

# Henderson Memories:

City of  
Henderson  
Living Histories

**CITY OF HENDERSON**  
**LIVING HISTORY INTERVIEW**  
**FIRE CHIEF JIM CAVALIERI**  
**MARCH 20, 2003**  
**PART 2**

1                   INTERVIEWER: You're not only the chief of the fire department,  
2                   you're also someone who was born and raised in Henderson. Can you tell us  
3                   a little bit about some of your personal experiences growing up in  
4                   Henderson?

5                   CHIEF CAVALIERI: Henderson was a wonderful place to grow up. It  
6                   was truly a small town. I remember things such as Water Street and  
7                   Van Valey Shoe Store. We used to go shopping for shoes there and he'd  
8                   always talk my mother into buying ugly shoes because they fit and I was  
9                   always upset over that. But that's where you had to go to shop because it  
10                  was close. The market in downtown Henderson and driving to Fremont  
11                  Street with no Tropicanas and no Flamingos or Saharas, just the Boulder  
12                  Highway, with no speed limit. Those are some of the memories that I have. It  
13                  was truly a small community that took care of each other and it was a great  
14                  place to grow up.

15                 INTERVIEWER: So, in your teenage - - or when you were driving, can  
16                 you tell us about some of your trips up Boulder Highway?

17                 CHIEF CAVALIER: No. (laughter) I don't recall ever driving up  
18                 Boulder Highway at any rate of speed other than that that was safe and  
19                 appropriate.

20                 INTERVIEWER: Well, not necessarily, that you were driving fast, but  
21                 where were you going?

22                 CHIEF CAVALIERI: We'd spent a lot of time in Boulder City. That  
23                 seemed to be different than Henderson, so we liked to go there. Fremont

1 Street was always a wonderful place to hang out with Trader Bills, I think was  
2 the name of it. And you'd get to cruise Fremont Street and turn around at the  
3 Blue Angel Motel, which you probably wouldn't want to do now. But those  
4 were some of the things that we did.

5 INTERVIEWER: In terms of the Henderson casinos, The Eldorado  
6 and The Rainbow Room, I mean, do you remember when those opened?

7 CHIEF CAVALIERI: I don't recall when they opened. It seems as  
8 though they'd been there forever, to me. I don't know that their opening had a  
9 great impact on me, personally, but they've been there forever as far as I'm  
10 concerned. I don't remember when they weren't there.

11 INTERVIEWER: Did you ever go - - I mean, were there dances there  
12 or were they just, basically, casinos. I don't really know that much about  
13 them.

14 CHIEF CAVALIERI: I think most of the dances that I attended were at  
15 the Youth Center. Every Friday night there was a dance at the Youth Center,  
16 and that's where we went to enjoy ourselves and have a good time and see  
17 people from school and other areas and it was a fun time.

18 INTERVIEWER: Is that Youth Center still there?

19 CHIEF CAVALIERI: It's not. There is a youth center there. It's been  
20 replaced, but there's still portions of the old Youth Center there. The old  
21 Youth Center was a fun place to be. I was telling someone just this morning -  
22 - we were trying to think of the fellow's name who ran it and his name was

1 Pappy Swift. And if you got out of line, he'd crack you on the head with a pool  
2 cue and, and I think I garnered a knot or two during my youth from getting  
3 whacked with that pool cue.

4 INTERVIEWER: Do you remember when the Youth Center was built  
5 and Frank Sinatra and everybody coming for that fundraiser?

6 CHIEF CAVALIERI: I don't. I don't.

7 INTERVIEWER: Any other thing that stands out in your memory, just  
8 of significant events in the history of Henderson, like (inaudible) benchmark  
9 events?

10 CHIEF CAVALIERI: This is gonna sound kind of silly. But, I think, the  
11 opening of Safeway on Boulder Highway was a significant event. It seemed  
12 like it took a great deal of the shopping from the Water Street area and it was  
13 something like we'd not seen. A lot of the mom and pop shops that were on  
14 Water Street and then this big corporation coming in with a strip mall like we  
15 weren't used to as well. I think that was significant.

16 As far as the fire department goes, some significant events, I think,  
17 initially, the agreement between Basic Management, Incorporated and the  
18 City of Henderson to turn the fire department over to the City was the  
19 beginning of our fire department. So that was certainly significant.

20 The opening of our Fire Training Center, which continues to be a  
21 premier state-of-the-art training center, has provided us and many of the  
22 departments throughout the valley with the ability to train and become better  
23 at our craft. And then the explosive growth to the southwest, and the ability to

1 look at better ways to build fire stations and partnerships with private entities  
2 and builders to provide those, has made a great deal of impact on our  
3 department and the city as a whole.

4 INTERVIEWER: Do you think it benefits the residents that a lot of  
5 Henderson has grown in this master-planned community development, I  
6 mean, from the standpoint of, like you were saying, being able to work with  
7 the developers and plan things out. I mean, is that something that the  
8 residents of Henderson really might not see it directly, but there's a lot of  
9 functionality in there?

10 CHIEF CAVALIERI: The one thing I can say is from growing up in  
11 Henderson and having that small-town atmosphere, I think what the  
12 master-planned communities have allowed us to do is keep some of that  
13 small-town atmosphere. That area that you live in is your home. And it is a  
14 small town to you. And we've remained a bedroom community, which has  
15 allowed for much of that same feeling as well. We haven't seen the major  
16 growth in casino or hotel corridors. And so, I think that master-planned  
17 communities have been a great benefit to the city and they've allowed us to  
18 maintain that small city feeling.

19 INTERVIEWER: Why do you stay in Henderson?

20 CHIEF CAVALIERI: Henderson is my home. I was born and raised  
21 here. Our children have been raised here and now our grandchildren are  
22 being raised in Henderson. It's a wonderful place to live and participate in all

1 of the programs and functions that are here. And so I don't see myself living  
2 anywhere else in the near future.

3 INTERVIEWER: You know, when you think about the community you  
4 live in, is it just the place you live or do you have a certain pride - - like when  
5 you talk to other people in saying, you know, I live in Henderson. Where does  
6 that pride come from, if you do?

7 CHIEF CAVALIERI: I do have a great deal of pride in Henderson. I  
8 believe much of it comes from being raised here and seeing the friends grow  
9 up to be successful, and the values that have been instilled in the people who  
10 have grown up and moved here and now live here. Much of that pride comes  
11 from my career and being a firefighter. I'm extremely proud to be a firefighter  
12 for the City of Henderson Fire Department and to work for the City of  
13 Henderson. And so all of those things put together do create that pride in  
14 where I live and what I do. I guess, even to the basic sense of who I am,  
15 much of it comes from being here all of my life.

16 INTERVIEWER: You know, if you thought about the phrase, "living the  
17 American dream", what does that phrase mean to you and do you think  
18 you've been able to do it in Henderson?

19 CHIEF CAVALIERI: Probably the first portion of living the American  
20 dream is being allowed to grow up and enjoy a safe environment and I was  
21 provided with that. And, as I stated earlier, so have my children, then, and  
22 our grandchildren as well. And so that safe environment has allowed me to  
23 grow up and live the American dream.

1           The second portion of that is in the fact that I don't believe there's too  
2           many people in this world who can say, I wake up every morning and love to  
3           go to work. And for the past 15 and a half years, there's not been a morning  
4           where I haven't gotten out of bed thrilled at the fact of going to work for the  
5           City of Henderson Fire Department.

6           So, when you put those two things together, I have lived the American  
7           dream and I am continuing to live it.

8           INTERVIEWER: Anything else that you think we haven't really  
9           touched on or personal little stories? I mean, you mentioned Pap Swift - - I  
10          think I said the name right. Any other people that stand out in your memory  
11          over the years, you know, as characters or stories of falling in the lake or  
12          anything?

13          CHIEF CAVALIERI: Well, I remember in the old days when for no  
14          reason at all the police would chase you. They generally wouldn't take you to  
15          jail, they'd give you swift kick in the back of the pants and tell you they were  
16          going to tell your parents. And I recall that happening to many friends of  
17          mine, but never to me. And so, that's all that I'll say about that.

18          INTERVIEWER: Do you remember cruising up and down Water  
19          Street?

20          CHIEF CAVALIERI: All of the kids in Henderson used to cruise  
21          Water Street. That was the social event of the weekend. And when you got  
22          sick of driving up and down Water Street you'd park at the Polar Queen right



- 1 in the middle of Water Street and that was the social gathering place for the
- 2 youth of Henderson when they weren't at the Youth Center dances.