



# Holley-Navarre Fire Department reaches milestone

By Brian Lester  
brian@navarrepress.com

Holley-Navarre Fire Chief Ron Norton wasn't aware of the history of the land that will one day be a site for a new fire station in Holley.

A custom cabinet craft shop called Holley Craft caught fire in December of 1965, and despite starting out small, the fire burned down the shop because there was no nearby fire department to fight it. The fire department at Eglin Air Force Base tried to battle it but arrived too late to save the building.

"We had no idea at all about the history when we bought the property," Norton said. "It's neat that the property involved in the need for a fire department is going to have a fire station there."

The disaster sparked the beginning of the Holley-Navarre Fire Department, which was started by a group of citizens, operating only on borrowed equipment and donations for funding.

"A lot of fire departments have started that way," Norton said. "You get to the breaking point where you realize something has to be done and someone steps up and takes the lead. I'm glad they did."

Norton points out that the first firefighters at Holley-Navarre faced their share of challenges.

"We think we have limited, poor equipment, it was a lot different back then," Norton said. "From what I could tell looking in photos, they had some used apparatus and used vehicles. It wasn't until the mid-1980s that they bought modern apparatus. Those were phased out in 2000 and we bought new ones."

The department is still going strong today and the 50th anniversary of it will be celebrated Oct. 3 at the station located on Esplanade Street in Navarre.

Details are still being finalized but the event will run from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. and feature activities for children, demonstrations, station and fire apparatus tours, entertainment – either a local musician or DJ will be on hand – and food.

"It's a big deal to reach a milestone like this," Norton said. "I've gone back through the history books to see how it's evolved and even had the pleasure of meeting a few of the founding fathers of the department. It was a privilege to talk to them and find out what their needs were then and their reasons for starting the department."

The department started out relying only on volunteers but soon shifted to having part-time firefighters during the day and volunteers at night. Seven years ago, the department went to full-time status 24-7.

"The next phase is to add manpower because we are critically short," Norton said. "We'll also eventually have the station in Holley. Right now we're seeking state and federal funding for it."

Norton has been with the department since 2002 after spending 21 years in the military. He started out as a volunteer and became the chief in 2009.

"Some days are rewarding and other days not so much, depending on what has happened," Norton said. "Overall, it's a great job being able to be out there helping others day to day. That's what it's all about."

As for the 50th anniversary celebration, it's about making the community more aware of the department. It also serves as a kickoff to Fire Prevention Month.

"It's a chance for the people to get out and learn more about how we operate and the ways we can help them out," Norton said. "It's exciting to be a part of it."

**Want to go?**  
50th Anniversary for HNFD  
When: Saturday, Oct. 3  
When: 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.  
What: Kids' activities  
Demonstrations  
Station tours  
Food and Music



## Holley-Navarre Fire Dept. Milestones

- 1977 – HNFD answered 72 alarm calls for the year
- Aug. 3, 2000 – Greg West hired as first full-time paid employee of Holley-Navarre Fire District.
- Feb. 1, 2001 – HNFD serves a population of 26,000. Department acquires three fire engines, a rescue truck, brush truck, zodiac boat and four automatic external defibrillators.
- Dec. 7, 2001 – HNFD blazes trail with cadet firefighter program.
- Mar. 22, 2002 – HNFD answers 107 calls for the month of February.
- Feb. 5, 2004 – HNFD board offers Les Slocum a five-year contract as several volunteer firefighters urged the board to promote the acting fire chief.
- Mar. 25, 2006 – HNFD obtained permission to erect a metal firefighter training facility behind Fire Station 1 on Esplanade Street.
- Dec. 4, 2008 – Ron Norton officially appointed as fire chief of the Holley-Navarre Fire Department
- Oct. 30, 2009 – Continuing with its educational outreach campaign, the Holley-Navarre firefighters hosted their first open house and "Haunted Firehouse of Horror" on Oct. 30, drawing hundreds from the Navarre area.
- Aug. 19, 2010 – HNFD responded to 231 calls for the month of July
- Dec. 2, 2010 – HNFD hired part-time life safety inspector, Joe Early of Fort Walton Beach.
- Dec. 5, 2012 – Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation awarded the district with a \$19,400 grant which was used to purchase 20 new emergency portable radios for firefighters.
- June 13, 2013 – HNFD signed the district's first-ever union agreement with the International Association of Fire Fighters
- Aug. 28, 2014 – HNFD purchased a piece of property in Holley for \$72,000 to eventually build a fire station in order to reduce response times.
- July 31, 2015 – HNFD answered a record-breaking 303 calls for the month of July
- Sept. 24, 2015 – HNFD now serves a population of 33,306, according to the Santa Rosa economic development website.
- Aug. 27, 2015 – HNFD updated its technology to include wireless tablets with cloud-based mapping and reporting programs. The programs will be online before the end of the year.