



Rising together to make things happen....

## North Hills Phoenix Association

# NEWS

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### Remarks by NHPA President Glenn Hammonds at the Opening of North Hills Fire Station 7

Mayor Brown, Chief Simon, President de la Fuente, Councilmember Brunner, neighbors and friends.

On behalf of the North Hills Phoenix Association and the Oakland Fire Services Agency I'd like to welcome you all to today's celebration of our new fire station, the North Hills Fire Station, Station #7. The station so nice they opened it twice.

"Work is done and then forgotten; thus it lasts forever" is how the Tao Te Ching describes working hard toward a worthwhile goal. The product of the work remains, while all else, the how and the why and even the troubles along the way, eventually fades. On this day, before memory fades entirely, we celebrate the work of men and women, named and many more unnamed, who worked on our fire station.

The need for a new fire station in this area was identified very shortly after the 1991 firestorm, but many obstacles stood between this need and today's station.

Funding for the station was secured in 1992 through Measure I. Steve Renten was a central figure in that campaign, which was a notable success, passing with a 70% majority. We thank Steve for his efforts and results on this, as on so many other matters. The initial intent to build a station staffed and administered by Oakland, Berkeley, and East Bay Regional Parks was reluctantly abandoned after a long search for a suitable site and additional funding for such a multiuse station.

After Oakland determined to proceed alone with a hills station and acquired the present site community involvement increased. Some 3 1/2 years ago in a meeting either organized or widely publicized by Anne Seasons, great support for the presence of the station was voiced, and Peter Scott was moved to volunteer to design the station in order to make it possible. Shortly thereafter, Anne Seasons and Danny Aarons appeared before the City Council to present an amended budget for the fire station that would allow the project to continue. The support of our Council members, both Jane Brunner and Sheila Jordan, before her, was essential. Jane Brunner and her aide, Bielle Moore, have been a constant source of support for difficulties in our area, and we thank them both for their efforts.

The difficult technical design process was assisted first by Reg Garcia, now Chief of our neighboring Berkeley Fire

Department, and then most ably by our own Assistant Fire Chief, Don Parker. Our heartfelt thanks to both these good men, who have contributed so much to our community, both on this project and others.

Also notable today are the efforts of Scott Constable, the artist, for the striking and beautiful, though not quite completed sundial we see before us, and Nancy Pollock, who designed the landscaping for the station. I'm sure you'll agree with owe a debt of gratitude for these creative efforts.

The station is already providing increased safety for our neighborhood. Although it has been open only since July 14, it has already responded repeatedly to both fire and medical emergencies. We hope that the station will also serve as a place for neighborhood meetings, a training center for the CORE program, and an Emergency Command Center. We thank the Fire Services agency for their support of the unique and valuable CORE program, and the work of Deborah Reisman and Henry Renteria on emergency preparedness. We also hope to meet here with our valued community police, Captain Ralph Lacer, Leigh Renteria, and Nicole Elder. Another aspect of community we hope to learn about here is our responsibilities as residents of this beautiful area to keep our lots free of excess fuel (otherwise known as our treasured landscaping). We must insist that the larger land owners in our area such as CALTRANS, East Bay Regional Parks and East Bay MUD, do their part in maintaining low fuel loads as well. We seek proper management of the wildlands nearby, such as Claremont Canyon, nearby, to ensure a fire-safe environment.

Our station should be staffed not only on high fire days, not only seasonally, but full time year-round. We are particularly pleased to have the support of our Councilmember Jane Brunner on this issue, and urge each of you to contact Jane voicing your support and to sign the petition we have circulating supporting full time staffing of fire station #7.

Today this beautiful station stands as an excellent example of people coming together to create community. We fought for it, and intend to cherish it and use it to further our North Hills community. We extend a very warm welcome to the Oakland Fire Services Agency to the North hills.

– July 24, 1999

# Fire Station History

The disaster of October 1991 spawned a number of investigations and initiatives. One such activity was a citizens advisory group guiding the City Manager's Office on fire zone recovery and disaster planning for future events. Out of that group came the legislation that became the Measure I Bond, which proposed to finance a number of emergency preparedness measures. After debating with City officials as to whether a North Hills station was needed, whether there was a place for it and so on, the citizens advisory group successfully advocated placing the fire station on the bond's list of projects. The bond passed with overwhelming support throughout the City.

The directions from the City Council to the City Manager on this project included a stricture that the new station be a multi-jurisdiction development to serve, and be funded by, Oakland and Berkeley. East Bay Parks and the University of California were also invited to participate. The ensuing official discussions took two paths.

One discussion collected the joint requirements each agency had for the station while the other considered locations. The location options quickly settled down to four sites. The most popular with the residents was at the four-way intersection of Claremont, Grizzly Peak Blvd. and Fish Ranch Road. The other sites were further north, albeit it within Oakland, at the behest of Berkeley. However there was no immediate agreement.

Meanwhile, the list of features expanded. At one point the proposed station included a depot for post-earthquake supplies, a helipad, a natural history room and community meeting rooms. Naturally, the price of the facility exceeded the money allocated for it. The only site that could accommodate such a grand facility lacked power and water and would require considerable grading on an environmentally sensitive plot. This period of discussions lasted almost two years.

Ultimately these discussions lead nowhere. The failure to come to terms on location and the escalating cost of the features resulted in a stalemate. At various times the move toward a new station almost ceased but political pressure ensured that it didn't. During this period, citizen agitation and the now defunct Fire District kept the pressure on the

Oakland Council and its employees to produce a North Oakland Fire Station. The Fire District offered political support to build and funding to operate the station. At one point, the proposed station became leverage to reopen the Grass Valley Station, closed after Proposition 13. Grass Valley has been open during the fire season since 1997.

When a landowner made an offer of a site for the fire station to Oakland in lieu of rebuilding their house, the political decision was finally made to abandon the joint project with the other jurisdictions. The offer of the land was accepted.

When the location of the new site became widely known, there was some neighborhood consternation as to why their area had been chosen and why the other sites had been abandoned. To address those concerns, former Councilmember Sheila Jordan and Fire Chief John Baker (ret.) called a public meeting in October 1995 at St. Theresa's Church in Rockridge.

As soon as the meeting began it became overwhelmingly clear that attendees were less concerned with the site selection process and the location than they were with the fact that, 4 years after the Fire, and 3 years after authorizing funding for a station, no construction had taken place. Even immediate neighbors of the proposed facility were plainly eager to break ground. When Peter Scott stood up to volunteer services (pro bono) as architect, the last concerns about the neighborhood fit and the quality of the facility melted away.

– Steve Renten

## Fire Station 7 Facts

Quarters: Engine 257  
Staff: 4 Firefighters  
Station Cost: \$987,000  
Area: 3,600 sq. ft.  
Lot Size: 9,700 sq. ft.  
Architects: Peter Gray Scott  
Steve Kodama, Associate  
Project Managers: Diego Garcia & Jose Gonzalez  
Artist: Scott Constable