

Wildwood Living From an Old Timer

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By Delbert Bills

Fire Protection and Fire House

One of our major concerns in the early development and management of our sub-division was fire protection and emergency response. Even by 1988, there were only a handful of buildings at Wildwood and one house between Wildwood and San Isabel to the South. We had no means of communicating other than driving to Hartsel to report a fire. There were no radio links, land line telephones, cell phones, call boxes nor radio telephones. Also our insurance premiums were high. We agreed to field one or more volunteers from Wildwood to represent us on the Hartsel Volunteer Fire Department as it was called in those days. Toby Kettleson, Ken Neu, Dave Simpson and Dick Hubbard and our caretaker were among the first of the volunteers. Dick was our intermediary for the Wildwood (BOD) Board of Directors. By 1990 he was a captain in the Hartsel Fire Department. Dick was also our president and I was vice president. Early on there were numerous, piece meal and therefore almost insignificant attempts, to get an improved fire rating and even coordination with the (HFPD) Hartsel Fire Protection District. We did not have an official relationship or point-of-contact at that time. Several of us had been advocating for a fire house at Wildwood including the fire chief, Jay Hutchinson, of the (HFPD). I believe we all wanted the same thing but were all unable to get our acts together. The best arrangement that we could work out in those days was permission for Dick to take a small pick-up tanker home to Wildwood on weekends. Although we had few structures in place in Wildwood, we had quite a few campers and the Fourth of July weekends were (and still are) a big worry.

The HFPD was under the “thumb” of the Fairplay fire chief who was also the president of their Board of Directors. It is documented, in their minutes and ours, as well as direct input from Captain Hubbard that Hartsel was struggling to survive and had internal problems between operations and their BOD. South Park Ranches to our south had gone bankrupt which removed a large chunk (38%) of their taxing base according to my notes. We were inexperienced and seasonal residents. Consequently, we were apprehensive on contracting with a somewhat questionable entity and the HFPD obviously was apprehensive about Wildwood even if money had been available to do what we all were advocating for.

I was appointed to head up an effort to get things pulled together. Early in 1990, I contacted Jay Hutchinson, HFPD fire chief and we agreed to study our issues and get back together. On June 16, 1990, we called a joint WW/HFPD Board meeting, principally, myself, Toby Kettleson, Ken Neu, and Bob Bennett with Jay Hutchinson and some HFPD Board

members. I still have very comprehensive HFPD minutes from their taped transcript as well as my own notes of that first historic meeting. Jay outlined a major proposal to have Wildwood build a fire station branch (to be named Fire Station #2) that would house one pumper truck at first and ultimately two. He proposed a 24'x24' one bay (later a two bay 24'x30') building at an estimated cost of \$10,000 (later over \$20,000). He wanted access to the east finger of the pond (the one closest to the now built firehouse) and a ramp to get pumper access to our water or via a "dry hydrant." He stated that, "My 5 year plan says we are going to have a truck out here. I don't like leaving a truck out here without it being housed." He covered many items like fire house location, electrical supply; propane supply; heat; getting a variance due to being more than 50' from the county (Yellowstone) road; call box; desire to get the HFPD fire rating changed from a 10 to a classification of 9; building and property insurance and more. He also went into the need to work toward a rescue and emergency capability as the "first response team" for a second truck in the future. These were words that we all wanted to hear.

The dry hydrant, insurance, building plans, bidding, electrical, radio communications and maintenance, to name a few things, were to be provided for and paid for by HFPD per his proposal. We would ensure an adequate supply of water; provide the land; build the building; improve our Wildwood road access to the fire house; put in new cattle guards; etcetera. Some of these commitments were to become very controversial and was argued over for over a year, as the fire chief was not backed up by his Board of Directors. Several joint meetings of both Boards were called. Those meetings often ended up with an insufficient number of board members to make a quorum and decisions were hard to come by.

Many of our issues were centered on financing, liability, future maintenance of the building if built, maintenance of the HFPD equipment, dry fire hydrant cost responsibility, etcetera. (This dry fire hydrant was finally installed this summer, 2008). The commitment made at the joint meeting on 9-17-90 (from taped minutes) was, "If the building is built here and the truck is here, from then on, all maintenance on the building and equipment and dry hydrant comes under the fire department's responsibility." Other issues were: regarding volunteer firemen, liability, insurance coverage, training, benefits, license to drive trucks, loan, bids, radio contact, building specs, "Mutual Aid", ISO protection rating reduction and others. Each of the above items would turn out to require many hours of involvement, discussions and negotiations.

For example, during our early work on this project, we became aware of a difference between some of our property owners mill levy for fire protection. At that time the (J-C FPD) Jefferson-Como FPD mill levy was nearly double the HFPD mill levy due to a new fire station that was being planned for about four miles south of Como on Elkhorn road. I arranged for and

met with the J-CFPD BOD (twice) and discovered that about one-fourth of the northern part of Wildwood filing 1, filing 2, filing 4 and all of filing 3 was under the Jefferson-Como FPD. This represents roughly 25% of the Wildwood tax base. This resulted in additional coordination meetings between the two fire protection districts and us. At that meeting, I obtained a copy of a letter from ISO Commercial Risk Services, Inc. that was directed to the J-C FPD President dated 12-15-89. It covered the positive impact of meeting criteria for reducing the fire protection rating from a 10 to 9. Quote, "The changes from class 10 to Class 9 will reduce property insurance premium calculations.....from 7% to about 12% for Homeowner-type policies." One of the major requirements to lower the rating is that 2 fire trucks are required with a large pumping capacity of about 250 gallons of water for a sustained 4 minutes. A class 9 rating would cover a 5 road mile radius from the fire station. Sustained pumping capability to lower the rating from 9-7 is 350 gallons per minute. This is still in the future as of this date.

Many issues remained but the Wildwood general membership voted to move ahead at the September annual business meeting in 1990. The December Board established financial conditions and limitations, material arrangements, and a charge to the president to line up a contractor. The preliminary cost estimate was about \$20,000. At annual dues then of \$40/year, that represented 110% of our annual budget. We were trying to work it out so that a special assessment would not be necessary. The Wildwood BOD moved to study and draw up a building contract at the February 25, 1991 meeting. The Board made a special trip to Wildwood to select the fire house site in March.

Four bids were let. Two abstained, one was \$30,750 and the (NLC) Neil Land Construction bid of \$18,000 was accepted and contracted for. Actual costs were over \$20,000.

I thought it strange that our President, Dick Hubbard, pulled me aside at our June 22 picnic during which we covered the status of many of the issues at hand. He asked me to draw up the preliminary long term agreement for our attorney to finalize. Within a week Dick resigned for personal reasons. As Vice president, I was suddenly president and as a newly constituted Board, we were responsible for picking up the pieces and moving forward. With the help of the good directors previously mentioned, we pressed forward.

(To be continued in the December article #3.)

Del Bills is a 28 year Wildwood resident; past Board president; liaison with the state water engineer and district water commissioner; was instrumental in extending power through filings one and two; electrical engineer; long time Boy Scout leader; farming/ranching boyhood heritage with an intense interest in nature. You can contact him at www.delbertbills127@msn.com.