

Bonny Doon

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World's Oldest Volunteer Fireman

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Earl Schoonover, 74, the "world's oldest active volunteer fireman," will be proud to shake your hand, in person, at the Bonny Doon Fire Team's annual steak barbecue Saturday from 4 to 7 p.m. on the Bonny Doon School grounds off Pine Flat Road.

Moreover, if you can successfully challenge Schoonover for the world's title, he and the other 23 members of the fire team will treat you to a steak dinner.

"I really won't mind if I lose that title," Schoonover said. "If someone can take it from me, I'll figure he deserves it because he's worked a bit longer to win it."

Schoonover has served with the volunteers since 1959. In 1960 he became its second president. He's now a vice president, and he captains the rescue squad that provides emergency first-aid service at any hour of day or night in the sprawling Bonny Doon School District.

"We wanted a little fire department up here," Schoonover said, "because of our remote location. The fire team was organized by the county's Civil Defense organization, and we are a Civil Defense Fire Team."

"The emergency rescue service is important up here, too."

A person can bleed to death in a minute. Or suppose you need oxygen. If you are denied oxygen for five minutes you lose a part of your brain. If you are denied it for 10 minutes you become a vegetable."

Schoonover has personal knowledge of the value of emergency rescue service everywhere. A few years ago he was hospitalized suddenly with an aneurysm and lost a leg.

His fire team duties include teaching Red Cross first aid and family emergency first aid in the Civil Defense program.

"One of the best classes I ever had," he said, "was at the Aptos Fire Department. Some of my students there are Red Cross instructors now."

Schoonover's parents brought

him to California from Nebraska in 1905. His father, J. A. Schoonover, was postmaster of Beverly, Neb., in 1899 and became postmaster in Beverly, Calif., in 1908.

"I remember walking 2½ miles to the country schoolhouse in Beverly, Calif.," Schoonover said. "They call the place Beverly Hills now, and I worked there a time as a trick rider in early-day movies."

Most of Schoonover's working years, however, were spent in construction. He was a carpenter, then a carpenter foreman, then a heavy-construction superintendent.

He helped to build the Moffett Tunnel in Colorado, the Glenville Dam in North Carolina, the Imperial Dam in California, and the Metropolitan Water Tunnels at Mecca Pass for the City of Los Angeles.

"I shot the first gun full of concrete for the Metropolitan Water Tunnel," he said proudly. "That was quite a project."

However, The Bonny Doon Fire Team and his gardening activities appear infinitely more important to the youngish, wiry "world's oldest active volunteer fireman" than reminiscences of other years.

"Our president is Stanton Fraser and our fire chief is Albert Swain," he said, getting back to the Bonny Doon Fire Team and its steak barbecue this Saturday. "The team meets the third Thursday of each month at Bonny Doon School, where the food will be good this Saturday. We have seven pieces of major equipment acquired through the county and Civil Defense. Our biggest tanker holds 2000 gallons. We have trucks that hold 900 gallons and 350 gallons and 450 gallons. Our rescue truck used to be a military ambulance, and it's filled with all kinds of emergency equipment, from oxygen tanks to inflatable plastic splints."

The barbecue is being held, Schoonover said, to continue a fire team drive to raise money for construction of a firehouse

and purchase of more equipment.

"Frank Hellenthal has given the fire team a half-acre for the firehouse," he said, "and we hope to build there some day."

The fire team auxiliary pays for the oxygen used in the resuscitator, Schoonover added, with money raised through other projects.

Schoonover's wife, Camille, is an auxiliary member.

The Schoonovers live off Bonny Doon Road in a house he has remodeled over the years. Schoonover's passion for gardening is evident everywhere. He has a 40-tree orchard that produces oranges, grapefruit, tangerines, cherries and white Kadota figs. Ferns, fuchias and rhododendrons highlight the woodland acreage that includes an all-year stream.

Because Mrs. Schoonover works regularly at Ford's in Watsonville, Schoonover does the family cooking and canning. He has another talent. Shortly



Earl Schoonover

after he lost his leg he trained himself to use his wife's knitting machine and he can now whip out as elegant an ensemble as you are likely to see anywhere.

"I had to do something after I lost the leg," Schoonover said. "It wasn't hard to learn to use that machine."

"Speaking of learning," he added, "did I tell you that all the fire team's training is pro-

vided by the California Division of Forestry? You can't beat training like that."

Schoonover has a son, five grandsons, a grand daughter, a great-granddaughter and a great-grandson.

Though he may or may not be "the world's oldest active volunteer fireman," he'll be the Bonny Doon Fire Team's oldest active member at the barbecue Saturday afternoon.