

Sportland Bowling Center, 1968

08/20/10 423 W, 1 I - + 14 - 5

For your Friday enjoyment, here's a vintage photo of Sportland Bowling Center on North Boulevard, which burned on May 20, 1968. That's the old name of Capital Boulevard, for newcomers to Raleigh. The fire was reported at 7:33 a.m. Crews stretched hose across the southbound lane (singular!), which resulted in four hours of traffic delays. The smoke was visible 18 miles away in Rolesville as the one-story, frame-and-brick structure blazed.

Captain and future Fire Chief Rufus Keith was on the arriving engine and said the building was full of fire when they arrived. He estimated the response time was one-and-a-half to two minutes. He told the *News & Observer* that fire was coming out of the windows in the front, around the area of the grill and meeting rooms. Fire was also coming from the windows of the upper deck, where the lanes were located.

Firefighters battled the blaze for over two hours. The structure was valued at \$250,000, was built in 1959, and was owned by a City Councilman. The center had 24 lanes with automatic pin-setters (leased, not owned), as well as a grill and game area. The building's safe was recovered, though with the locking mechanism melted. One compartment was pried open, and money recovered. A demolition expert had been called that evening, to get the rest of the dough!

The fire was reported by telephone at 7:33 a.m. Asst. Fire Chief Jim Burnette told the *News & Observer* that a janitor reported that the fire started then grease on the grill caught fire. The janitor was quoted as saying that the fire filled the kitchen with smoke, so he opened the north and south doors of the building, to clear the smoke. Fire Chief Jack Keeter said "wind blowing out of the northwest was blowing right through the building."

The structure had a wooden roof supported by wooden beams, and brick and masonry block walls. The roof collapsed about 8:20 a.m. Fire damage was estimated at \$500,000.

Units on scene included E7, E3, T7 (service), E4, R1, E1 to relieve E3, T6 (service) to relieve T7, R3 to "pull down wall," E2 to relieve E1, and then E7 the next day, wet down debris. Note the absence of aerial apparatus. The trucks on scene were American LaFrance pumpers from the 1950s and 1960s, two 1960s service trucks, two 1950s FWD pumpers, and a 1966 Chevrolet panel van which served as Rescue 1. Plus a couple red cars. [Read more about that apparatus.](#) Click once or twice to enlarge:



Where on North Boulevard was the bowling alley located? Readers can hopefully help with that. I am guessing it's the same location as the current bowling alley, just south of Crabtree Boulevard.

Legeros - 08/20/10 - 07:07

I think you may be right. In the bottom left of the photo, that bridge looks just like the current bridge that is the entrance to the bowling alley off northbound Capital Blvd. And in the picture, beyond that bridge, that looks like it could be the hill in front of what is now Bobby Murray Chevy.

rfburns - 08/20/10 - 09:37

Same location as current. My Cub Scout den was supposed to go there the following weekend. We went to Putt Putt on S Wilmington instead. It was 'Downtown Blvd' from the Dawson-McDowell split out to where 'Old Wake Forest Road' split off (the commercial building there on the right was the S&H Green Stamps store). From that split out to the US1-US401 split it was called 'North Blvd'.

DJ - 08/20/10 - 22:15

Cub scouts! We need a picture with that. In fact, could be a future blog feature. Childhood photos of favorite fire and EMS personnel. Dale, you go first.

Legeros - 08/20/10 - 23:01

Name: (real name preferred)
E-mail: (optional)
Web Site: (optional)

Remember personal info?

Yes

No

Comment:

/ [Textile](#)

Comment moderation is enabled on this site. This means that your comment will not be visible on this site until it has been approved by an editor.

To prevent spam we require you to answer this silly question

What are the FIRST TWO LETTERS of the word 'fire'?

[\(Register your username / Log in\)](#)

Notify: Yes, send me email when someone replies.

Hide email: Yes, hide my email address.

Small print: All html tags except and <i> will be removed from your comment. You can make links by just typing the url or mail-address.