



# Fire Warden

County of Los Angeles Fire Museum Association

Volume 11, Issue 1

Spring 2002

## 'Squad 51, where are you now?'

# Celebration honors first paramedics, new home

The award-winning Petersen Automotive Museum threw open its doors February 18 to celebrate Los Angeles County's first 40 paramedics. The County of Los Angeles Fire Museum Association (CLAFMA) sponsored the event, which also introduced Squad 51 to its new bunkmates, including the Batmobile and the Green Hornet's Black Beauty.

"We're delighted that our members and the public can come see Squad 51 anytime they like," said Jim Page, who was elected

president of CLAFMA in March. The famous rig is on a one-year loan to the Petersen, which is located in L.A.'s "Miracle Mile." Page made a presentation about the origins of the paramedic movement and announced the squad's induction.

Hundreds of CLAFMA members attended, as did a number of those involved with the "Emergency!" television series. Randy Mantooth, who played paramedic/firefighter Johnny Gage, drew throngs of fans and autograph seekers, as always.

Newly-elected CLAFMA board

member Joe Woyjeck organized the evening. Partygoers reconnected with old friends amid more than 150 race cars, classic cars, hot rods, motorcycles and favorites from Hollywood. The Petersen also featured a 1942 Chevy Loadmaster brush rig.

### 'One miracle after another..'

Page played to an enthusiastic crowd from the beginning. "I was talking to Carol Bebout a little while ago," he told them, referring to a pioneering nurse. "She said running into each of you this evening reminds her of one miracle after another.

"Indeed, we're here tonight to celebrate a series of events that *have* been miraculous. They not only changed many of our lives; they've also changed things for people the world over."

The induction of Squad 51 in the Petersen is linked to the recognition of the first 40 paramedics to be trained and certified in Los Angeles County. Page acknowledged some of those first 40 present, as well as dozens of others who were there to celebrate the pioneers' contributions to emergency healthcare.

Those contributions were picked up by Hollywood and shared with *everyone*. "I've traveled all over the world in recent years," Page said. "I've seen 'Emergency!' in Japan with English subtitles. I've seen it in Kuwait, spoken in Arabic." He paused to kid Mantooth: "Randy, they need a different voice-over for you in Kuwait; it's not very flattering."



Jim Page's presentation of department history and war stories preceded the squad's induction.



**MARK YOUR CALENDARS!** Our open house happens June 22-23. Come have some BBQ and kick some tires! See page 7.

## news

First things first: We've scheduled an open house for June 22-23. Please see page 7 for more details and mark your calendars!

The open house, the event at the Petersen Automotive Museum featured on the cover, the Fire Warden itself, the tireless restoration work on your museum's collection – they all happen thanks to the leaders you elect. The members nominate their directors and elect them at-large in odd-numbered years.

Last year's ballot featured nine nominees; the following seven won seats on the board of directors:

- Dave Boucher;
- Paul Oyler;
- Paul Schneider;
- Jim Page;
- Ken Jury;
- Joe Woyjeck; and
- Jordan Pearl.

The directors voted for the executive officers March 7. With the encouragement of Paul Schneider, who had served as president since 1995, the board selected Jim Page as the new president. (One of Page's first official acts was acknowledging Schneider's dedication.) The directors voted in new board member Joe Woyjeck as vice president. Paul Oyler and Ken Jury continue their service as secretary and treasurer, respectively.

Speaking of Paul Oyler, who is a captain in the Los Angeles County Fire Department: He kept his cool on national television in January. Twelve million viewers saw him face a live alligator dangling inches from his head on the premiere of ABC's "The Chair." Oyler never flinched. (In fact, he scared the, um, stuffing out of the alligator instead of the other way around.)



**CLAFMA's event at the Petersen brought together some true paramedic pioneers. Back row from left: Bill Miles; Wayne Nutt; Roy Burleson; Bill Ridgeway; Steve Jongsma; Carol Bebout, RN; J. Michael Criley, MD; and Roger Crow. Front row from left: Chuck Bender; Less Gustafson; Dale Cauble; and Rocky Doke. Photo by Kenji Luster.**

Page described the events of 1969 that led to the paramedic movement and the TV show. "A serendipitous confluence of visionary physicians, one stubborn politician, some dedicated nurses – two of whom are with us tonight – sowed the seeds of a healthcare revolution," he said.

### Taking the hurdles

Page singled out many champions of the paramedic concept, including physicians, nurses and politicians such as Kenneth Hahn and Ronald Reagan, who was governor at the time. However, he didn't hesitate to reel off those who *fought* the beginnings some 30 years ago.

"The California Medical Association had lobbyists working against the Wedworth-Townsend Act," he said. "There were many nurses deadset against the idea of firefighters with a defibrillator in their hands. Many hospital administrators were frightened, particularly when they were asked to dedicate their hospitals as base stations."

Page got knowing laughs from the crowd when he described the early opposition from some police officers. One anecdote about a patient-care disagreement ended with a six-foot-eight fire captain looking down at a deputy sheriff's drawn weapon and asking, "What are you going to do – shoot me?"

The war stories went on, from the vagaries of the county mechanical department to private ambulance crews' penchant for sabotage; from skeptical fire chiefs to primitive medical equipment. "The venerable E&J resuscitator weighed about 85 pounds in the case," Page mused. "So if you had to take it up stairs, you had to use it on yourself before you could use it on a patient."

Mostly, however, the evening focused on more than 30 years of lifesaving success and heartfelt camaraderie. So, if you missed this party, please join us in June for CLAFMA's open house. (See page 7 for details.)

For details about the Petersen, visit [www.petersen.org](http://www.petersen.org) or call them at 323-930-2277.



**Steve Jongsma adds his autograph to a Squad-51 backboard. Photo by Kenji Luster.**



# biography

You may not know it, but the Los Angeles County Fire Department's hiring requirements for entry-level pilots are among the toughest *anywhere*. Here's the story of a man who signed on the department

in 1972 and became one of the few to achieve the rank of senior pilot. See how Rick Cearley wrangled rescues and wildfires in the grand

tradition of the department's first air-operations division. *If you'd like to suggest someone for our "Biography" feature, please let us know. See the editorial contact information on page seven.*

**A**s part of the L.A. County Fire Department's ongoing oral-history videotape series, Capt. David Boucher (ret) interviewed Senior Pilot Rick Cearley (ret) last October. Cearley retired in 1996. Here are a few excerpts from their conversation, starting with how Cearley came to be hired by none other than the department's first helicopter pilot himself.

A. They're probably the most stringent in the helicopter industry. Our requirements are 4,000 hours as pilot-in-command. And that takes some time to get; you're not going to just go out in the first couple of years and get 4,000 hours. Fifteen-hundred hours of that has to be above 4,000 feet and working in unimproved helispots. They want fire experience, and when

they say 'desirable,' that almost makes it a necessity. Turbine time was another 'desirable' quality.

Q. Would you tell us how you were hired?

A. I was working [on the Alaska Pipeline]. In the winter, they closed us down because of the weather. So, I went to a helicopter convention and I was told Bart [planned to hire] some pilots.

Q. Now, Bart was our first helicopter pilot.

A. Roland Barton was the first pilot hired in the county fire department, and the air operation was the result of his diligence, his inventiveness.

He was at the convention...and we talked for about 45 minutes. Things happened pretty fast; it was only a week from the time I met him 'til I was in L.A. doing an oral exam.

Q. As you well know, the requirements for being a helicopter pilot with the L.A. County Fire Department are rather stringent.



**Clockwise from top left: Pilot Rick Cearley ready to fly; Cearley stands by on the flightline; Cearley's one-skid landing on a Ventura County clifftop facilitates a rescue. "If there was a safe place to do it, I preferred a one-skid landing versus a hoist. With a hoist, you have so many variables. If you can get the skid down and hold it on the rock, you can load a whole crew."**

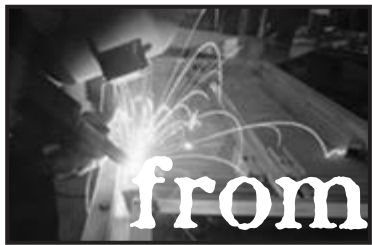
Q. You had actually dropped on fires before you came to work for us. Did you have additional training once you got here?

A. We needed quite a bit of additional training here because the tank was much different from the buckets I used in Alaska. It was much easier to drop with the L.A. County tank. And I'd like to stress this right now: It's called the L.A. County tank, not the L.A. tank.

There are some other people who try to get the thunder from it. The thunder belongs to Bart and his team. Bart's the one who invented it. It was his idea, and he made the very first tank, which was a 105-gallon tank. [See page 6 for a photo

continues on page 7





# from the shop

Most people see vehicles and gear from the museum's collection after they're *gleaming*. But what does it take to transform a dusty, rusty, busted vehicle that may have been exposed for years to the elements – and worse – into a shiny showpiece? CLAFMA board member and restoration expert Paul Schneider takes

you behind-the-scenes with dedicated people who devote their time and talents preserving fire-service history for the rest of us. This is part one of an occasional series that documents the re-emergence of a 1955 Crown from a limbo of chain-link and rats' nests.

**T**he L.A. County '55 Crown is our main project right now; it's a complete restoration. We brought it to the museum on a flatbed. It had been heavily vandalized during its previous storage. All the glass was busted out and there was graffiti scratched into the skin – it was just a giant mess.

Remarkably, after sitting for 14 years, it fired right up. It blew a bunch of acorns and rat nests and crap out of the exhaust manifold, then settled down into a real nice idle and ran like a top. We cleaned out the carburetor and the air filter, put new spark plugs in there and it runs great.

One thing that held us up for a while is something called *fender beading*. That's a weather stripping that goes between the fenders and the fire engine's body.

In a full restoration, you take the gauges out, the fenders off, the compartments and the cabinets off – you take everything off. (We also cut off a cab enclosure to return it to its original open-cab configuration.) When it was originally put together, it was sealed with aluminum weather stripping that had a little bead. They don't make that kind of aluminum any more. When we took it apart, the original fender bead was corroded.

So, the problem is to try to be accurate – that beading needs to be the same color as the fire engine. They still make beading, but it's made out of vinyl. You

can't really paint vinyl, because it flexes and the paint would just crack off. It took a long time to find red beading, but it's on there now and looks good.

Some people don't take the fenders or anything else off – they just sand everything down and paint it. It looks OK. But I don't like painting over any joints that may move or flex. Eventually the paint starts to crack right there. So I like to do it in a way that won't crack in two or three years; it will last indefinitely as long as the vehicle is kept inside and maintained.

The number-two problem involves rewiring every inch of the vehicle. A county mechanic, Oscar Lopez, comes here after he gets off work and works for two or three hours a night. We don't have a 1955 wiring diagram, so he's having to use a 1967 diagram and piece it all together.

It's amazing just how much wire there actually *is* in a fire engine; there's a couple of miles of it. It may sound extravagant, but it's necessary. After all, the vehicle is almost 46 years old, and it sat in the weather for years.

### Labor of – well, you know...

This was Engine 44; I'd like to restore it to Engine 36. It was a very busy engine at the time, and my uncle was captain of Engine 36. Whatever the number, it'll be better than it was when it was new. Come see it at our open house!





A FLEET OF 32 CROWN FIRECOACHES BUILT FOR THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES



Counter-clockwise from top right: Engine 36 and its crew during the 1955 Crown's heyday – that's a young Capt. Paul Schneider standing by the engine; a 50s-era publicity photo; this rare image of a 1955 Crown and its equipment, turnouts and helmets serves as valuable reference for the ongoing restoration; the '55 Crown awaits rescue from its 14-year exile at the Pacoima Warehouse; George Verkamp gives gravity a hand while Howard Schneider helps guide the Crown off the flatbed toward the museum's garage; and in mid-restoration, miles of new wire, all-new gauges and switches add up to a brand-new electrical system. Photos from Paul Schneider's collection and by Tim Elliott.





Where were you in '72? Elsewhere in this issue, we mentioned the 30th anniversary of the paramedic program. We thought a brief flashback to the county's brush-fire operation might be in order, too.

# flashback

Because we'd also focused on helicopters and open houses in the issue, we knew we'd found a winner with this shot: a Camp 9 open house 30 years ago –

complete with air operations! *We're always looking for department photos, as well as badges, uniforms, documents and vehicles. If you can help, please call David Boucher at 818-242-3035.*

**1** L.A. County Fire Department's Fire Camp 9 circa 1972. It's located just above Sylmar and bordered by Sand Canyon. Capt. Wally Reed was the camp superintendent at the time.

**2** The open house drew friends and families of the camp crews, who were known as FCLs: Fire Control Laborers. The term was later changed to FSAs: Fire Suppression Aides.

**3** The camp's primary helispot offered pilots a quick approach to the San Fernando Valley.

**4** Bert Thompson was foreman on the crew. His helmet is silver, which was a precursor to today's white command helmets. The crews' helmets are yellow with red or blue highlights.

**5** As part of the open-house event, Pilot Rick Cearley flew in a crew to cut a simulated brush line; there is no fire. "They would come through and put a scratch line along the fire, and we would drop with them," he said. "These guys move pretty fast. Later, another crew would come along and put in a finish line or clean-up line." Usually there were about 10 on a crew.

**6** Cearley swoops down for a drop in Copter 14, a Bell 205 A-1; it had a 360-gallon tank. "The early stages of firefighting with helicopters and camp crews was a real exciting time," he said. "I really liked it; it was a great way to put a fire out."

**7** Roland Barton (right) helps move the first aluminum drop tank circa 1961; he designed it for use under the county's Bell 47-G. JEB Aircraft in Burbank produced the 105-gallon tank.

– Drop photo courtesy of Rick Cearley; tank photo courtesy of David Boucher.



**6**

**1**

**2**

**3**

**4**

**5**

**7**





**Pilot Rick Cearley (far right) and a Camp 9 flight crew unloading after a nighttime fire run. "This is one of my favorite pictures," he said. "I miss flying a lot."**

## Rick Cearley

from page 3

of Barton's first drop tank.] It progressed to a 320-gallon for the 204 [helicopter] and a 360-gallon tank for the 205. Anyway, it was easier to fly that fixed tank than it was to fly a bucket.

**Q.** What was it like the first time you dropped on a real, working brush fire?

**A.** There was a fire in Topanga Canyon in 1972, and it was the first one I got to do quite a few drops on. It didn't get real big, maybe a hundred acres, but it was kind of old [growth] and very steep. I had taken a Camp 9 crew into the fire. You go to a camp on your standby days and get with your crew. They get everything ready so when the horn goes off, they load their tools as you start the helicopter. We could be off the pad in a couple of minutes, maybe three. We got the fire put out.

**Q.** In your career, you were on many large fires. Is there one that stands out?

**A.** The one that sticks in my mind most is the Topanga fire in 1993, but there are probably a lot bigger than that. The reason this one sticks in my mind is because of the losses incurred in that fire. We lost

structures and houses. We also lost one individual on that fire.

**Q.** [Speaking of tough fires], the Glen Allen fire, as I recall, was in August of '93.

**A.** Right, up on the side of the mountain. If it was 50 acres, that's stretching it, but it was very steep and there was a ravine right in the middle of the fire that caused the whole problem. Our camp crew had gotten overrun – the Camp 2 crew. They had deployed their shelters, but we did have two fatalities on the fire, and we did have two badly-burned crewmen.

I got there probably about 15 minutes after the crew was burned. I picked my two paramedics up, and we also got a load of water so

when we got there we could maybe make a dust drop. When I got there, I found a point I could hover on. It was very dusty and very ash-covered. I put up a dust cloud you could see for a mile...



*If you'd like to hear the rest of Rick Cearley's description of that rescue – and why he hails two paramedics as heroes – join us for our open house on June 22-23. Please see more details at right.*

## who's who

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### MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION:

For details, go to [www.clafma.org](http://www.clafma.org).

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## Our open house

### features some old friends!

If you'd like to see our terrific collection of fire apparatus, helmets and restoration works-in-progress – and you like barbeque – be sure to join us June 22-23 for our open house.

Come meet the leaders and other volunteers who handle the day-to-day operations. You'll find plenty of classic rigs. Who knows, you may kick a few tires and find yourself interested in a restoration project of your own!

The open house will be 8-4 both days at 8635 Otis St. in South Gate. For details, go to [www.clafma.org](http://www.clafma.org).



# Fire Warden

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L.A. County Dodge Squad 51 (\$30 + \$5 shipping)  
Length: 3.375 inches - scale: 1/64  
This Dodge truck represents the heart and soul of the 'Emergency!' TV series.  
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