

Reader Mail - December 2014

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Happy holidays and let's open the mailbag...

Q: I am in possession of what appears to be a logbook from [this engine] from [this department in another state] for [these dates]. Would you or anyone you know be interested in this item?

A: Contact the Fire Chief of the department, and give them first right of refusal. They'll likely be interested in obtaining same. After that, you could contact the [Fire Museum Network](#) and inquire about interest from their member organizations.

Q: What is TSU 1?

A: That's the label on the front bumper of Raleigh's reserve rescue, one of the department's two 2007 Pierce Enforcer walk-around rescue units. It's housed at Station 14. They're identical trucks and the other is a front-line unit used by Rescue 1. The acronym stands for Technical Support Unit 1. There was an earlier plan to use the second rescue as both (a.) reserve unit and (b.) second piece of apparatus for Squad 14. With extra or additional rescue equipment. Don't know the current status of that plan. Squad 15, incidentally, staffs a second piece of equipment, a tractor-drawn trench rescue trailer that's parked behind the station. Click to enlarge:



Q: I saw your site with [Civil Defense apparatus](#) and thought you might like to see Birmingham, Alabama's 1953 Reo rescue truck. Purchased on a 50/50 matching grant, it managed to stay in BFD until about 2000. It was last stationed near the airport and filled to the brim with stretchers for use at a crash at the airport. Then it was sold as surplus and languished in a car lot for several years before being refurbished. The truck was then donated to the Southern Vintage Fire Apparatus Association (Southern SPAAMFAA chapter). Along the way she lost her roof access ladder, extension ladder, and stokes basket, but we are lucky to just have her. Here she is... Click to enlarge:



A: Great looking rig! Thanks for sharing the pictures. We had a blue-over-white [Civil Rescue truck in Raleigh](#). It stayed on the roster until 1980 or abouts. Was apparently sitting somewhere in Raleigh and later photographed in 2011 being towed to a local scrap yard. The truck sat around for a few months and was finally scrapped. We didn't learn about same until the following year. [Read the blog post](#) with that unfortunate news.

Q: In 1973 or 1974, I was a member of a group that purchased an old Charleston firehouse and renovated it to become a Montessori school for pre-school children. At the time of purchase, if memory is correct, it had a personnel door on the left and an equipment garage on the right as viewed from the street. It was not much wider than twice the equipment door but it did have a backyard. It was two-story and located "downtown." (My wife complained of flooded streets when it rained during her trips to the school.)

We left Charleston in 1974 and I have forgotten the address of the school. Searching for Montessori schools in Charleston does not yield a result that is consistent with my memory. Can you identify which firehouse this might have been? None of your descriptions mention the conversion to a school. Thanks in advance.

A: You've clearly found my [Charleston fire history pages](#)! Alas, it's been some years since I researched the history of their current and former firehouses. The better person to answer your question is Grant Mishoe, a Charleston-area firefighter who has done (and continues to do) extensive historical research about CFD. Here's his contact information [which I sent].

Q: I'm a volunteer/buff out of El Paso, TX. In addition to being interested to every aspect of the fire service, I've always been fascinated by helmets and helmet shields. I'm hoping you could fill me in on the "system" Raleigh uses for their helmets and shields? For our department, we use the FDNY system for the shields: black with white letters for pumpers, red with letters for the truck, and blue for the heavy rescue. For officers, the respective company colors are used for the numbers on a white background.

For the helmets, uncertified non-SCBA firefighters wear a plain yellow helmet. These guys don't do much but learn the job and support functions. Non-certified SCBA trained firefighters get blue reflective stickers for their yellow helmets. These firefighters will work the nozzle or back up at car fires and also man monitors at defensive fires. Certified firefighters, pump operators, and sergeants wear red helmets. Pump operators and Sergeants each wear a rocker on both sides that says "Engineer" and "Sargeant," respectively. Lieutenants and Captains wear black and Chiefs wear white. Looking forward to your response.

A: The current system of helmet colors and shield designs was started in late 2007. Chiefs wear white helmets, Captains wear red helmets, and all lower ranks wear black helmets. Shield colors vary based on company assignment, and include colors for firefighter recruits and probationary firefighters. The shield colors were expanded in 2013 for squad and rescue members. See these two blog posts with a [general overview](#) (2007) and the [added shield designs](#) (2013). Helmets also have last names in large white letters on the tops of the rear brim.



Q: I reside in North Raleigh and live about a minute away from Bay Leaf Station 1. We love that department and they have been life savers (literally) to us a few times. Today I was doing some research and for the first time realized how nice their apparatus is all around. Not many county departments have seven pumper-tankers which are all 1999 model years or newer, for example. But they do have some older apparatus in their lineup, notably a 1993 E-One rescue, and a 1999 Pierce ladder.

Those pieces of apparatus have to have tons of mileage on them. The rescue's been around for more than twenty years, and the ladder's on its fifteenth year. It's the only northern ladder in the county other than Wake Forest's, which isn't close at all. Essentially you have one ladder responding to structure fires with DHFD, SHFD, BLFD, and mutual aid for WFFD and RFD at times. That's a lot of miles over the years. It *has* to be about time for the ladder (and the rescue) to be replaced.

What's the apparatus replacement schedule guideline for rescues and ladders? Twenty years? Just looking for some insight on this matter.

A: Great question! First and foremost, consider contacting the fire department itself. They love to hear from those they serve and welcome the opportunity for community outreach. They'd love to talk to you.

Ladders, along with engines and rescues, have a twenty-year replacement schedule. Thus it'll be a few more years before the ladder is due. The rescue was eligible last year, but it appears BLFD deferred same. (There are two other departments getting new rescue this fiscal year, due to eligibility.)

What is a deferment? That's when a department declines to immediately replace an eligible piece of apparatus. I've seen this happen a few times over the years in Wake County. Either the replacement is ordered in a later year, or they decline to replace the truck, period.

Who determines the fleet size of county departments, you ask? That's a legacy product of the "pre fire tax" era. When the countywide "fire tax service district" was implemented in 1999, each department's fleet (up to that time) was based on what the particular department felt they needed.

What's been added into the mix is greater governance of funds for maintaining and replacing those rigs. There's also an apparatus committee that's part of the Wake County Fire Commission, that aids in that governing. (For example, they've developed the engine, tanker, brush, and rescue specs used in recent years, and that allowed bulk purchase discounts across multiple departments.)

Can a county department buy a truck outside of this process? Yes. Bay Leaf obtained their air truck through an AFG grant, with additional funds raised by donations. Not that you asked about those aspects. Just adding some context and additional information.