stay, and in July 1970 he joined the TFD as a firefighter, beginning a 30-year career with the Department. After only six months on the job, he was one of the firefighters who fought the disastrous Pioneer Hotel fire in December 1970, and would later be quoted, "Who I am and what I stand for as fire chief was put into me that night."



Shipman steadily worked himself up on the TFD responsibility ladder. He was promoted to Engineer in 1974, to Captain in 1979, Battalion Chief in 1983, and Assistant Chief in 1987. His experience included managing the Fire Prevention Division, and the Operations Division, which included the Fire Suppression and Hazardous-Material team.

Over his years with the TFD, Shipman attended Pima Community College, studying fire science, and graduated from the National Fire Academy.

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<sup>9</sup> You can read all about the Nott Steamer, including its restoration, in a previous "Reflections" article, "Tucson's Nott Steamer."

When Chief Moreno resigned in September 1992, Fred Shipman was assigned as Deputy Chief while the process to choose a new Chief proceeded. Shipman, the only local applicant, was selected as Chief in February 1993, after a nationwide search that attracted 86 others.

Chief Shipman began his term with three initiatives: 1) for the TFD to be more community oriented, 2) a focus on environmental issues, and 3) to recruit more women and minorities. A local newspaper reported that under “Shipman’s direction, a quiet foment of discontent among the Department rank and file that was before evident has calmed considerably.”

During Shipman’s almost nine years as Chief, he oversaw the remodeling of fire Stations 8, 9, and 11; the relocation and building of new quarters for Stations 4, 6, and 18; and the commissioning and building of Station 19. Apparatus continued to be replaced on a regular basis, particularly ambulances, pumpers, and aerial ladders. During Shipman’s term as Chief the TFD also put into service six ladder tenders, a Heavy Rescue truck, and a Hazardous Materials Waste vehicle.

While Shipman was Chief, the TFD fought five major fires where the estimated damage equaled or exceeded \$1M: the UA Women’s Gym on East University Boulevard in 1993 (\$1.9M damage), Amphitheater High School on West Yavapai Road in 1995 (\$1M damage), Old Tucson on South Kinney Road in 1995 (\$10M damage), First Southern Baptist Church on East Speedway in 1996 (\$2M damage), and the Solarium Restaurant on East Tanque Verde in 1999 (\$1.4M damage).

Fred Shipman retired in January 2001, with the Tucson Daily Citizen reporting, “Shipman built the TFD into what one member of the City Council calls a ‘national model for service, prevention, and educational efforts’ ... As he steps down from a job that drew him little public attention, we take notice and thank him.”

Chief Shipman has maintained his primary residence in Tucson since retirement. He enjoys hunting, traveling and spending time with his family and grandchildren.

**Major Incidents.** From 1970 through 2000, the TFD fought scores of fires and responded to numerous emergency incidents<sup>10</sup> in the Tucson metropolitan area. They are too numerous to discuss in detail in this paper, but here are some highlights:

Following the disastrous Pioneer Hotel fire on December 20, 1970,<sup>11</sup> there were five other major Tucson fires in the 1970s where the estimated damage exceeded half a million dollars:

- a. June 25, 1973 - \$540,000, Pima County Administration Building at 131 West Congress Street
- b. February 7, 1976 - \$600,000, Fry’s Market at 7864 East Escalante Road
- c. March 8, 1977 - \$600,000, Environmental Air Products at 1100 South Plumer Avenue
- d. April 27, 1979 - \$545,000, Tucson Pipe and Supply at 196 South Tyndall Avenue
- e. May 11, 1979 - \$750,000, Wickes Midway Lumber at 4001 East Speedway Boulevard

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<sup>10</sup> All of these major fires and incidents are described on this website under “Major Incidents.”

<sup>11</sup> See the previous “Reflections” article, “The Pioneer Hotel: Tucson’s Most Tragic Fire.”

There were at least three other “major incidents” of note in the 1970s:

- a. October 23, 1971 - Almost 38 years after suffering the fire that enabled the capture of desperado John Dillinger and his gang,<sup>12</sup> the Hotel Congress experienced a second fire that caused \$60,000 damage to hotel’s bar.
- b. June 23, 1974 - A rare tornado touched down southwest of Tucson, mangling a trailer park and killing one person. The TFD responded with rescue and parametric units.



*Firemen and rescue workers strap a tornado victim to a stretcher after they freed him from beneath the wreckage of a mobile home. Nineteen homes were destroyed and approximately 50 other homes were damaged in the tornado. (Courtesy of the Arizona Daily Star)*

- c. October 26, 1978 - An Air Force A7D Corsair jet fighter on landing approach to Davis-Monthan AFB crashed into the intersection of East 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Highland Avenue, barely missing the UA and a junior high school, killing two people on the ground. The TFD responded with fire engines and paramedic units.

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<sup>12</sup> See the previous “Reflections” article, “The Hotel Congress Fire and the Capture of John Dillinger.”



*A large piece of the jet that crashed at East 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Highland Avenue can be seen in this photo, surrounded by firemen, rescue workers, and bystanders. (Courtesy of the Arizona Daily Star)*

The 1980s and 1990s saw the TFD fight six fires with damage estimates around \$1M:

- a. September 15, 1980 - Sunset Lumber Distributors at 970 South Cherry Street
- b. May 14, 1983 - Naughton Plumbing & Home Improvements Mart at 4226 South 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue
- c. February 24, 1985 - Miles Label Company at 102 West Flores Street
- d. August 21, 1993 - UA Women's Gym at 1713 East University Boulevard
- e. September 12, 1994 - Amphitheater High School at 125 West Yavapai Road
- f. February 5, 1996 - First Southern Baptist Church at 445 East Speedway Boulevard

There were also four Tucson fires in the 1980s and 1990s where the estimated damage well exceeded a million dollars:

- a. July 3, 1983 - \$1.5M, Stray Cat Bar at 745 East University Boulevard: Twenty two TFD units responded. It took 64 firefighters 90 minutes to extinguish this four-alarm arson fire. The 60-year-old former church, which had been converted into a popular nightclub, was lost. The building was razed in 1987.



*The Stray Cat Bar was popular with college students. The structure formerly housed Dooley's Bar and was originally built as the Metropolitan Baptist Church. (Courtesy of Fred Bair, Sr.)*

- b. August 12, 1989 - \$3M, Oliver's Cleaners at 300 East 7<sup>th</sup> Street: This five-alarm incident was the largest fire Tucson firefighters had seen in five years. Seventeen units responded with 56 firefighters. It took two hours control the fire.



*Oliver's Cleaners was in flames when firefighters arrived. The roof caved in shortly thereafter. (Courtesy of Fred Bair, Sr.)*

- c. April 25, 1995 - \$10M, Old Tucson Studios at 210 South Kinney Road: An arson fire spread quickly through dry wooden buildings, burning more than 40 percent of the 360-acre park. Under a mutual-aid agreement, every emergency agency in Pima County responded. Firefighters were hindered by a lack of water on site.



*Firefighters watched helplessly as flames devoured much of Old Tucson Studios. (Courtesy of Fred Bair, Sr.)*

- d. May 1, 1999 - \$1.4M, Solarium Restaurant at 6444 East Tanque Verde Road: Forty firefighters fought this arson fire that sent flames - visible for miles around - shooting more than 100 feet into the air. The three-story split-level building - of wood, glass, metal, and cement - burned to the ground, pancaking in on itself.



*TFD fire investigators - with help from the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms - look through the ruins of the Solarium Restaurant. (Courtesy of the TFD)*

Finally, here are an additional two “major incidents” of note in the 1980s and 1990s:

- a. July 22, 1982 - Several electric transformers exploded outside the Tucson Newspapers building at 4850 South Park Avenue, killing the *Arizona Daily Star's* business manager and injuring six others. The TFD responded with pumpers and paramedic trucks.



*After the explosion at the Arizona Daily Star's production plant, firefighters and paramedics converged on the parking lot to offer assistance. (Courtesy of the Arizona Daily Star)*

- b. August 22, 1989 - A Southern Pacific railroad tank car full of flammable, toxic chemicals ripped open as it derailed at 3476 East Aviation Parkway, forcing the evacuation of hundreds of people. There were no injuries. The TFD Hazardous Materials Unit cleaned up the toxic spill.



*TFD personnel examine the damage to railway cars after the accident that spilled toxic chemicals. (Courtesy of the Arizona Daily Star)*

**Chemicals  
fuel fire at  
label firm**

## **Inferno claims Old Tucson**

**Blaze causes \$1 million damage**

**Inferno claims Old Tucson**

**Blast rips news plant**

**Fire damages  
at Amphi put  
at \$1 million**

**Fire damages women's gym**

**Fire ruins  
main plant  
of Oliver's**

**Arson blamed again  
in lumberyard blaze**

**Fire  
hurts 3  
slightly**

**Two tanker cars derail, leak  
naphtha, forcing evacuation**

**Solarium owner IDs fire suspect**

**Blaze damage  
\$600,000**

**Furious fire at Stray Cat bar**

**\$750,000 blaze at lumberyard  
injures 5 firemen, 2 employees**

**CONGRESS HOTEL FIRE  
SENDS 9 TO HOSPITALS**

**Midtown church's  
auditorium gutted  
in 3-alarm fire**

**AIR FORCE JET CRASHES;  
BARELY MISSES SCHOOLS**

**\$545,000 fire destroys  
warehouse**

**County building fire  
damage is \$540,000**

**TOLL OF TORNADO IS HEAVY**

*Tucson's newspapers reported on these major incidents from 1970-2000. (Courtesy of the Arizona Daily Star and Tucson Citizen)*

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## Greater Tucson Fire Foundation

### Thank you for taking an interest in Tucson Fire Department history —

This is one of many sections that contain information, documents, letters, newspaper articles, pictures, etc. They have been collected and arranged in chronological order or by a subject. These items were collected, organized and entered into a computerized database by Dave Ridings Retired Assistant Chief Tucson Fire Department, Al Ring friend of the department, Greater Tucson Fire Foundation and with the help of many friends and fellow firefighters.

All graphics have been improved to make the resolution as good as possible, but the reader should remember that many came from copies of old newspaper articles. This also applies to other items such as documents, letters, etc.

Credit to the source of the documents, photos, etc. is provided whenever it was available. We realize that many items are not identified and regret that we weren't able to provide this information. As far as the newspaper articles that are not identified, 99% of them would have to be from one of three possible sources. The *Arizona Daily Star*, The *Tucson Citizen* and the *Tucson Daily Citizen*, for which we want to give a special thanks.

Please use this information as a reference tool only. If the reader uses any of the information for any purpose other than a reference tool, they should get permission from the source.

Should the reader have additional information on the above subject we would appreciate you sharing it with us. Please see the names and contact information on the 1st. TFD Archives page right below this paragraph.

