

Davenport Firemen Slate Reunion

The Davenport Volunteer Fire Department will hold a reunion barbecue Saturday for present and former firefighters to celebrate the 40th anniversary of its founding.

Some 50 men are expected to attend the event, which will begin at 6:30 p.m. in the Davenport Fire House.

"The party will go on until the last memories of the good old days have been revived," Chief Elio Orlando said. "Down through the years this great bunch of men fought many fires and conducted many rescue operations, so they'll have a lot of memories to exchange."

The department was formed in 1930 through efforts by the Davenport Improvement Club. A club committee composed of Frank Meyers, Charles Bella, Luis Poletti and Frank Garaventa led the work of developing the by-laws and forming the department.

Frank Meyers was elected first fire chief, and the first fire truck was home-made during evenings and spare time. Meyers was master mechanic. The truck, called an Overland, was smaller than a Ford ranchero.

In the following years the truck was spruced up and participated in City of Santa Cruz parades. Meyers, Garaventa, Burl Clark and Burl Clark Jr. (three or four years old) took the fire truck to Santa Cruz along 20 miles of winding, narrow dirt roads.

Mounted on the truck, and bigger than it, was a sign urging the world to "Watch Us Grow."

The next truck, a Pierce Arrow, lasted until World War II, at which time the department came to a standstill. In 1949, however, again through efforts of the Davenport Improvement Club, the department was reorganized.

A committee composed of Bella, Sal Celebrado, Elio Orlando and Al Singelton was appointed under chairmanship of Francis Gregory to head up the reorganization. Through donations by Santa Cruz businessmen and residents along the



Forty years of providing firefighting and rescue services will be celebrated Saturday by the Davenport Volunteer Fire Department at a barbecue for former and present firemen. The de-

partment provides other benefits to the community as well, including an annual free community dance in May. The first free dance to be given was announced

in this fashion in 1961 by (left to right) Mrs. Larry DiTano, Mrs. Albert Novelli, Larry DiTano, Albert Novelli, Mrs. Elio Orlando and Elio Orlando, present fire chief.

coast, some \$2500 was raised. In three years a 1934 Chevrolet fire truck was bought from the Live Oak Fire Department.

In 1952 Gregory was elected fire chief, a job he held until 1962. The fire team was composed of 10 men.

A second fire truck was bought in 1961 from U. S. Army surplus. Money for this purchase was raided through donations, coffee and cake sales, and dances.

In 1959, however, the men decided to form a fire district to make purchases on a more businesslike basis. The district was established in 1960, and in 1965 another truck was bought this one from the Division of Forestry.

The Davenport Fire House was built in 1958 through volunteer labor and through donations of materials from various merchants. Biggest gifts came from the Big Creek Lumber Co. and the Portland Cement Co.

"Our present fire house was built at absolutely no cost to the taxpayers, in fact," Orlando said.

In its 40-year history the de-

partment has trained more than 80 firemen, the records show, and these men have prevented large, potential fire disasters in one of the county's wilder, most remote regions. Fires fought have included brush fires, structure fires, and forest fires.

Some of the fires were lost, the records show also, because they were too advanced to control by the time the alarm was sounded. Lost in such fires were historic Ocean View Hotel, the Hotel D'Italia, and the Davenport Cash Store. No lives have ever been lost in one of the fires.

The department also performs rescue work and has saved down through the years the lives of many people stranded on cliffs or trapped in sea caves. Last year, for example, the department handled eight rescue calls successfully.

Other department contributions to Davenport include maintenance of the local dump, provision of Christmas candy to town children, and a free community dance annually.

Biggest department expense

today is insurance of the men, building and equipment. However, the fire district taxes are the lowest imposed by the 15 fire districts of the county, Orlando said.

The present district stretches from the county's northern boundary line to approximately and extends three miles inland from the ocean.

In this district, Orlando said, the biggest hazards are not to the residents but to the tourists.

"They do not know the dangers of the seas and the mountains around us," Orlando explained, "So sometimes, before they know it, some of these people are in trouble and we have to aid them."

Efforts have been made to invite to the barbecue all the men who have provided, this emergency aid to tourists and residents alike over the past four decades.

"It is possible, however, that we may have missed contacting a former member of our department," Orlando said. "If we have, we hope those who have not been contacted will telephone us promptly at 423-1363.