Our History
Capitol Heights Volunteer Fire Department
As early as 1905, the citizens of Capitol Heights began thinking of ways to solve the problem of adequate fire protection in the Town of Capitol Heights. The number of fires in the town continued to rise, as did insurance premiums. In some instances, the insurance companies even refused to cover losses due to fire.

The first form of fire protection was a bucket brigade, which was started when Mr. Harry Holmes, then Mayor of Capitol Heights and Mr. Bert Adams went to Rider’s Pool Room recruiting interested volunteers. The bucket brigade operated from a small shed located on the corner of 61st Avenue (now Capitol Heights Boulevard) and Central Avenue. The land was donated by Mr. O.B. Zantzinger and the equipment consisted of a ladder and six buckets.

In 1908, the citizens purchased a hand drawn, chemical wagon. This unit was later replaced by a horse drawn steamer, which was purchased from the District of Columbia Fire Department in 1911. An interesting note about this apparatus is that it was still in active service by the DCFD up until the time it was delivered to Capitol Heights. In fact, when the delegation from Capitol Heights arrived at the DC fire station to take it home, they were directed to go downtown where the unit was in use at a fire.

The first motorized fire truck came in 1912 with the purchase of a model “T” Ford which was outfitted with the chemical tanks from the hand drawn wagon. It is believed that this unit was the first motorized fire truck in Prince George’s County.

The Volunteer Fire Company #1 of Capitol Heights, Maryland was more formally organized in 1913. The department was later incorporated in 1914 and is now known as the Capitol Heights Volunteer Fire Department.

On December 1, 1920 the Capitol Heights Volunteer Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary was organized. Mrs. Dora Quill, after having an argument with her husband about him “spending too much time at the firehouse.” Mr. Quill’s response to his wife was “why don’t you start a Fire Department of your own.” After such a prompting Mrs. Quill mobilized the women of the Capitol Heights community to form what is now the Capitol Heights Volunteer Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary. The Capitol Heights Volunteer Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary has the distinction of being the first organized fire department ladies auxiliary in the United States and the world. Mrs. Irene Connor served as the auxiliary’s first president.

When organized, the Ladies Auxiliary to the Capitol Heights Volunteer Fire Department had 12 charter members: Mrs. Dora Quill, Organizer; Mrs. Irene A. Conner, President; Mrs. Marie Davis, Vice President; Mrs. Clara Bryan, Treasurer; Miss Freida Fankhouser, Secretary; Mrs. Minnie Nuthall; Mrs. Alice Maguire; Mrs. Evelyn Jacobs; Mrs. Elenore Noel; Mrs. Lulu Miller; and Mrs. Annie Pierce.

The organization served to support the fire department and to raise funds. Becoming just as active as the department, they arranged their own meeting nights and began holding regular fund raising events to support the department. Some of the activities included: lunches, bake sales, card parties, dinners, and assisting at the carnivals and meetings.

The Capitol Heights Volunteer Fire Department became one of the first members of the Prince George’s County Volunteer Firemen’s Association (now the Prince George’s County Fire & Rescue Association) in 1927. That same year, Capitol Heights hosted the County Convention.

In 1930, a new firehouse was built on 61st Avenue because of the
expanding fleet of fire apparatus. This building is now the Capitol Heights Town Hall. In 1934, the Ladies Auxiliary purchased a new siren to be located on top of the firehouse to alert members when a fire alarm was received. The siren replaced the old bell system, which had proven to be inadequate, as more houses were being built further from the center of town, making it difficult for firefighters to hear the bell.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the United States entered World War II. This war depleted the department’s membership and the town’s fire fighting forces. Forty members were called upon to serve their country. To ensure that adequate fire protection could be maintained, the department began accepting junior members. In addition, members of the ladies auxiliary were trained to fight fires. After the war the ladies welcomed their men home with a party in June of 1946. Three members did not return home from World War II, including Michael Korn, Hersal Cralle and Julius Vajda. A plaque in memory of these brave men is installed on the front of the current fire station.

The war caused a shortage of staffing throughout Prince George’s County. However, the fire departments throughout the county were facing a new problem, the need for improving the methods of receiving alarms and dispatching stations to emergencies. To solve this problem two Fire Control Boards were established in 1942.

Fire Control Board #1 was located in Hyattsville and Fire Control Board #2 was located at the Capitol Heights fire station. Fire Control Board #2 remained in operation at the Capitol Heights fire station until 1957; it was then relocated to the Fire Marshal’s office at the County Police Station in Seat Pleasant.

In 1946, Mrs. Magdalene Schmidt was elected president of the County Association’s Ladies Auxiliary. Mrs. Schmidt also held the office of Chaplain for the County Auxiliary from 1951 through 1969, when she was named Chaplain Emeritus. Mrs. Schmidt helped organize eight other auxiliaries in Prince George’s County and the Maryland State Ladies Auxiliary. She also served as president of the Maryland State Firemen’s Association Ladies Auxiliary in 1949.

The fire control boards were the early stages of Fire and Rescue Communications, which is now part of Public Safety Communications. Much of the success of Fire Control Board #2 was the dedication of those who worked there and sought to continue to improve it. Chief Frank Briguglio was instrumental in making these improvements, chairing the Fire Control Board Committee of the County Association for years. Oscar Poore, a lifetime member, was one of the first to be hired as a dispatcher and rose through the ranks to become the Chief Dispatcher for the County Fire Department before retiring in 1970. Another life member, Robert “Gene” McClelland, Sr. also worked as a dispatcher and retired in 1976 with more than 25 years of service.
Once again the organization was outgrowing its facilities. The ladies promptly went to work saving and investing in stocks to fund the building of an even greater facility. On September 12, 1948 Mrs. Magdalene Schmidt presented Chief Frank Briguglio with five thousand dollars in Building Association Stock to put toward the building of the new firehouse. Members and town’s people worked hard so that the new 1948 American LaFrance pumper could be housed inside before winter weather set in. This addition allowed the existing building to be renovated to include a hall for fund raising and a kitchen for the Ladies Auxiliary. In 1951, another American LaFrance pumper was delivered.

The first ambulance operated by the department was placed in service in September 1954. The unit was a used 1949 Cadillac ambulance. Its first call was in Hillside on September 4, 1954.
The Capitol Heights Fire Department has been on many major fires throughout its history. However, the most devastating fire in Capitol Heights was a fire at the Stembler and Ford Lumber Company in October 1959. Units were on the scene of this 8 alarm fire for several days, with the lumberyard being a total loss.

The annual 4th of July carnival and fireworks became a tradition in Capitol Heights in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Both the department and the ladies auxiliary participated. These events were major fund raising activities that helped the department build its present fire station on Central Avenue (1964).

In 1965 the ladies auxiliary opened their kitchen to the public. They began selling pizzas and submarine sandwiches each week. Thirty-nine years later that tradition continues every Friday evening.

Two new pumpers and an ambulance were purchased in the 1960's. They include a 1967 Ford Ward LaFrance pumper, a 1968 Ward LaFrance pumper and a 1967 GMC ambulance.

The ladies auxiliary marked their 50th Anniversary with a party in 1970. During this decade, they also participated in many county functions. The ladies won numerous perfect attendance awards to county meetings and events during this era. In addition, this group of ladies always stood out in a crowd; from the matching outfits to the wacky costumes they wore in Ocean City Conventions and company parties they always were dressed to impress.

In 1975, after the retirement of Lawrence Woltz, County Fire Chief, Frank Briguglio, a life member and past Chief of this department, was named Fire Chief for Prince George's County. Chief Briguglio served as County Fire Chief until his untimely death in 1978. Chief Briguglio was inducted into the County Association's Hall of Fame in 1981. Recently, Briguglio earned his place on the Founder's Circle Memorial in October 2000.

In 1976, construction began on a new underground subway station at East Capital Street and Southern Avenue. The Capitol Heights metro station is part of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's rapid rail system. This system provides rail service throughout the Washington metropolitan area. The underground subway station opened in the early 1980's, bringing with it many new challenges related to fire and rescue services and the potential evacuation of approximately 1,000 passengers during an underground emergency. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
purchased three support vehicles and placed them throughout the metropolitan area for response to emergencies. Metro Support Unit 5, a 1986 Ford, was placed in service at Capitol Heights, which would provide extra self-contained breathing apparatus, mass casualty supplies and other related equipment during a Metro Rapid rail emergency.

The unit also provides support on mass casualty and hazardous material incidents, responding throughout the Washington metropolitan area.

In 1986, Prince George's County purchased a new Seagrave pumper and placed it at the Capitol Heights fire station to replace Engine 52, the 1967 Ford Ward LaFrance. The new apparatus was designated as Engine 51. Old Engine 52 was then donated to the county's training academy for use in training new firefighters.

In August 1988, Chief Estepp, County Fire Chief, authorized the assignment of a crew of two firefighters and an officer around the clock to help with staffing shortages. Along with this came the re-establishment of ambulance services, which were discontinued from the Capitol Heights station for a short time due to staffing limitations. A new ambulance was delivered in March 1989.

The station received two Unit Citations in 1989. One was for assistance to a disabled member of the community and the other for being the first station to receive "exceeds standards" in all categories during the annual station inspection.

Engine 52, a new FMC pumper was placed in service that same year. This was the first pumper bought by the department since 1968. Engine 53, the 1968 Ward LaFrance was then retired. This new pumper was dedicated to Ernest Moreland at our 80th Anniversary celebration in March 1995.

During the 1980's and 90's several of our ladies auxiliary members received honors for their years of service to the department and the community. Ladies auxiliary members inducted into the Prince George's County Fire and Rescue Association-Ladies Auxiliary Hall of Fame include: Magdalene Schmidt (1982), Gracie Mothershead (1984), Evelyn Mockabee (1988), Carrie Campbell (1988), Sharon Daneri (1996), Alice Long (1996), Anna Smith (1996), Carrie Campbell (1998), Rita Daneri (1998), Vivian Morgan (1999) and Mary Russell (1999). In addition, Louise "Alice" Long was recognized in 1998 by the County ladies Auxiliary for more than sixty years of service. A special service pin had to be designed for this occasion since no one had ever had received this honor.

The department purchased a 1986 Maxim/Spartan 100 foot tractor drawn aerial ladder from the Berwyn Heights Volunteer Fire Department in 1993. Truck 5 was placed in service on September 1, 1993. This unit was dedicated to William A. Devine, Jr. at our 80th Anniversary celebration in March 1995.

Also receiving honors, Volunteer Firefighter William Hawkins, along with career Lt. Rahilly from Station 6 (Hillside VFD) received the Fire Chief's Award at the
1992 annual Police/Fire Awards ceremony for their participation in an international effort to deliver much needed firefighting equipment to war torn Bosnia.

At the 1995 Police/Fire Awards ceremony, John Weaver, then Volunteer Captain, was awarded the Bronze Medal of Valor for his efforts in rescuing two children from a house fire on Walker Mill Road in District Heights. Despite everyone’s best efforts the children were pronounced dead at the hospital.

The crew from the Capitol Heights station was recognized once again in 1998 for their actions that led to the successful rescue of three children from a house fire on Brenner Street in Capitol Heights. The crew from Capitol Heights was: James McClelland, Sr., John Weaver, Earl Schubert, Clifford Wilson, Rob Wallace, and William Lehew, Sr. The crew placed a hose line between the fire and the stairs leading to the upstairs bedrooms, allowing other crews from Hillside and Seat Pleasant stations to locate and remove the children. The crew received a Unit Citation for this incident.

During the 1990’s, several members were recognized by the County Association for their dedicated service. Five were inducted into the Association’s Hall of Fame. They include: Oscar Poore (1991), William A. Devine, Jr. (1997), Robert “Gene” McClelland (1998) and Howard “Gabby” Harrison (1998). Three junior members received the Norris Beard Award for Outstanding Junior Firefighter of the Year. They include Terrance Fayson (1991) James McClelland, Jr. (1998) and Joseph Howell (1999).

In the late 90’s fire department websites were being created all over the United States. Capitol Heights joined these ranks in creating a living-history of their department at http://www.chvfd.org. The new computer technology allowed the department to showcase their company, recruit new members, and provide information to both its members and the community. The website was awarded the Golden Web Award, which is awarded by the International Association of Webmasters and Designers, for two years in a row.

The year 2000 brought a piece of history back to Capitol Heights. Someone who had purchased some property in a government auction contacted the station. The owner had found our 1948 American LaFrance Pumper in an abandoned barn on this new property. Having the original certificate of ownership, the owner contacted Capitol Heights Fire Department to find a home for the pumper. Engine 53 was re-purchased in time for the 85th Anniversary Celebration in March of 2000.

Also in June of 2000, Alice Long received the Honorary Award at the Maryland State Fireman’s Convention. Chief Ron Siarnicki presented the award for her dedication and service to the ladies auxiliary.
Two Capitol Heights members were also inducted into the Prince George’s County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association’s Hall of Fame; Both Charles Miller and David Breeden, Jr. received their awards in September of 2000.

On December 27, 2000 at 1720 hours units responded to the Pyles Lumber Company on the 6000 block of Allentown Road. The fire, which reached three alarms, caused 1.5 million dollars in damage. Truck 5 and Chief 5 responded on the second alarm and remained on the scene for several hours.

Company 5 pushed ahead in 2001, they had a busy year, running several major incidents and facing new challenges.

An event that would forever change the world, our country, and the fire service occurred on September 11, 2001. Terrorists hijacked multiple planes and flew them into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. A fourth plane crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. There were many lives lost that day, including 343 firefighters at the World Trade Center in New York. On September 11, 2001 both career and volunteer personnel of Prince George’s County were called to duty. Personnel from Company 5 transferred to District of Columbia Engine 15 while D.C. firefighters were at the Pentagon. Personnel remained at Engine 15’s quarters for approximately eight hours. In the aftermath, the ladies auxiliary was called to action in helping sort and organize the thousands of cards, letters, and donations being sent for the firefighters in New York.

Still on edge from the events of September 11, 2001, the members of the Company 5 responded to two multiple alarm blazes within the Prince George’s County. The first of these incidents was on September 26, 2001 at the Fairfield Farms Warehouse on Addison Road. During the three-alarm fire Engine 52, supplied water to Tower 7 with its large diameter hose.

On November 11, 2001 a four-alarm blaze occurred at the Michael’s Craft store in Bowie. Chief 5 was the first one on the scene and had the operations sector. Truck 5 was dispatched as the second due truck on the second alarm. Truck 5 reported that the column of smoke could be seen leaving quar-
ters. Truck 5, positioned on side delta of the fire building, and protected the exposure building, which was a tire and auto repair shop. This fire resulted in 3 million dollars in damage.

The year of 2001 also brought numerous awards to the company and its members. In its 2001 National Run Survey Firehouse® Magazine listed Prince George’s County Truck Company 5 as busiest ladder in the county and the 104th busiest ladder in the United States. At the 2001 MSFA Convention Alice Long received the Honey Award for her hard work and dedication to the Ladies Auxiliary. In addition, Chief James McClelland, Sr. was inducted into the Prince George’s County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association’s Hall of Fame in 2001. Another member from Capitol Heights was also recognized as Outstanding Junior Firefighter of the Year; Thomas Russell received the 2001 Norris Beard Award.

The year 2001 also brought new apparatus and equipment to the department. Engine 51 was retired to the reserve fleet and was replaced by a new 2001 Seagrave pumper. Company 5 also became the second department in the county to purchase a thermal imager. The imager was placed in service on Truck 5 and was equipped with a transmitter for remote monitoring. A portable TV/VCR and a receiving station are also carried on Truck 5. This allows incident commanders to monitor activities on the fire ground and provide valuable information for incident critiques.

With the increased threat of terror in the world, troops were mobilized to fight overseas in Iraq. This call-up included Dwayne Frost who is part of the D.C. National Guard. Dwayne reported for duty in the Middle East in January 2003.

Record snowfall in the area kept departments working in 2003. One major incident occurred at Toys ‘R” Us store on Annapolis Road in Lanham.

Large amounts of snow and rain caused the roof of the store to collapse during business hours. Company 5 leadership played major roles on this incident. Chief 5, also the Volunteer Operations Commander, was the incident commander. Deputy Chief John Weaver was the Safety Sector officer. Assistant Chief Bob Russell was in charge of logistics during the incident. Truck 5 and MSU 5 responded and the thermal imager was used to look for victims.

During the state convention in 2003 William Hawkins was inducted into the Maryland State Fireman’s Association Hall of Fame for his hard work and dedication to making the state convention run smoothly. Also in 2003, Deputy Chief John Weaver received the Francis Xander Award at the 2003 Prince George’s County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association Convention.

In the first quarter of 2004, Prince George’s County experienced a sharp increase in the rate of fire deaths as compared to previous years. Fire deaths in the communities immediately surrounding our first response area remained high. To address this issue, the career and volunteer personnel from the Capitol Heights fire station embarked on an unprecedented effort to get fire safety information out to the citizens of the Town
of Capitol Heights and the surrounding communities in our first due response area. This effort started in March 2004 before the state and countywide efforts to address the rate of fire deaths began. A plan was developed to go door-to-door to every business and residence in our first due response area by the end of 2005, handing out fire safety information and offering to check smoke alarms. This plan was proactive, rather than reactive. Batteries were replaced and new smoke alarms were installed where needed at no cost to the resident. On December 31, 2005 the station achieved this goal by completing the last remaining residences on Larchmont Avenue.

Company 5 continued to respond to major incidents throughout the county in 2004. Truck 5 and Chief 5, as the Volunteer Operations Commander responded to a three-alarm fire on 68th Place in Landover Hills. Truck 5 conducted a systematic search of the fire buildings and performed overhaul operations. Units from Company 5 were also called to the scene of a trench rescue in Seat Pleasant. Engine 51 and Ambulance 58 were at the scene to provide support to the collapse team. Chief 5, as the Volunteer Major was the incident commander.

Again faced with aging facilities the department received news that the much needed building renovation would soon commence. Architects began preparing construction documents in 2004.

In April 2004 the company welcomed home Dwayne Frost home from Iraq. He received the Bronze Star and a Purple Heart for his duty to his country. A picnic was held in Dwayne’s honor, celebrating his safe return. Department and Auxiliary Members were also on hand when Dwayne was inducted into the American Legion Post # 259 in Clinton, Maryland.

During the 2004 its Annual Convention, Chief James McClelland, Sr. was awarded the Maryland State Fireman’s Association Firefighter of the Year Award for his hard work in 2003. Also recognized for his efforts, Bob Russell was inducted into the Prince George’s County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association Hall of Fame. In October of 2004 Magdalene Schmidt was honored on the Founder’s Circle Memorial at the Cranford-Graves Fire Service Building in Landover Hills, Maryland.

In October of 2004, the company celebrated its 90th Anniversary of service to the citizens of Capitol Heights. During the anniversary banquet, members were given a commemorative pin that was modeled after the badge the first Captain wore when the department was organized. Originally, the Captain was the highest-ranking member of the department.

On November 3, 2004 Truck 5 responded to the Prince George’s County seat in Upper Marlboro to fight the five-alarm fire in the historic courthouse. The courthouse, which was under renovation at the time of the fire, sustained extensive damage. However, no historical documents or artifacts were lost because they were removed before renovations began. A photo of Truck 5 and the career personnel operating on the scene of the fire was featured on the cover of Firehouse® Magazine.

The Capitol Heights Volunteer Fire Department received an “Above and Beyond Award” from the
Maryland Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve Committee in May 2005. The award was presented to Maryland businesses and organizations that have enacted policies, provided benefits and have supported our National Guard and Reserve troops that exceed the requirements established in the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-Employment Rights Act.

The 2005 Prince George’s County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association Annual Convention was eventful for Capitol Heights. William A. Devine, Sr. was inducted into the Prince George’s County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association Hall of Fame. Robert Russell was sworn in as Second Vice President of the Association, while Vivian Morgan assumed the role of Secretary of the Association’s Ladies Auxiliary. Miss Sara Russell was also crowned as Miss Fire Prevention 2005 for Prince George’s County.

Engine 52, our 1989 FMC pumper, was rehabbed in 2005 and returned to quarters in late fall. Repairs and upgrades were made to the cab interior, which included: new headsets, an intercom system, Drive Cam, and a LineX engine cover. LED warning lights were installed to improve visibility and new scene lighting was installed for a better view in a night work environment. The exterior of 52 also underwent a redesign, changing to a white over red color paint scheme. New design concepts included a revised door logo, fire prevention safety message, and prominent placement of our website address.

2006 saw the end of an era, with Metro Support Unit 5 placed out of service early in the year. The unit was originally placed in service in 1985 and was equipped with 40 sets of Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) rated for one hour and various mass casualty supplies to handle emergencies within the Metrorail system. New breathing air units and mass casualty units were ordered to replace the two units functioning as an MSU in Prince George’s County.

Because of our close proximity to FedEx Field, one of the new Mass Casualty Units was placed at station 5 in August 2006. As a Level II MCSU, it will be dispatched on Mass Casualty Incidents (MCI) in Prince George’s County including commuter bus accidents, passenger train derailments, building collapses, etc. In addition, the unit can be dispatched mutual aide to any jurisdiction in the National Capitol Region including Northern Virginia, Washington, DC, Montgomery County and Frederick County. The unit is equipped with mass casualty supplies that can be used to operate triage and treatment areas.
Progress continued on moving closer to the long awaited building renovation. The final drawings were issued and the project was put out to bid in late 2006.

Our Fire Prevention and Life Safety Program was a prominent theme in 2006. During March of 2006, the Volunteer Fire Company #1 of Capitol Heights was awarded $47,074 in federal funding through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program. In order to sustain and improve our already aggressive Fire Prevention and Life Safety Program funds were sought for the purchase of our own Fire Safety Trailer.

The department and its members were also recognized for their unprecedented efforts in their Door-to-Door Fire Prevention Campaign which was completed in December 2005. Members were awarded with a Unit Citation for their efforts. The department was also presented with several proclamations from the county executive, county council, and town governments. Cash awards were also presented through the Maryland State Fireman’s Association and Firehouse® Magazine Heroism Award Program. Since the development of this project, other stations and personnel in Prince George’s County have adopted the project and are now following our lead in proactively reaching out to the community before tragedy occurs.

Louise “Alice” Long celebrated several milestones in 2006; Alice received the Governor’s Volunteer Service Award for Lifetime Achievement. This award was presented for her 70 years of faithful service to the Capitol Heights Fire Department and to her community. Less than a month later, Alice celebrated her 100th Birthday with family, friends and her extended firehouse family. The rank of Honorary Firefighter was bestowed upon Alice and the department presented her with a firefighter’s helmet. During the 2006 Prince George’s County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association’s Annual Convention Alice was presented with a 70-year service pin. Once again, a new service pin was created since no one had ever achieved this milestone.

Past President Alfred Laughery was inducted into the Prince George’s County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association’s Hall of Fame.

Also during the 2006 Prince George’s County Volunteer Fire
and Rescue Association’s Annual Convention Robert Russell was elected as their First Vice President. Vivian Morgan was also installed as the Vice President of the Prince George’s County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association’s Ladies Auxiliary.

In 2007, the station took delivery of a new Fire Prevention Safety Trailer, which was purchased through a Department of Homeland Security Fire Prevention grant. This trailer remains the first and only handicapped-accessible fire prevention trailer in Prince George’s County. Through this new program, we have visited many schools and community events around the county and have provided fire prevention instruction and literature to thousands of children and families.

For the first time ever, the newly elected President of Prince George’s County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association and the newly elected Prince George’s County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association Ladies Auxiliary President were the from the same company. Robert Russell and Vivian Morgan were sworn in as Presidents of their respective organizations during second session of the 2007 Convention.

Two members were also remembered in 2007 and 2008 for their dedication to our company. Oscar Poore was included on the Founders Circle Memorial located at the Cranford-Graves Fire Service Building in October 2007. Past Chief Jack Brooks was inducted into the Prince...
George’s County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association’s Hall of Fame.

Without warning in August 2009, the Fire Chief at the time, removed career staffing from the station. This left our volunteers with the responsibility of staffing the station 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Our members, most who have served our community for decades and have daytime jobs, would not be able to sacrifice feeding their families to staff the firehouse 24 hours a day. This impact to service left not only the community at risk, but it also put all of our members at greater risk for injury or death. The administration’s answer to this problem was to deliver a couple of cases of smoke alarms to the town hall and to rely on neighboring companies who were already stretched thin.

Capitol Heights Volunteer Fire Department members dug in and staffed the firehouse as much as we could; members worked to exhaustion to continue to provide service – this was a matter of pride. For a volunteer department that has faithfully served our community and the county for nearly 100 years, we weren’t simply going to give up.

Early on, it was normal to have a news crew camped out on the front ramp to see if any units would respond that day. Many politicians paid lip service to the importance of getting staffing back, but there was little action that we could find.

This was the beginning of a long road for members of the department. The department pushed to recruit new members and veterans returned to help mentor those going through their training. Members of the community and college students from D.C. applied in record numbers as we continued to provide service, in spite of the many critics throughout the county fire service. Many of the student recruits were pre-med, politics, and architecture majors; some even came into the company with prior EMS service.

Weeks turned into months and months into a year and many things seemed to get worse. Truck 5, which is dedicated to Past Chief William “Andy” Devine, was reassigned to station 37 and the Mass Casualty Support Unit was moved to another station. Soon the County also came looking for Engine 51, which they had placed into the reserve fleet. It too was later removed in order to put a new station in service; a station that required the equipment and staffing that they didn’t have for us.

In the midst of the turmoil of 2009, we started a project that would take on a life of its own. In preparations for Veteran’s Day 2009, which has always been a part of the Capitol Heights community, we started a veterans section on our website. Many of our members have
served their country in the military during both war and peace time. We were able to discover interesting new information about the three members who were killed in action in World War II and Treasurer Emeritus Ernie Moreland’s capture as a POW in the Battle of the Bulge. We reached out to family members of previous members through genealogical research. In 2010, we continued to research the military service of our members, focusing on our charter members. We were able to document military service as far back as the Spanish-American war including a member that rode with Theodore Roosevelt’s Rough Riders. We continue to document current member service and unearth new information about our charter members and about our history in preparation for our upcoming 100th Anniversary.

Our building renovation project, which had already been scaled back due inadequate funding, was finally ready to get underway in 2010; but people also worked behind the scenes to squash the project. It appeared that we were being dismantled piece by piece, despite our commitment to serve and will to survive as a company. The renovation project did commence after months of stalling and our building was taken down to its shell. Crews operated out of a small trailer in the side yard and ran through the snow and the mud to get to their gear and the apparatus. The trailer had a small office, a bath-
room, bunk room, and a small day room with only a coffee pot, microwave, and water cooler. We struggled to keep the apparatus warm inside the building during the winter months and during the summer months we held our company meetings in the side yard. There was no kitchen or shower and only a handful of people could fit in the trailer at a time.

Despite our limitations with staffing and facilities, we continued to recruit and get new members trained in 2010 and looked to expand our pool of drivers.

In February 2010, back to back blizzards made responding to calls very difficult across Prince George’s County. Crews whose vehicles became stranded in the snow continued on foot to answer the call to duty. Due to the amount of snow, Humvees and National Guard troops were deployed throughout the County to ensure EMS crews could reach patients. Dwayne Frost helped navigate one of the Humvees that was in service during the storms.

Governor Martin O’Malley visited the station on April 15, 2010. The Town of Capitol Heights was named capital of Maryland for a day in celebration of its 100th year anniversary. Since the Capitol Heights Volunteer Fire Department played a significant part in the town’s history, it was only fitting that event was held at the fire station.

Veteran firefighter and wounded warrior Dwayne Frost returned to active fire department service six years after returning from Iraq where he was seriously wounded. While the Army deemed Dwayne fit for combat, NFPA 1582, the standard that governs medical evaluations for firefighter candidates, does not allow individuals who have sustained injuries similar to Dwayne’s to participate in interior firefighting operations. After careful review by the Prince George’s County Fire/EMS Department’s Bureau of Occupational Safety and Health (BOSH) and an independent medical advisory board, Dwayne was cleared to participate in exterior firefighting duties and to provide EMS care. He later received the Prince George’s County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association’s Armed Services Valor Award for Bravery in September of 2010.

Alice Long’s name was also engraved on the company’s marker at Founders Circle, along with other members from our company, for her dedicated service to the department and the auxiliary.

In 2011, the department continued to grow and train new members and drivers.
The year’s first significant snow fall led to increased calls for service. On January 28, 2011, the station responded to 16 engine calls in a 12 hour period. Many stranded vehicles and trucks made response difficult and crews walked from blocks away to reach the scene in some cases. While part of the crew worked to back up the first due company, members assisted getting the displaced mother and child to the safety of a warm ambulance. After the fire was extinguished the crew helped shovel out the ambulance so it could transport to Children’s Hospital.

On February 19, 2011, the crew from company 5 operated at brush and structure fires on the south side of the county. It was the busiest day on record for the entire department; high winds and dry conditions increased the number of calls for service to over 800 calls in a single day. Units from counties in Maryland, Virginia, and District of Columbia responded to seven major incidents going on simultaneously and other calls for service throughout the county. Members who responded received a unit citation for their participation in this historical call for service, known as Fire Storm 2011.
Construction progressed and with the substantial completion of the project, a ribbon cutting ceremony was held on September 25, 2011. During the ceremony, members of the department dedicated the building to Chief James McClelland, Sr. for his tireless dedication to the department and for the renovation of the station. The new dedication plaque was installed on the front of the firehouse.

Career firefighters returned to Capitol Heights in late 2011 and staff the station during the weekdays. Our members are still working hard to serve the citizens of Capitol Heights and surrounding areas. Our department continues to recruit and train new volunteer members in 2012.

We look forward to what the future holds for us and we honor the hard work, sacrifice, and service of all that came before us.
Our Future
Capitol Heights Volunteer Fire Department