



Joe Rich Fire History



Prior to our fire department, Joe Rich residents had little hope of putting out a fire once it was established. In 1929, Charles Halby and Agnes Philpott's home burned down. Smith's home and many others were lost to fire. The Lamberts, Hemmings, and Carlsons all lost their Joe Rich homes in fires. A trailer at High Lonesome Ranch burned. In 1965, Pat Russell saw smoke rising from Findlay's house in mid-winter. She, Frank and the Weddells rushed over to find that 'hippies' living in the house had left a fire on to heat their sauna and it had gotten away while they were out. The Russells and the Weddells managed to get it out with multiple buckets of snow. Even after the advent of the fire department, Marcia Aitkens' cottage was badly damaged by fire in 2002, after she had moved out to a long term care facility.

Picture of the original 1978 community hall and fire department, station 51



In 1951 and 1952, dances were held at the school house to raise money and the women collected clothing for the Lamberts, the Hemmings and the Carlsons when they were burned out.

In the mid 1970s, Duff Booth was Joe Rich's Regional Director. He found out that if Joe Rich had a volunteer fire department, fire insurance would be much cheaper for residents. Armed with this information, he began talking up the need for a department. His suggestion coincided with the planning of the Joe Rich Community Centre and so it was decided to combine the two functions in the same building; a community centre and a fire hall. The plans were redrawn, the financing was increased a little, and a referendum was held under the direction of the Regional District.

Although the community centre and fire hall would raise the tax on individual homes about \$99, the drop in the cost of fire insurance for individual homes would almost pay for the increased tax. The construction of the fire hall also made it easier to get money to build the dual function building. The referendum passed, and the Community Centre & Fire Hall was completed in 1979.

Elections were held for a fire chief and Larry Bjur, a Kelowna fireman who lived in Joe Rich was elected.

However, though he gave invaluable advice to the new department, he never acted as chief, because his union objected. Ray Wittur became the first chief and continued with the job until 1980. Frank Russell took over from him that year, and was followed by Bruce Williams, Ray Wittur again, Bob Hamm, Al Reid, Brian Morris and by our present chief, Curtis Nyuli. Being chief has always been a time consuming and demanding job. The chief is held responsible for whatever goes wrong and there is a lot to go wrong. Although chiefs are paid, the pay doesn't compensate them for the time consumed and the worry caused by the job.



Ray Wittur, JRFD's first Fire Chief, 1978 - 1980

In the early days, the community held a ball tournament to raise money for the fire department.

At first, fire department volunteers were not paid at all. In spite of this, the department started with 15 members. There are now 25 members of the fire department and 2 auxiliary members. Because many of the men on the department worked outside Joe Rich, some of the most reliable members were women who were more often home; they play a special role in emergencies involving women and children and continue to be a valuable part of the fire protection services.



JRFD Fire Chief's of the 80's, Frank Russel, Bruce Williams and Bob Hamm

New recruits go through a period of showing up to fire practices and watching to learn procedure and to be assessed by the officers. If they like the work and seem suitable, they are then incorporated into the department. After 1985, our fire fighters were paid for one hour a week spent at fire practice on Monday evenings, and for two hours on a 'call out'. Chiefs and Assistant Fire Chiefs were paid at a higher rate than the rest of the crew. Many courses are provided and required for fire department members. These are often held outside Joe Rich so members are now paid to cover their travel costs and the registration for the course.



JRFD Fire Chief's of the 1990's, Allan Reid and Brian Morris. Morris retired in 2003

Besides our current Fire Chief Curtis Nyuli there is: Assistant Chief of Administration Don Kort, Assistant Chief of Operations Greg Robson, and four (3) Lieutenants: Richard Romolock, John Robbins, and Andrew Dumontet.

The administration of our fire department falls under the appointed fire chief and Regional District staff. A committee made up of fire department officers and regional district managers makes up a yearly budget for the department. This is submitted to the Regional District board as part of the community operating budget. It amounts to about \$280,000 a year for the fire department and an additional \$30,000 for the community hall.

Most of the fire department costs are for fixed expenses such as lease and maintenance payments for equipment and wages. A part of it is not assigned to fixed costs, but is used for emergency costs such as last summer's fire as well as a fund to be laid aside for the purchase of new trucks and equipment in the future. Bills are submitted to the Regional District which prepares a statement of expenses each month. Calls to some emergencies are paid for by PEP, the Provincial Emergency Program.

Initially, fire department members were called to fires by six 'Fire Phones'. Those who had these were responsible for contacting a short list of other department members. Since 1984, each member of the department has carried a pager and currently respond to 911 calls 247/365 as paged. Chief officers are affixed to an additional paging network.

The sophistication of our Fire Department has increased greatly since the department began. The training is much more extensive. Members have to learn a long list of procedures and have to take several training courses in first aid, air brakes, forest fire mitigation, working inside burning buildings etc. Equipment has become more complex and efficient. Even the equipment for a new member now costs about \$3,000 and \$5,000 for an officer. When the department began only a fire hat, rubber boots and a fire jacket were required.

By 1998, it was decided that a new fire station would be needed for the west part of Joe Rich, the Goudie Road Area. Their part of the community was enlarging rapidly. It was in a fire protection no-man's land, since much of it was over 5 miles from the Joe Rich fire station. The new station is now located at the corner of Goudie and Sun Valley Roads and has 2 trucks housed there. Our original station is Station 51 and the Goudie Road Station is Station 52. The fire department members are the same persons for both locations. Chiefs had been elected until the Goudie Road Station was built. The Regional District decided then that they needed more control since they

were legally liable for any problems and therefore they began appointing the chiefs. The fire department now services over 500 homes.



View of the Joe Rich valley looking to the west. Kelowna in the background

The department started with a new light green '78 GMC Fire Truck with a 500 gallon tank. If they arrived at the fire before it had taken hold of the building, they could put it out successfully. But if they arrived when it was burning hard, they might succeed in knocking it down only to have it completely get away on them when they ran out of water and had to go for more. At some fire, there was a water source nearby such as a creek, but at others they had to drive several kilometres for water. This pointed up the need for a tanker truck. An old one was found and reconditioned by Ron Philpott.

Since then the trucks have gradually improved. In 1990, a 3000 gallon Crash Truck which had been used by the Vancouver Airport was obtained. Bob Hamm, the fire chief and his department decided to take on the major task of rebuilding it to make it suitable for Joe Rich's needs. Ron Philpott had died, but his large and well-equipped home mechanical shop was still used. The truck was completely stripped down and rebuilt by Ron Blaney and the rest of the crew undoubtedly with Ron's spirit guiding them along. The result was spectacular and a great surprise to the Regional District staff and to those who hadn't believed the job was feasible.

The fire department now has five trucks serving the two stations; a '99 Western Star 1000 gallon engine, a 1500 gallon tender, a '1994 Volvo engine, a 2003-550 4x4 Ford 250 gallon multipurpose emergency truck fitted with a foam unit and a 2006 F-350 Brush truck. The department has three truck bays in Station 51 in east Joe Rich, and four truck bays in Station 52 on Goudie Road. Our department has an agreement with the Kelowna Fire Department to send up a tender truck to a major Joe Rich fire if our officers request it. We are charged for this service but the Kelowna truck is able to get here in 20 minutes.



View of the Joe Rich valley looking east, to the Big White Ski area and Beaverdell

New responsibilities have also been added for the department. Initially, it was responsible only for structure fires. Now their responsibilities encompass all emergency services from the top of Black Mountain hill to Beaverdell and part way up the road to Big White as well. In the valley, a 911 call for medical help, rescue, forest or car fires, vehicular accidents or natural disasters brings the fire department first.

This past summer, the department was on high alert when the forest fire was burning to the south, but fortunately the fire never got closer than 10 kilometres from Joe Rich. Over the past four years, calls have averaged about 80 per year. Of these, 40% are motor vehicle accidents, about 15 % medical calls and the rest are a variety of emergencies including car fires, bush fires, and house fires.

Growth and new responsibilities have required upgrading and an addition of a second fire hall, additional manpower and equipment. The past and current community / fire department members have put in many unpaid hours to raise money and update the facilities over the years. We are grateful for these wonderful unselfish contributions.

First JRFD Pumper Truck of 1978 (retired in 1998)



1965 Vancouver Airport crash truck, used as a JRFD water Tender. (retired in 2003)



More Joe Rich history can be found at: <http://www.joerichnews.com/archives/familiespeople.htm>