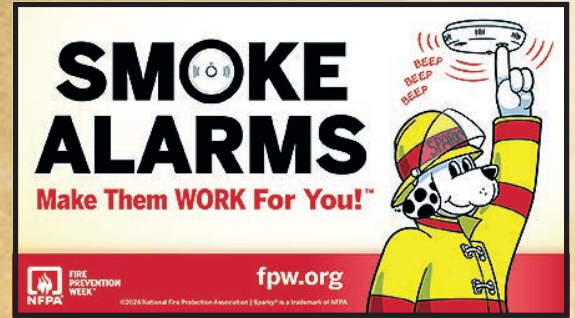


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• FIRE PREVENTION WEEK • ROCKTON OPEN HOUSE  
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# Fire Prevention Week began after the Great Chicago Fire

The Great Chicago Fire was a conflagration that burned in the American city of Chicago during Oct. 8-10, 1871. The fire killed approximately 300 people, destroyed roughly 3.3 square miles of the city including over 17,000 structures, and left more than 100,000 residents homeless.

The fire began in a neighborhood southwest of the city center. A long period of hot, dry, windy conditions, and the wooden construction prevalent in the city, led to the conflagration. The fire leapt the south branch of the Chicago River and destroyed much of central Chicago and then crossed over the main branch of the river, consuming the Near North Side.

Help flowed to the city from near and far after the fire. The city government improved building codes to stop the rapid spread of future fires and rebuilt rapidly to those higher standards. A donation from the United Kingdom spurred the establishment of the Chicago Public Library.



On the evening of Oct. 8, 1871, more than 300,000 weary residents of the great city of Chicago went to bed expecting nothing more than a quiet night's sleep followed by an ordinary Monday of going to work or tending family. Instead, these unprepared citizens found themselves pursued by an inferno, driven into the waters of Lake Michigan or running far onto the open prairie north and west of the city.

FILE PHOTO Fire Prevention

## ORIGIN

The fire is claimed to have started at about 8:30 p.m. on Oct. 8, in or around a small barn belonging to the O'Leary family that bordered the alley behind 137 DeKoven Street. The shed next to the barn was the first building to be consumed by the fire.

City officials never determined the cause of the blaze but the rapid spread of the fire due to a long drought in that year's summer, strong winds from the southwest, and the rapid destruction of the water pumping system, explain the extensive damage of the mainly wooden city structures.

There has been much speculation over the years on a single start to the fire. The most popular tale blames Mrs. O'Leary's cow, who allegedly knocked over a lantern; others state that a group of men were gambling inside the barn and knocked over a lantern. Still other speculation suggests that the blaze was related to other fires in the Midwest that day.

The fire's spread was aided by the city's use of wood as the predominant building material in a style called balloon frame. More than two-thirds of the structures in Chicago at the time of the fire were made entirely of wood, with most of the houses and buildings being topped with highly flammable tar or shingle roofs.

All of the city's sidewalks and many roads were also made of wood. Compounding this problem, Chicago received only one inch of rain from July 4 to Oct. 9, causing severe drought conditions before the fire, while strong southwest winds helped to carry flying embers toward the heart of the city.

In 1871, the Chicago Fire Department had 185 firefighters with just 17 horse-drawn steam pumpers to protect the entire city. The initial response by the fire department was timely, but due to an error by the watchman, Matthias Schaffer, the firefighters were initially sent to the wrong place, allowing the fire to grow unchecked.

An alarm sent from the area near the fire also failed to register at the courthouse where the fire watchmen were, while the firefighters were tired from having fought numerous small fires and one large fire in the week before. These factors combined to turn a small barn fire into a conflagration.

## SPREAD

When firefighters finally arrived at DeKoven Street, the fire had grown and spread to neighboring buildings and was progressing toward the central business district. Firefighters had hoped that the South

Branch of the Chicago River and an area that had previously thoroughly burned would act as a natural firebreak.

All along the river, however, were lumber yards, warehouses, and coal yards, and barges and numerous bridges across the river. As the fire grew, the southwest wind intensified and became superheated, causing structures to catch fire from the heat and from burning debris blown by the wind. Around midnight, flaming debris blew across the river and landed on roofs and the South Side Gas Works.

With the fire across the river and moving rapidly toward the heart of the city, panic set in. About this time, Mayor Roswell B. Mason sent messages to nearby towns asking for help. When the courthouse caught fire, he ordered the building to be evacuated and the prisoners jailed in the basement to be released.

At 2:30 a.m. Oct. 9, the cupola of the courthouse collapsed, sending the great bell crashing down. Some witnesses reported hearing the sound from a mile away.

As more buildings succumbed to the flames, a major contributing factor to the fire's spread was a meteorological phenomenon known as a fire whirl. As overheated air rises, it comes into contact with cooler air and begins to spin, creating a tornado-like effect. These fire whirls are

likely what drove flaming debris so high and so far. Such debris was blown across the main branch of the Chicago River to a railroad car carrying kerosene. The fire had jumped the river a second time and was now raging across the city's north side.

Despite the fire spreading and growing rapidly, the city's firefighters continued to battle the blaze. A short time after the fire jumped the river, a burning piece of timber lodged on the roof of the city's waterworks. Within minutes, the interior of the building was engulfed in flames and the building was destroyed. With it, the city's water mains went dry and the city was helpless. The fire burned unchecked from building to building, block to block.

Finally, late into the evening of Oct. 9, it started to rain, but the fire had already started to burn itself out. The fire had spread to the sparsely populated areas of the north side, having consumed the densely populated areas thoroughly.

## AFTERMATH

Once the fire had ended, the smoldering remains were still too hot for a survey of the damage to be completed for many days. Eventually, the city determined that the fire destroyed an area about four miles long and averaging 3/4 mile wide, encompassing an

area of more than 2,000 acres.

Destroyed were more than 73 miles of roads, 120 miles of sidewalk, 2,000 lampposts, 17,500 buildings, and \$222 million in property, which was about a third of the city's valuation in 1871.

On Oct. 11, 1871, General Philip H. Sheridan came quickly to the aid of the city and was placed in charge by a proclamation given by mayor Roswell B. Mason:

"The Preservation of the Good Order and Peace of the city is hereby intrusted to Lieut. General P.H. Sheridan, U.S. Army."

To protect the city from looting and violence, the city was put under martial law for two weeks under Gen. Sheridan's command structure with a mix of regular troops, militia units, police, and a specially organized civilian group "First Regiment of Chicago Volunteers." Former Lieutenant-Governor William Bross, and part owner of the Tribune, later recollected his response to the arrival of Gen. Sheridan and his soldiers:

"Never did deeper emotions of joy overcome me. Thank God, those most dear to me and the city as well are safe."

General Philip H. Sheridan, who saved Chicago three times: the Great Fire in October 1871, when he used explosives to stop the spread; again after the Great Fire, protecting the city; and lastly in 1877 during the "communist riots," riding in from 1,000 miles away to restore order.

For two weeks Sheridan's men patrolled the streets, guarded the relief warehouses, and enforced other regulations. On October 24 the troops were relieved of their duties and the volunteers were mustered out of service.

Of the approximately 324,000 inhabitants of Chicago in 1871, 90,000 Chicago residents (1 in 3 residents) were left homeless. 120 bodies were recovered, but the death toll may have been as high as 300. The county coroner speculated that an accurate count was impossible, as some victims may have drowned or had been incinerated, leaving no remains.

In the days and weeks following the fire, monetary donations flowed into Chicago from around the country and abroad, along with donations of food, clothing, and other goods. These donations came from individuals, corporations, and cities. New York City gave \$450,000 along with clothing and provisions, St. Louis gave \$300,000, and the Common Council of London gave 1,000 guineas, as well as 7,000 pounds of sterling from private donations. In Greenock, Scotland (pop. 40,000) a town meeting raised 518 pounds on the spot.

• CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



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# Safety First

Fire Prevention Awareness 2024

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# NFPA announces 'Smoke alarms: Make them work for you!' as official theme for Fire Prevention Week, Oct. 6-12

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) announced "Smoke alarms: make them work for you!" as the official theme for Fire Prevention Week, Oct. 6-12, 2024 at the NFPA Conference & Expo in Orlando, Fla.

This year's focus on working smoke alarms comes in response to NFPA data, which shows that the majority of U.S. home fire deaths continue to occur in homes with no smoke alarms or no working smoke alarms.

"Smoke alarms can make a life-saving difference in a home fire, but they have to be working in order to deliver the needed protection," said Lorraine Carli, vice president of the Outreach and Advocacy division at NFPA. "This year's Fire Prevention Week campaign reinforces the critical importance of smoke alarms and what's needed to install, test, and maintain them properly."

Having working smoke alarms in

the home reduces the risk of dying in a home fire by more than half (54 percent). However, roughly three out of five fire deaths occur in homes with either no smoke alarms or no working smoke alarms. More than one-third (38 percent) of home fire deaths result from fires in which no smoke alarms are present.

"People tend to remove smoke alarm batteries or dismantle them altogether when they don't know how to fix the issue. These actions put them at serious risk in the event of a home fire," said Carli. "This year's Fire Prevention Week campaign gives people the tools and know-how to keep their smoke alarms in working order."

Key messages for this year's Fire Prevention Week theme, "Smoke alarms: Make them work for you!" include the following:

- Install smoke alarms in every bedroom, outside each separate sleeping area (like a hallway), and on each level (including the

basement) of the home.

- Make sure smoke alarms meet the needs of all family members, including those with sensory or physical disabilities.
- Test smoke alarms at least once a month by pushing the test button.
- Replace all smoke alarms when they are 10 years old or don't respond when tested.

To learn more about Fire Prevention Week and this year's theme, "Smoke alarms: Make them work for you!" visit [fpw.org](http://fpw.org).

Additional Fire Prevention Week resources for children, caregivers, and educators can be found at [sparky.org](http://sparky.org) and [sparkyschoolhouse.org](http://sparkyschoolhouse.org).

Fire Prevention Week is celebrated throughout North America every October and is the oldest U.S. public health observance on record. For more than 100 years, Fire Prevention Week has worked to educate people the risk of home fires

and ways to minimize them. Local fire departments, schools, and community organizations play a key role in bringing Fire Prevention Week to life in their communities each year and spreading basic but critical fire safety messages.

For this release and other announcements about NFPA initiatives, research, and resources, please visit the NFPA press room.

## About the National Fire Protection Association

Founded in 1896, NFPA is a global self-funded nonprofit organization devoted to eliminating death, injury, property and economic loss due to fire, electrical and related hazards. The association delivers information and knowledge through more than 300 consensus codes and standards, research, training, education, outreach and advocacy; and by partnering with others who share an interest in furthering the NFPA mission.



Harlem-Roscoe Fire would like to thank State Farm agents Erik Abrahamsen and Mike Frank for the donation of this year's National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Fire Prevention Week Kits. For the past few years State Farm Insurance has teamed up with the NFPA to provide their agents with kits to be distributed to the fire departments within their service area.

HARLEM-ROSCOE FD PHOTO Fire Prevention

## History of Fire Prevention Week

Since 1922, the NFPA has sponsored the public observance of Fire Prevention Week.

In 1925, President Calvin Coolidge proclaimed Fire Prevention Week a national observance, making it the longest-running public health observance in our country.

During Fire Prevention Week, children, adults, and teachers learn how to stay safe in case of a fire. Firefighters provide lifesaving public education in an effort to drastically decrease casualties caused by fires.

Fire Prevention Week is observed each year during the week of Oct. 9 in commemoration of the Great Chicago Fire, which began on Oct. 8, 1871, and caused devastating damage.

This horrific conflagration killed more than 250 people, left 100,000 homeless, destroyed more than 17,400 structures, and burned more than 2,000 acres of land.



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# Minimize the risks of fire

The good news: Deaths from home fires in the U.S. have trended downward since the 1970s, according to Injury Fact, but even one death from a preventable fire is too many. While fire doesn't discriminate by age, it is the third leading cause of death for children 1 to 14.

## Cooking fires

When cooking, make fire safety a priority by keeping these tips in mind:

Be alert; if you are sleepy or have consumed alcohol, don't use the oven or stovetop.

Stay in the kitchen while you are frying, grilling, boiling or broiling food.

When simmering, baking or roasting, check the food regularly, remain in the kitchen while cooking and use a timer

Keep anything that can catch fire away from your stovetop.

## Heating fires

Heating is the second leading cause of home fires. Follow these tips:

Keep all flammables, like paper, clothing, bedding, drapes or rugs, at least 3 feet from a space heater, stove or fireplace.

Never leave portable heaters and fireplaces unattended; turn off heaters and make sure fireplace embers are extinguished before leaving the room.

If you must use a space heater, place it on a level, nonflammable surface, like ceramic tile, not on a rug or carpet.

Keep children and pets away from space heaters.

When buying a space heater, look for models that shut off automatically if the heater falls over.

Other top causes of fire include smoking, electrical problems and candles. To minimize risks:

Institute a "no smoking" policy in the house.

Check all cords and replace any that are frayed or have bare wires.

Switch to flameless candles.

Keep matches and lighters high and out of children's reach in a locked cabinet.

## Working smoke alarms are a must

About three out of five fire deaths happen in homes without working smoke alarms. Smoke alarms are a key part of a home fire escape plan providing early warning to reduce your risk of dying in a fire.

The National Fire Protection Association recommends you:

Install smoke alarms on every level of your home, inside bedrooms and outside sleeping areas on the ceiling or high on the wall.

Keep smoke alarms away from the kitchen, at least 10 feet from the stove, to reduce false alarms.

Use special alarms with strobe lights and bed shakers for people who are hard of hearing or deaf.

Test smoke alarms monthly.

Replace batteries in your smoke alarm and carbon monoxide detector annually.

Replace smoke alarms that are 10 or more years old.

## Make an escape plan

One home structure fire is reported every 88 seconds, according to Injury Facts.

Once the smoke alarm sounds, a fire can spread quickly, leaving only a minute or two to escape. That's why it's so important to have a home escape plan.

Start by drawing a map for your home

and follow these guidelines:

Plan two ways to escape from each room. Make sure all doors and windows leading outside open easily.

Identify secondary routes: a window onto an adjacent roof or a collapsible ladder from a second floor window.

If you live in a multi-story building, plan to use the stairs – never the elevator.

Designate an outside meeting place a safe distance from the house.

## Practice your home fire escape plan

Everyone – including children – need to know your family escape plan. The National Fire Protection Association

indicates 71 percent of Americans have a home fire escape plan but only 47 percent have practiced it. Practice your fire drill with everyone in the house at night and during the day, twice a year. Remember to:

Practice getting out with eyes closed, crawling low to the floor and keeping your mouth covered.

Practice closing doors behind you

Practice how to "stop, drop and roll" if your clothes catch on fire.

Practice testing door handles to see if they are hot before opening them.

Teach children never to hide and how to escape on their own in case you can't help them.

## When and how to use fire extinguisher

Always put your safety first; if you are not confident in your ability to use a fire extinguisher, get out and call 9-1-1. The American Red Cross cautions you to evaluate the situation and ensure:

Everyone has left or is leaving the home, the fire department has been called, the fire is small, not spreading, and there is not much smoke. Your back is to an exit you can use quickly.

Remember the acronym PASS:

**P**ull the pin. **A**im low at the base of the fire. **S**queeze the handle slowly. **S**weep the nozzle side to side.



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# The true story of Smokey Bear

One spring day in 1950, in the Capitan Mountains of New Mexico, an operator in one of the fire towers spotted smoke and called the location in to the nearest ranger station. The first crew discovered a major wildfire sweeping along the ground between the trees, driven by a strong wind. Word spread rapidly, and more crews reported to help. Forest rangers, local crews from New Mexico and Texas, and the New Mexico State Game Department set out to gain control of the raging wildfire.

As the crew battled to contain the blaze, they received a report of a lone bear cub seen wandering near the fire line. They hoped that the mother bear would return for him. Soon, about 30 of the firefighters were caught directly in the path of the fire storm. They survived by lying face down on a rockslide for over an hour as the fire burned past them.

Nearby, the little cub had not fared as well. He took refuge in a tree that became completely charred, escaping with his life but also badly burned paws and hind legs. The crew removed the cub from the tree, and a rancher among the crew agreed to take him home. A New Mexico Department of Game and Fish ranger heard about the cub when he returned to the fire camp. He drove to the rancher's home to help get the cub on a plane to Santa Fe, where his burns were treated and bandaged.

## RESCUED!

News about the little bear spread swiftly throughout New Mexico. Soon, the United Press and Associated Press broadcast his story nationwide, and many people wrote and called, asking about the cub's recovery. The state game warden wrote to the chief of the Forest Service, offering to present the cub to the agency as long as the cub would be dedicated to a conservation and wildfire prevention publicity program. The cub was soon on his way



Judy Bell helped her mother take care of Smokey.

SUBMITTED PHOTO Fire Prevention

to the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., becoming the living symbol of Smokey Bear.

Smokey received numerous gifts of honey and so many letters he had to have his own zip code. He remained at the zoo until his death in 1976, when he was returned to his home to be buried at the Smokey Bear Historical Park in Capitan, New Mexico, where he continues to be a wildfire prevention legend.

Smokey cub sitting on a Piper PA-12 Super Cruiser

In 1952, Steve Nelson and Jack Rollins wrote the popular anthem that would launch a continuous debate about Smokey's name. To maintain the rhythm of the song, they added "the" between "Smokey" and "Bear." Due to the song's popularity, Smokey Bear has been called "Smokey the Bear" by many adoring fans, but, in actuality, his name never changed. He's still Smokey Bear.

# HOW DO WILDFIRES START?

By Megan Fitzgerald-McGowan  
CONTRIBUTOR

Every year, thousands of wildfires burn across the United States. As of early June, the National Interagency Fire Center reported that 16,657 fires have occurred so far in 2024, with 1,968,698 acres burned.

It's been shared before that not all fire is bad. It does have a role to play within certain landscapes and ecosystems. It gets tricky because the past century of effective wildfire suppression has altered these landscapes, so fires burn at a higher intensity.

That, combined with the increased number of structures, creates the recipe for disaster. And, unfortunately, most of these fires – around 87 percent – are started by human-related activity.

## HOW DO FIRES BURN?

Before we learn more about how wildfires start, let's first take a quick look at how a fire in general occurs. Fire is a chemical reaction requiring oxygen, heat, and fuel. These three components are commonly presented as "the fire triangle."

- **Oxygen:** Oxygen is important for supporting the chemical reaction. Most fires require at least 16 percent oxygen concentration to burn; environmental air contains about 21 percent oxygen.

- **Fuel:** Any combustible material can act as the fuel in the fire triangle. Through the lens of wildfire, this can be materials on the landscape such as brush, trees, grass, and downed debris. It can also be buildings and other infrastructure within communities.

- **Heat:** Heat plays a role in the initial ignition of the fire and in maintaining the fire and sustaining its spread.

If we break any part of the fire triangle, the fire cannot be sustained.

## HOW WILDFIRES START

There are two main categories as to how a wildfire starts: natural and human caused.

## NATURALLY CAUSED WILDFIRES

Lightning is the primary agent for

naturally caused fires. (There are some instances of volcanic activity starting wildfires, but that is limited.) Lightning is a force of nature that we can't prevent, but we can prepare ahead of time, especially in areas that have fairly predictable or regular lightning patterns.

When I was on a wildland engine in Washington state, it was routine to go on an assignment in eastern Washington ahead of a lightning storm.

In the summer, it is common for patterns to set up off the coast and work their way up through Oregon and Washington. Sometimes these storms would bring rain with the lightning, sometimes not. And even if they did bring moisture, it wasn't enough to fully extinguish a fire.

Even with rain, a strike could ignite a small fire that would skunk and creep around, waiting for temperatures to come back up and fuels to dry back out, before coming visible and needing attention a few days or even weeks later.

## HUMAN-CAUSED WILDFIRES

The majority of wildfires are started by humans or human-related infrastructure. These fires are often accidental but can be intentional (arson) or caused by negligence. Some examples include:

- Campfires
- Backyard debris burning
- Equipment use (lawnmowers, chainsaws, etc.)
- Discarded cigarettes
- Vehicles (engine sparks)
- Fireworks
- Arson

Again, reflecting on my time as a wildland firefighter, much of the smaller, day-to-day activities included responding to small fires caused by humans—lots of escaped campfires and debris burns. It was often frustrating because federal, state, and local agencies and fire departments spend a lot of time trying to engage their audiences in wildfire prevention efforts.

The iconic Smokey Bear celebrates his 80th birthday this year and his message that "Only you can prevent wildfires" still holds true today.

## GREAT CHICAGO FIRE • CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Buffalo, all commercial rivals, donated hundreds and thousands of dollars. Milwaukee, along with other nearby cities, helped by sending fire-fighting equipment. Food, clothing and books were brought by train from all over the continent. Mayor Mason placed the Chicago Relief and Aid Society in charge of the city's relief efforts.

Operating from the First Congregational Church, city officials and aldermen began taking steps to preserve order in Chicago. Price gouging was a key concern, and in one ordinance, the city set the price of bread at 8¢ for a 12-ounce loaf.

Public buildings were opened as places of refuge, and saloons closed at 9 in the evening for the week following the fire. Many people who were left homeless after the incident were never able to get their normal lives back since all their personal papers and belongings burned in the conflagration.

After the fire, A. H. Burgess of London proposed an "English Book Donation", to spur a free library in Chicago, in their

sympathy with Chicago over the damages suffered. Libraries in Chicago had been private with membership fees. In April 1872, the City Council passed the ordinance to establish the free Chicago Public Library, starting with the donation from the United Kingdom of more than 8,000 volumes.

The fire also led to questions about development in the United States. Due to Chicago's rapid expansion at that time, the fire led to Americans reflecting on industrialization. Based on a religious point of view, some said that Americans should return to a more old-fashioned way of life, and that the fire was caused by people ignoring traditional morality. On the other hand, others believed that a lesson to be learned from the fire was that cities needed to improve their building techniques. Frederick Law Olmsted observed that poor building practices in Chicago were a problem:

Chicago had a weakness for "big things," and liked to think that it was outbuilding New York. It did a great deal of commercial advertising in its house-tops. The faults

of construction as well as of art in its great showy buildings must have been numerous. Their walls were thin, and were overweighted with gross and coarse misornamentation.

## CHICAGO TRIBUNE EDITORIAL

Olmsted also believed that with brick walls, and disciplined firemen and police, the deaths and damage caused would have been much less.

Almost immediately, the city began to rewrite its fire standards, spurred by the efforts of leading insurance executives, and fire-prevention reformers such as Arthur C. Ducat. Chicago soon developed one of the country's leading fire-fighting forces

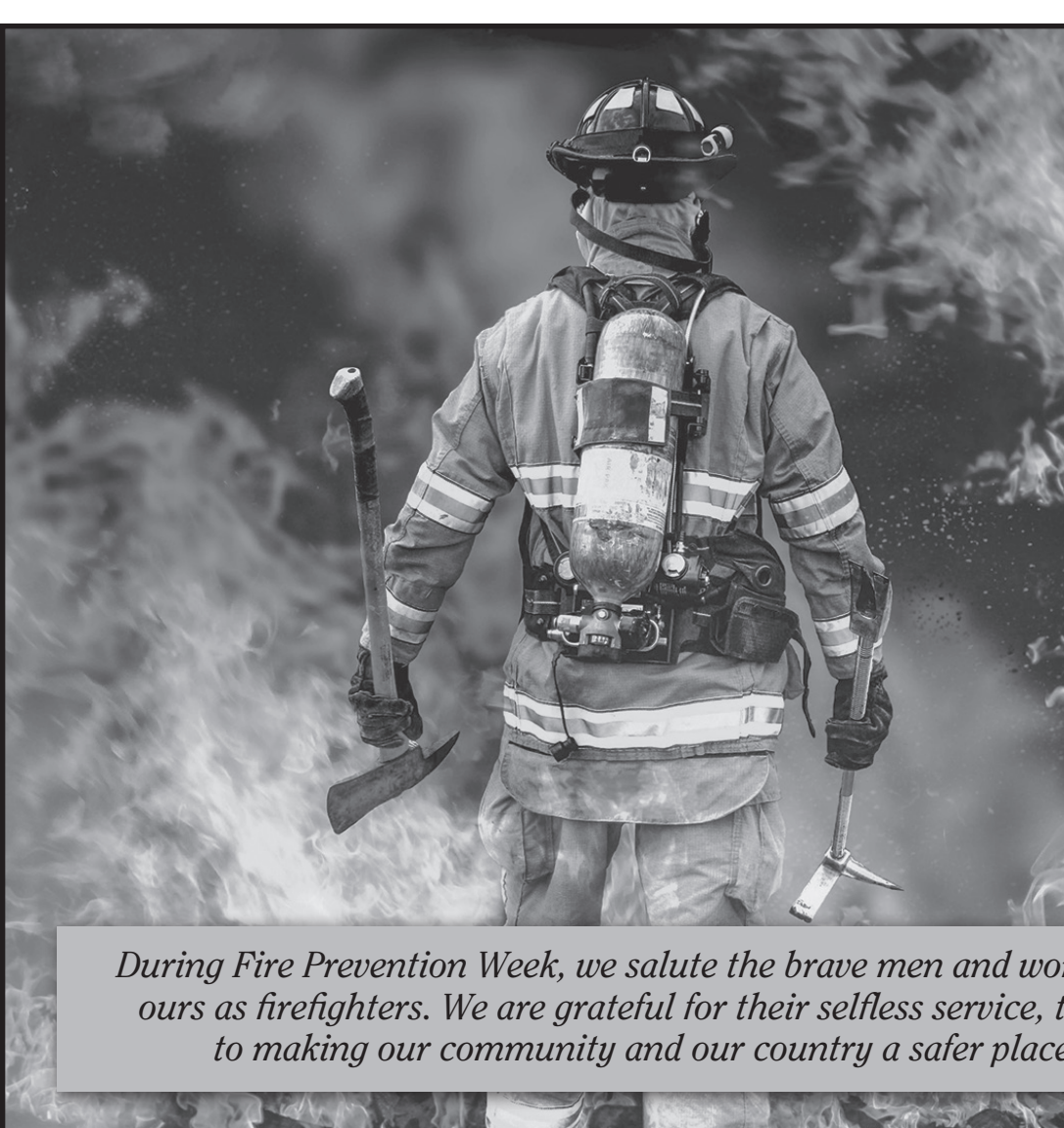
More than 20 years after the Great Fire, 'The World Columbian Exposition of 1893', known as the 'White City', for being lit up with newly invented light bulbs and electric power.

Business owners, and land speculators such as Gurdon Saltonstall Hubbard,

quickly set about rebuilding the city. The first load of lumber for rebuilding was delivered the day the last burning building was extinguished. By the World's Columbian Exposition 22 years later, Chicago hosted more than 21 million visitors.

The Palmer House hotel burned to the ground in the fire 13 days after its grand opening. Its developer, Potter Palmer, secured a loan and rebuilt the hotel to higher standards, across the street from the original, proclaiming it to be "The World's First Fireproof Building."

In 1956, the remaining structures on the original O'Leary property at 558 W. DeKoven Street were torn down for construction of the Chicago Fire Academy, a training facility for Chicago firefighters, known as the Quinn Fire Academy or Chicago Fire Department Training Facility. A bronze sculpture of stylized flames, entitled Pillar of Fire by sculptor Egon Weiner, was erected on the point of origin in 1961.



# Facing Danger. Protecting Lives.

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**HRFD Fire Station #1 • 10544 Main St. in Roscoe**



Smoke House - Extinguisher Simulator - Fire Trucks - Slide - Spray Water - Station Tours - Hotdogs, Chips & Cookies  
Activity table featuring coloring and puzzle pages and more.