

North Tahoe firefighting in the 1950s

By Pat Dillon, Moonshine Ink

A gleaming red fire engine roars by, a paramedic ambulance close behind. Arriving at the scene, the firefighters attack the fire, assess the wrecked car, or stabilize the sick or injured person. On the North Shore, we're fortunate to have the expertise and equipment to handle almost any emergency, but has it always been this way?

The North Tahoe community has only had a year-round population since the 1920s. At that time, there were just a few hardy families that stuck it out through the often brutal winters. After World War II, however, people built more homes, established businesses, and the towns of Kings Beach and Tahoe City expanded.

During summer, the U.S. Forest Service provided fire protection, with engines equipped with small water tanks for fighting brush fires. While adequate for the infrequent forest fire problem, these units and the rangers that staffed them were not equipped to deal with structure fires. In winter, the residents were left to handle blazes themselves. Even into the 1950s, bucket brigades were still used by neighbors to fight fires.

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