

Bethel fire department celebrates new building

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Bethel Fire Chief Jeff Proctor said several factors are responsible for the department's new home on Snug Harbor Road during an open house and ribbon cutting at the new facility Sunday afternoon.

Proctor told a full house that increased county funding, community support, grants from the State Volunteer Fire Department Grant Program and a dedicated group of firefighters allowed Bethel to build the much-needed facility.

"It's a dream come true," Proctor said.

The event was very well attended, with hundreds on hand, including founding department members and others who contributed greatly to its operation over its 28-year history.

Charles Skinner Jr., a former chief of the Hertford Fire Department and a former county fire marshal, gave a brief history of the department.

Skinner said that on July 27, 1953, Hertford firefighters responded to a house fire in Bethel. They could see the smoke when the trucks rolled onto Highway 17. But the response time was too long, and the house was lost.



A ribbon cutting was held to officially open the new Bethel Fire Department station Sunday afternoon. As department members looked on (above), County Commissioner Mack Nixon, Chief Jeff Proctor, President Donald Hobbs, and Commissioners Wallace Nelson, Ben Hobbs and Charles Ward cut the ribbon. Sparky the Fire Dog (right) also made an appearance at the open house.



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The same things happened again in 1957.

In the 1960s, word of the development of Snug Harbor and later Holiday Island, hit the streets. Those communities would put even more houses in an area hard to protect from Hertford, Skinner said.

One morning in the store that sits at the corner of Snug Harbor and Pender roads, Skinner said he and some Bethel residents discussed organizing a fire department in Bethel.

It was decided that a meeting would be held at the community building on March 4, 1965 to discuss the matter. A couple of firefighters from Hertford came to the meeting also.

From that meeting, the first rural fire department in Perquimans County was born. It was chartered on Aug. 2, 1965 as the

Bethel Community Fire Protection Association, Inc. The first officers were Roy Chappell Jr., president; Maynard Fleetwood, vice president and chief; William Corprew, secretary; and Emmett Long, treasurer.

Skinner said the roster of the first department listed several family members, including fathers and sons, brothers, in-laws and cousins.

At the open house Sunday, there were several second and even third, generation firefighters wearing a Bethel uniform.

The first truck in Bethel came from a rural volunteer department in Forsyth County.

Firefighters have held many fund raising campaigns for a building and equipment over the years. A lot of hours have also been spent in training.

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After Bethel chartered, other communities also realized the need for fire departments and four more were chartered: Intercounty in 1966, Winfall in 1967, Belvidere Chappell Hill in 1971 and Durants Neck in 1980.

During the program, Association President Donald Hobbs thanked many people and groups for their support of the fire department.

Also on hand was

Lauren Thompson, administrative officer with the N.C. Department of Insurance. Firefighters said Thompson's help has been critical in helping them to apply for and receive grants from the state.

After the ribbon cutting, the large crowd in attendance enjoyed refreshments prepared by the Ladies Auxilliary and touring the facility and equipment.