

# **Henderson Memories:**

**City of  
Henderson  
Living Histories**

**CITY OF HENDERSON**  
**LIVING HISTORY INTERVIEW**  
**FIRE CHIEF JIM CAVALIERI**  
**MARCH 20, 2003**  
**PART 1**

1 CHIEF JIM CAVALIERI: My name is Jim Cavalieri and I am the  
2 Fire Chief for the City of Henderson Fire Department.

3 INTERVIEWER: How long have you been fire chief?

4 CHIEF CAVALIERI: I've been fire chief for just under two years now.

5 INTERVIEWER: And how long have you been in the fire department  
6 with the City of Henderson?

7 CHIEF CAVALIERI: I've been with the fire department for about 15  
8 and a half years, total.

9 INTERVIEWER: What kind of changes have you seen over the last 15  
10 and a half years?

11 CHIEF CAVALIERI: Probably the most significant change that we've  
12 seen in the fire department is due to the explosive growth that's compelled us  
13 to grow along with the city, and so things such as opening four fire stations in  
14 two years - - with the construction and hiring and purchasing all of the  
15 equipment that goes along with that - - it's quite the challenge keeping up with  
16 the growth.

17 INTERVIEWER: In terms of, like, things that people don't realize about  
18 fire departmentally, you know, why is it important for you to grow? What  
19 would you want to tell someone out there in the community, you know, about  
20 what the fire department is accomplishing, other than, you know, obviously,  
21 being there when a building catches on fire?

22 CHIEF CAVALIERI: Of course, the main purpose for us being here is  
23 emergency response and that's medical and fire related and different - - all

1 types of different responses. We also provide public assistance when needed  
2 and education programs and take care of many non-emergency functions as  
3 well.

4 INTERVIEWER: And, you know, part of what we're trying to do is a  
5 historical perspective, so if you think back to when you first joined the fire  
6 department 15 years ago, could you describe that fire department to me?

7 CHIEF CAVALIERI: I think I can remember back that far. We had  
8 three fire stations at the time, and I was on the bottom of the seniority list,  
9 which numbered 35. The fire station I was assigned to was a metal building  
10 that's now located down by the boys club, the Henderson Boys' and Girls'  
11 Club. And that's what we ran our equipment out of. And so, since that time,  
12 we've seen six fire stations added, 150 personnel added, major changes in  
13 the types of equipment and apparatus that we use. And so, the changes  
14 have certainly been dramatic.

15 INTERVIEWER: That first fire station - - that metal fire station that you  
16 were in, was that the original fire station in the city of Henderson?

17 CHIEF CAVALIERI: It wasn't. The original fire station is right here in  
18 downtown Henderson. I didn't have the opportunity to work in it, but I did visit  
19 it a time or two when I was brand new. And it was all they had at the time and  
20 it provided the citizens of Henderson, at that time, with what they needed for  
21 fire and emergency services.

22 INTERVIEWER: Is the building that you worked in, the metal building,  
23 still there?

1 CHIEF CAVALIERI: It is. It's still there. I haven't gone in it since  
2 we've left, but I'm sure they've made some minor changes to it.

3 INTERVIEWER: So, can you tell me about some of the changes over  
4 the 15 and a half years that you've been in the fire station?

5 CHIEF CAVALIERI: Sure. I remember learning to drive a fire truck  
6 that had a clutch and a stick shift, and we used to hate to drive it because it  
7 was so difficult to down shift and keep the thing going. And I remember when  
8 we bought new equipment, they were called "hushes" the new state-of-the-art  
9 fire trucks for the time. We went from riding outside of the fire truck to inside  
10 the fire truck in cabs that were quiet and out of the weather and provided  
11 protection from those things. So that was significant. And that's changed  
12 even more to date.

13 We now have fire apparatus that is state-of-the-art and the best that  
14 you can purchase. So those are some of the changes, as well, that we've  
15 seen.

16 INTERVIEWER: Fifteen and a half years ago is right around the time  
17 of the PEPCON explosion. Were you in the fire department when PEPCON  
18 exploded?

19 CHIEF CAVALIERI: I was. I wasn't working that day. I was  
20 working - - I happened to be in Las Vegas at Tropicana and Wynn Road and  
21 felt and saw the results of the explosion and drove home, went to the fire  
22 station I was assigned to, grabbed my equipment, and then went to the  
23 incident command post and waited for an assignment there.

1                   INTERVIEWER: In general, I mean, not just specific to the fire  
2                   department, how do you think the City responded to that, you know, very  
3                   cataclysmic event?

4                   CHIEF CAVALIERI: Overall, we did extremely well, if you think of how  
5                   significant that explosion was, all of the damage that it caused, as well as the  
6                   injuries and evacuations and all of those things. The City brought into effect  
7                   mutual aid agreements and help from other departments, and we responded  
8                   very well to that very difficult situation.

9                   INTERVIEWER: One of the things that I've learned, you know, I really  
10                  didn't know that much about Henderson, it really is a community, you know,  
11                  and it's a pretty tight-knit community. You know, after PEPCON happened,  
12                  did you see any of that community spirit coming together?

13                 CHIEF CAVALIERI: Absolutely. Everybody had to work together  
14                 during that time and what we've seen, whenever there's a major incident, is  
15                 the community pull together. And whether it was emergency services or  
16                 community groups or families, I think that events like that make us look at  
17                 things in a different light. And then the humanistic side of it comes out and  
18                 people do respond appropriately, and that's what happened.

19                 INTERVIEWER: You were talking before about the growth in the city  
20                 of Henderson and, obviously, Lake Las Vegas is, you know, a major  
21                 expansion, you know, in the last 15, 20 years. How has that changed your  
22                 role, or the fire department's role?

1                   CHIEF CAVALIERI: Well, along with the growth at the Lake Las  
2 Vegas came major resorts, and we look at other areas in Henderson where  
3 that's taken place as well. Major resorts that have many hotel rooms and  
4 many floors are man-power intensive when it comes to emergencies. And so,  
5 some of the things that we've had to do to respond are make sure that those  
6 hotels have the most up-to-date, life-safety packages so the people who  
7 come here are safe. And we've done very well at that.

8                   We also had to change the way we responded to emergencies. We  
9 had to learn about responding to high-rise emergencies and how to handle  
10 those. And we've responded very well to that, and today we can respond to  
11 those emergencies with confidence that we can take care of them.

12                  INTERVIEWER: Anything in particular in terms of just training or  
13 personnel that you've had to change to respond to a high-rise hotel? I mean,  
14 just again, in the growth and changes over time.

15                  CHIEF CAVALIERI: To respond to high-rise emergencies it's  
16 extremely man-power intensive. Things such as not using elevators and  
17 walking up stairwells, major evacuations problems, all of those things  
18 compelled us to change the way we did business at the major hotels. So we  
19 learned those processes and procedures and they're now in place for those  
20 responses.