

# PHOENIX OF THE DETROIT FIRE DEPARTMENT



IN SERVICE TO THE CITY OF DETROIT

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**Teresa Singleton  
President**

### HISTORY

We ended February celebrating Black history month with a sponsored luncheon for both active and retired Phoenix members. Its relevance was far more than just a free meal but, an opportunity for retired and active members to reminisce about historical cultural backgrounds, share insight to the circumstances that led many to become firefighters and raise awareness of diversity right here, right now.

One special guest, Eugene McDonald, the nephew of Chief Marcena Taylor was in attendance. Mr. McDonald is a Historian and Playwright who has followed the Phoenix back to its inception and has interest in writing a piece centered around the Phoenix and African Americans ascending through the Detroit Fire Department. Chief Marcena Taylor was one of two African American firefighters to integrate the Detroit Fire Department in the late 1930s. After completing his education at Livingston College, he worked at the local post office in Detroit. He was told about an opening with the Detroit Fire Department. Along with 60 other blacks out of 5,000 applicants, Taylor sat for the exam. Once

hired, he was given his first assignment at Engine 34. Back then, discrimination and segregation was prevalent throughout the department. Taylor became the first African American officer when he was appointed Sergeant in 1952 and the first African American Battalion Chief in 1969. Chief Taylor retired from the Detroit Fire Department in 1971. He died in 1994.

At our Black History Month luncheon we honored two of our departed brothers for their accomplishments in life and their extraordinary leadership while on the Detroit Fire Department. Captain Marvin Massey and Sergeant Sivad Johnson were both selected for the inspiration and impact they imparted on many of their brothers and sisters on the Detroit Fire Department. Large professional portraits were mounted in the foyer to commemorate their legacy and unveiled in the presence of their families and Phoenix members. Remarks were made regarding their significance from active and retired members alike. Their names and stories will be repeated generation after generations of Phoenix members.

Engine 11 is an architectural marvel

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## Phoenix Member, Charles Simms, Highlighted In News



*Detroit* — Interim Fire Commissioner Chuck Simms wrapped up his first tour of the city's firehouses Monday, where he listened to concerns from first responders and explained improved health and wellness resources available to staff.

Simms said he's making good on his promise to address morale and provide more support during the global COVID-19 pandemic and vowed: "We're going to restore the trust in the community."

His tour follows a slew of incidents over the last few years involving intoxicated employees and a citywide audit that recommended the city bolster funding and support for the fire department's peer-to-peer counseling program.

The Detroit News followed Simms on the last stop of his tour, Engine 9 on Detroit's east side, where firefighters showcased a need for better equipment and upkeep of fire stations and advocated for a facility dedicated to aid first responders. Simms, a 35-year veteran of the department, has been touring fire stations since being appointed by Mayor Mike Duggan in January.

He said the tours will continue.

"During the pandemic, members in the field felt a little detached from management and that's why I'm here, to ensure that they know they have our support and we're here to uplift them and address any concerns or issues they have," Simms said.

He added that firefighters expressed concern over addressing their health and wellness, and a lack of "Transparency or communication and just like any other job - they just want to know and hear what the future for the fire department. This is about closing that communication gap."

Detroit's fire department, the largest in the state, has more than 1,150 employees. The department has a crossover program that trains firefighters in emergency medical services. So far, eight members successfully completed crossover training and that will be a priority going forward, Simms said.

"In the near future, you will see just one department and it will be EMS or fire combined," he said. "Right now, anyone who's hired after July (of last year), will be crossed trained to enhance the services

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**Gary Ringer  
Vice President**

### The Revolution Will Not Be Televised

Community building is not a spectator sport! According to Upcounsel, "the purpose of nonprofit organizations is generally to improve quality of life for others at a community, local, state, national, or even global level. These organizations are not dedicated to private or financial gain but to the advancement of public interest."

Before becoming a firefighter, I worked as a carpenter. I did the rough framing for homes throughout Metro Detroit. After work, I would journey back to the urban utopia we affectionately proclaim, "the D". Having this stark contrast of vibrant versus volatile garnered a vision of what could and should be. Complacency, lack of accountability, and mismanagement can cripple any organization. But it can topple a major city. During and after the

bankruptcy, public servants were put on the proverbial, political chopping block. Now more than ever, it is extremely important to have educated, ethical, and progressive individuals speaking on behalf of the blue-collar employees who have sacrificed pensions, wages, healthcare and HEALTH for the citizens of Detroit. The struggle to live a healthy lifestyle in an unhealthy environment fuels the stigma within low-to-moderate income communities that suggest residents are content and lack the drive to "pick themselves up by the bootstraps."

Detroit is an evolving city of 139 square miles and more than 639,000 residents. Our population is comprised of 80% African Americans whose median income has declined over the past 15 years. Although the narrative is steadily changing, 53% of Detroit residents live in "areas of concentrated poverty", defined by the census tract as an area with a poverty rate of 40% or more. The question of whether there are "two Detroits" - one that is vibrant with newly-minted developments spread across midtown and downtown, and another which is under siege with poverty, struggling schools, disinvested neighborhoods, and rampant crime - is too real to ignore.

The Phoenix of the Detroit Fire Department was birthed to extinguish the flames of inequity. "Many hands make light work." In honor of Black History, let's celebrate our past by maximizing the present while working towards our future.

*Gary Ringer, VP*

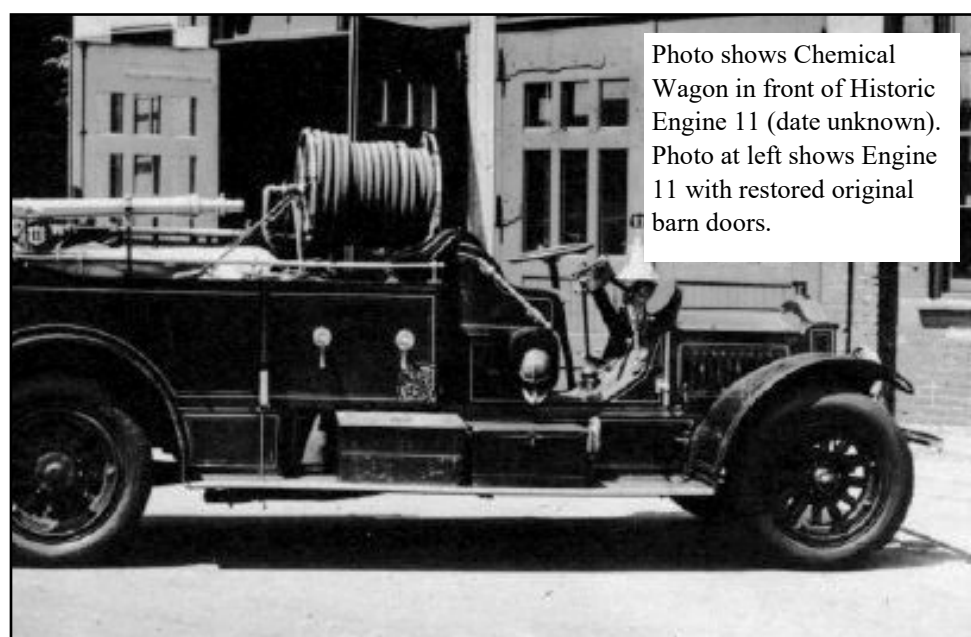


Photo shows Chemical Wagon in front of Historic Engine 11 (date unknown). Photo at left shows Engine 11 with restored original barn doors.

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where our stories are told and written, and our history is celebrated every day. It is where our contributions are rooted and preserved, and our collective legacy will leave its mark for years to come. We are committed to ensuring that all Phoenix members are never forgotten, and resolutely affirm our presence as members of the Detroit Fire Department.

The organization is rich in history and there are significant membership benefits you should not ignore. But I call for life's persistent and urgent question, once presented by the phenomenal Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. What are you doing for others? The Phoenix is OTHERS! When your life is over, everything you did will be represented by a single dash between the date you were born and the date you depart – what will that dash mean for the people you have known and loved and generations of firefighters who will come behind you?

Those who came before us were successful because of their solidarity and solidarity is one of the greatest assets we will ever have as an organization. Dreams don't work unless you do. Let that be a reminder of the greatness you did not know you possessed.

#### HERSTORY

In March, we'll be shifting gears telling stories for Women's History Month. The

stories will focus on the journey of being a woman, more often a woman of color, and of being a woman navigating the fire department landscape. We are thrilled to bring these stories to the fire forefront of conversations throughout March and hope you'll join us in celebrating some of the amazing women in fire departments and in our communities.

#### OURSTORY

The Phoenix of the Detroit Fire Department was founded after the riots of 1967. The mission of the organization centers on assisting minorities with entering and advancing in the fire service and on acting as a liaison between the fire department and the community we serve.

The organization is comprised of a diverse group of active and retired Detroit Firefighters. We collaborate to achieve greater collective impact for our members and the community we serve and protect. In order to create substantial opportunities, we ground a firm foundation with four major pillars: Professional Development: for ourselves and the community, Health and Wellness: physical, mentally and financially, Equitable Inclusion: of opportunities, access and partnerships and Community engagement. Our higher purpose is not the acclaim, but to rise up, to pull others up and leave the industry and world in a better place.

#### COMMIT YOURSTORY

*Teresa Singleton, President*

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to the citizens of Detroit. When you have a medical issue and you have a fire company around the corner, they are going to get there a lot faster and will be really beneficial for the city."

Robin Floyd, the department's new wellness specialist, stood beside Simms to share resources offered through their employee assistance program including counselors, mental health sessions, healthy eating, fitness, financial management, childcare and marital support, all of which are offered to spouses of first responders, too.

"We're here to support them and their family, who may need access to resources and the information and the key is consistency," said Floyd, who started the position in January. "We will build that bridge of communication for long-term support."

In March 2021, the city launched an environmental audit of the Detroit Fire Department after two suspected drunken driving incidents in one week, one in which a sergeant crashed a department vehicle.

A significant reduction of on-site leadership during the pandemic has led to a "very serious problem," Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan said at the time.

Earlier this month, two DFD personnel were suspended after alcohol was found in a fire engine operator's urine when he was on duty.

A lieutenant was suspended due to other factors, Simms added, including for allegedly allowing a fire engine to leave city limits.

The department's peer support network consists of one full-time employee, Lenette Woods, and volunteers who have to be pulled from their shifts or called from a list after a crisis. Its budget is \$79,000. Boston's peer-to-peer effort is funded with nearly \$700,000, the audit noted.

The report cites several traumas firefighters and EMS workers endure, including line of duty deaths, patient deaths and incidents involving children who've been hurt or killed.

The 25-question assessments found nearly 60% of workers voiced concerns over morale and leadership, scheduling, communication and employee recognition — and more than half were unaware of any employee assistance programs offered by the department.

About 60% of workers said they did not observe drinking or alcohol abuse among colleagues. Others said they had witnessed alcohol use, but it was a past practice.

Conversely, many "believe alcohol abuse remains a problem that needs a solution," according to the report.

Robert Distelrath, second deputy fire commissioner, said while the employee assistance program has existed over the years, it fell off following the city's bankruptcy in 2013 and is now in the process of being enhanced.

"It's a struggle and people are reluctant to ask for help," he said. "We're trying to be proactive and it's about consistency and transparency across seven departments."

*srahal@detroitnews.com*

# FIRE & RESCUE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

#### COBRA Training

(Anniston, Alabama, <https://cdp.dhs.gov/find-training/course/PER-262>) The HOT course provides responders with the unique opportunity to practice their knowledge and skills in a practical exercise in the Nation's only toxic chemical-agent training facility, the Chemical, Ordnance, Biological and Radiological (COBRA) Training Facility.

#### BOMB TRAINING

(NEVADA, [http://www.ctosnnsa.org/pages/courses/courses\\_resident.htm](http://www.ctosnnsa.org/pages/courses/courses_resident.htm)) Resident training courses are conducted on-site at the Nevada National Nuclear Site (NNSS) by Counter Terrorism Operations Support (CTOS). The NNSS is a massive outdoor laboratory, national experimental center, and training facility located 65 miles northwest of Las Vegas, Nevada. Originally established for testing nuclear weapons, from 1951 to 1992, 1,021 nuclear detonations and numerous radiological dispersal tests have been executed at the NNSS. This rich nuclear testing history of the NNSS offers dynamic training opportunities today. The 1,375 square miles of secluded and secure land at the NNSS provide a safe environment for training in realistic WMD scenarios.

#### DETROIT FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING ACADEMY

The many training sessions of the DFD training academy are conducted by well-seasoned DFD personnel. They are trained in both the technical, operational, and administrative aspects of the fire service.

#### EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

(Dillard Univ, New Orleans, LA, <https://edionline.net>) The Carl Holmes Executive Development Institute was born out of the effort to address the problem of African Americans in the fire service being denied the opportunity to receive cutting edge management training. The concept proposed by Carl Holmes, then Assistant Chief of the Oklahoma City Fire Department, was to have African American instructors deliver course material in the area of their expertise or current area of management within the fire service.

#### FIRE STAFF & COMMAND

(Eastern Michigan Univ, Ypsilanti, MI, <https://www.emich.edu/cet/cerns/fire-staff-command/index.php>)

This is an intensive program consisting of 350 hours of classroom instruction that will require out of class study, preparation of papers, projects, and examinations. The

experience will take the officer beyond traditional operational methods and strategic thinking and creative and innovative problem solving skills for current and future law enforcement executives paving the way for further advancement to senior leadership positions within their department.

#### HENRY FORD COLLEGE

(<https://catalog.hfcc.edu/programs/firefighterparamedic-aas>) Offers a career pathway for individuals seeking an entry-level position with a full-time municipal fire service. Course work provides a combination of academic education with necessary hands-on skills. Degree recipients earn an Associate in Applied Science, an EMT-Basic license, paramedic certification, Firefighter I & II certification, and valuable field/clinical experience.



#### NATIONAL FIRE ACADEMY

(Emmitsburg, MD, <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/training/nfa/>) The National Fire Academy (NFA) works to enhance the ability of fire and emergency services and allied professionals to deal more effectively with fire and related emergencies. Free training courses and programs are delivered at our campus in Emmitsburg, Maryland, online and throughout the nation.

#### SCHOOLCRAFT COMMUNITY COLLEGE FIRE TRAINING

(<https://www.schoolcraft.edu/in-service/fire-training>) Schoolcraft College strives to offer the most current and effective up-to-date training available, yet keeping your budget constraints in mind. In addition to mandated training, we continue to seek new courses in response to today's multi-faceted demands. In doing so, we try to stay consistent with the ever changing trends in the fire community and the training needed to keep fire fighters current.



# In Memoriam



**FRANCE BOWERS**  
RETIRED F.E.O.,  
ENGINE 51

Lived:  
08/08/1939 to 02/14/2022  
Served:  
09/24/1962 to 05/12/1994

(Note: Bowers was featured in the June 1973 Black Enterprise Magazine as 5th largest minority firm in USA)

NAME OF COMPANY	LOCATION	CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER	TYPE OF BUSINESS	YEAR STARTED	NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES	SALES 1972 *
MOTOWN INDUSTRIES	Los Angeles, California	Berry Gordy	Manufactures master recordings, disc and tape recordings	1949	325	\$40.0
JOHNSON PUBLISHING CO., INC.	Chicago, Illinois	John H. Johnson	Publisher of <i>Ebony</i> , <i>Jet</i> , <i>Black World</i> , <i>Black Stars</i> , <i>Ebony Jr.</i>	1942	245	23.1
FEDCO FOODS CORP.	New York, New York	J. Bruce Llewellyn	Supermarket chain	1969	450	23.0
F. W. EVERSLEY & CO. INC.	New York, New York	Frederick W. Eversley	General contractor and developer	1964	85	20.6
BOWERS REALTY & INVESTMENT CO.	Detroit, Michigan	France Bowers	Real estate	1968	30	18.0
JOHNSON PRODUCTS CO.,	Chicago,	George E. Johnson	Manufactures hair	1954	300	17.5



**BRETT M. JACKSON**  
RETIRED CAPTAIN,  
LADDER 21

Lived:  
08/26/1966 to 01/26/2022  
Served:  
09/12/1988 to 06/26/2020