

# Historic Belmont Firehouse

## Safety Learning Center & Fire Museum News

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*The Safety Learning Center & Fire Museum is a cooperative effort between Portland Fire & Rescue and the Jeff Morris Fire & Life Safety Foundation.*

**For Information or appointments:**

**Don Porth**

**Public Education Office**

**503-823-3615**

**Belmont Firehouse**

900 SE 35th Avenue

(at Belmont Street)

Portland OR 97214

Open the 2nd Saturday  
of each month 10 till 3  
or by appointment.

**No Safety Saturday  
in July & August**

### “Straight Tips”

“PFD”

PFD doesn't mean Portland Fire Department here. It means “Personal Flotation Device.” Water safety begins with the right things to make your experience safe. Follow all boating regulations for PFD's. Be especially careful in cold or fast moving water. Weak swimmers should always consider the support of a PFD. Water sports are fun but safety needs to swim along.

**Think Safe**

## Fireboats Bring 105 Years of History

Fireboats have served Portland for many years. The first, the “George H. Williams,” resulted from the vision of Chief David Campbell. The *Williams* was christened and launched on February 27, 1904.

It would not be long before the *Williams* was joined by the “David Campbell.” The *Campbell* was tested for service on May 14, 1913 (although the specific launch date is unknown). Both the *Williams* and the *Campbell* were steam powered and worked very well for their day. By 1927 however, times would change.

Three identical fireboats were commissioned for build in 1927. They would become the new “David Campbell,” the “Karl Gunster,” and the “Mike Laudenklos.” These 85 foot 11 inch, gas-powered crafts would provide primary service for many years until the addition of the “Virgil Spencer” in 1972. The *Spencer* was an entirely different type of boat, built for more speed and less capacity. The *Campbell*, *Gunster*, and *Laudenklos* were designed to pump 8,000 gallons of water per minute (later im-

proved to approximately 14,000 gallons per minute) while the *Spencer* would pump only 6,000. By contrast, the *Spencer* could travel considerably faster since it was half the length.

In 1973, the Fire Bureau assumed the duties of the Harbor Patrol. Formerly performed by the Police Bureau, this was a contentious move that carried significant political discussion. This consolidation added the “Karl Prehn” and the “LV Jenkins” to the fleet. While not fireboats, they did serve significant roles during their service.

With large fires on the decline and land access to waterfront properties improved, fireboats remained smaller, more maneuverable, and quick. The second “George H. Williams” was launched in 1984. It is 40 feet long and travels at 30 mph. The “Vern Buss,” built in 1995, is similar in size (42 feet), style, and service. In the continuing evolution of service, personal watercraft are now available to crews for quick response in critical areas. It's safe to say that Portland Fire & Rescue will continue to protect Portland from both sides of the shore for many years to come.

## Baskin-Robbins 31Cent Scoop Night

America's favorite ice cream restaurant, Baskin-Robbins has generously offered to raise funds to support the Safety Learning Center at the Belmont Firehouse.

The event will be held in Tigard (11705 SW Pacific Highway, Tigard OR 97223) on April 29th from 5PM to 10PM. This will be the second year Baskin-Robbins has chosen to support the Historic Belmont Firehouse.

Each 2.5 oz. scoop of ice cream is only 31 cents, making donations to the Belmont Firehouse an easy ad-



dition to your purchase. Funds will support safety education programs.

Enjoy a family treat and support safety by visiting our community partner on April 29th.

**Safety Learning Center & Fire Museum Event Line 503-823-3616**

## Remember This???

The fireboat “Virgil Spencer” had a rather rough beginning. During trials to determine her fitness. A broken pump housing scuttled the public unveiling and sank the *Spencer*. When the engine was started, it promptly pumped the hull full of water and the result is pictured here. The *Spencer* was not the only boat to experience challenges during early service. Read the article at the bottom of this page for more details of the unique beginnings experienced by Portland Fire & Rescue’s fireboats.

Do you have a memory to share? Submit them to Don Porth at the Belmont Firehouse. Call 503-823-3615 or [dporth@fire.ci.portland.or.us](mailto:dporth@fire.ci.portland.or.us)



**Portland Fire History, Safety Learning Center Information, Foundation Background**  
Find it on the web at [www.jeffmorrisfoundation.org](http://www.jeffmorrisfoundation.org)

### \*\*\* FIRE SALE \*\*\*



Water safety is not just for rivers, streams, and swimming pools. It begins in the home, especially if young ones are around. Hot water can severely injure young or old. Bathtub thermometers make good sense and may prevent a serious injury. Why not try a floating bathtub thermometer that is both functional and fun.

Visit the Belmont Firehouse Gift Shop or shop on-line for the entire selection of clothing and gifts. All proceeds support the Safety Learning Center & Fire Museum.

[www.jeffmorrisfoundation.org](http://www.jeffmorrisfoundation.org)

## Fireboats—It’s Not Always Smooth Sailing...

In September 1904, the original *Williams* was presented with it’s first real test at a waterfront machine shop fire. Upon arrival, she aimed her turrets at the building but, much to the dismay of the Captain, only a dribble of water came out. It seems a stoker had failed to light a boiler. Once lit, the ensuing stream of water pushed the fireboat into the middle of the river which necessitated another delay while the boiler was re-fired. While all this was happening, \$70,000 worth of real estate went up in smoke.

On July 29, 1913, the newly launched *David Campbell* was spraying water onto the deck of the burning Steel Bridge when she crashed into the bridge itself and damaged the front turret. Unfortunately, the

bad luck continued on August 4th when the *David Campbell* was unable to raise a “vacuum” to fight a fire that was later extinguished by land companies. The Oregonian newspaper sarcastically wrote that “...the new fireboat is in no danger from destruction from any fire that does not originate in her own hold.”

It would be 59 years before the next fireboat mishap would occur. The *Virgil Spencer*, while being started up for her 1972 public debut, promptly sank when her damaged pump housing filled the hull with water. The media had fun with this too. But the *Spencer*, as with all Portland fireboats, went on to provide valuable service to the city of Portland for many years.

\*\*\* Safety Learning Center & Fire Museum Event Line 503-823-3616 \*\*\*