

Donald Edwards 1

00:00:03 **AMY MAURO**

Well. Good morning.

00:00:04 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Good morning.

00:00:05 **AMY MAURO**

I am Amy Mauro, Executive Director of the DC Fire and EMS Foundation. I'm here this morning on September 5th at the home of Retired Fire Chief Donald Edwards. Chief Edwards, if you could just introduce yourself as well and spell your last name, sir.

00:00:29 **DONALD EDWARDS**

I'm Donald Edwards, Retired Fire Chief for the District of Columbia Fire and EMS Department.

00:00:41 **AMY MAURO**

And we're also joined by Kate Fogle.

00:00:45 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Hi, I'm Kate Fogle and I am the photo and video Archivist for the Foundation.

00:00:54 **AMY MAURO**

So, chief, why don't we just get started from the beginning? If you could tell us where you were born and raised.

00:00:59 **DONALD EDWARDS**

I was born and raised in Washington, D.C. that was my hometown. I was born in 1944. So, I mean, I'm an old person now. Senior one would say. I was raised in northwest Washington in the Parkview area, which is just north of Howard University. I went to Parkview Elementary School, Banneker Junior High, and Theodore Roosevelt High School. Graduated from Roosevelt in 1962.

00:01:39 **AMY MAURO**

And then what happened?

00:01:43 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Oh, well, I attended Howard University for a while, and I will admit, I wasn't that academically inclined. I was having fun, and I was also working full time at the U.S. Post

Office while I was going to school. And I dropped out after a couple of semesters, and I was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1966. And I spent two years during the Vietnam era in the U.S. Army. I was blessed because I did not go to Vietnam. I spent a year in the States and a year in Germany, and I came home in September of 1968 and went back to work, married in November of 68, and I went on the fire department, DC Fire Department in April of 1969.

00:02:55 **AMY MAURO**

Wow. And so were you in the city in 1968 during the riots?

00:03:00 **DONALD EDWARDS**

No, I was in Germany in April of 68 when the riots occurred, and I was shocked when I got back home to see how my city had changed. It had changed, you know, physically, psychologically and emotionally. It really changed. And that was a shock.

00:03:24 **AMY MAURO**

Can you tell us more about the psychological and emotional change?

00:03:31 **DONALD EDWARDS**

When I got back home, the tensions that existed in April of 68 were still prevalent. D.C. was really a sleepy southern town. You know, it was segregated. I went to segregated schools up until, just prior to entering junior high school, when the Brown versus Board of Education decision was passed. We had two separate school systems in the city - one for blacks, one for whites. And that was it. It wasn't the overt type of racism or discrimination that was evident in other parts of the country, but it was there. You knew where to go and what to do. Even the fire department was segregated. If you were a black, you could only be assigned to one of four companies. That was Engine 4, Engine 7, Engine 27, and Truck 10. And believe it or not, when I was appointed to the fire department, I was assigned to Truck 10. But that was in 1969.

00:04:59 **AMY MAURO**

The fire department had become integrated, right? They no longer had the race specific houses.

00:05:02 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Exactly right. So. But those are some of the things that played on your emotions. You know, there were tensions that still existed between the black community and the police department. There was also the ongoing anti-war demonstrations that were beginning to take place here in the city as a result of the US's involvement in Vietnam. ... And just to look at the destruction that had occurred, most, if not all of which occurred in neighborhoods that were predominantly occupied by people of color. 14th Street corridor. The H Street corridor or parts of 7th Street were just obliterated, basically. And they stood that way for years. And that sort of stifled the prosperity and economic growth of the city, because people who ran businesses fled the city, and there were stretches of the city that were just almost like a ghost

town at times.

00:06:25 **AMY MAURO**

And so how did you end up wanting to become a firefighter? Were you familiar with that community? Tell us your decision-making process.

00:06:34 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Well, as a child, I chased fire engines. I mean, I lived in not too far from Engine 24, which was the first due engine at our house. And we would see them responding down Georgia Avenue. And you became familiar with the apparatus and the numbers. Also, I had an uncle, my father's brother, who lived in the 1600 block of 10th Street NW, which was a block and a half away from Engine 4, which was an all-Black fire station at the time. And we used to go down to visit Uncle Henry and we walked past Engine 4 and that was the only place where we would see, you know, firefighters of color. And they were always welcoming, you know, they'd always wave, stop and talk, which was very different from Engine 24. I was run away from there. My brother, my older brother and I, we stopped by one day. The doors were open, and we were standing in front of the firehouse and the firefighter came out and said, get away from here. Get away from me. And we left. I was about 8 or 9 years old. Well, that sort of stuck in my mind, but I never thought at that young age – that was not a goal - becoming a firefighter.

Well, after I came back, after I was discharged from the Army and went back to work with the post office, the unit that I worked in, we would have breaks and we would play cards. We played Bid, Whist, Rise and Fly. That's one hand you'd have to bet at seven or something. If you lost, you got up so that everyone else would have an opportunity to play. And one night we were playing cards and there was a guy in the unit, and I can't remember that guy's name. He was about my age, and he said, you know, I got a letter today to go down to take the physical exam for the fire department. This was in like January of 1969 ... He said, I don't want to be a damn fireman. And so I was kind of curious. I said, why not, man? You know, it's more money than what we're making here. He said, "I won't be no damn fireman," like that. So I said, well, where did you take the test? So he said, U.S. Civil Service Commission, because at that time, all DC government jobs came under the auspices of the Civil Service Commission, 19th and E streets. So I called when I got home. I called the next morning, and the lady said, well, yes, we give the exam for the fire department every two weeks, every other Friday. So I said, well, do I have to make an appointment? She said, no, it's a walk in. So I went down. I took the test and on ... I know you wonder how I remember these dates. I took the test on February the 14th, which was Valentine's Day, which was also my older brother's birthday. And about ten days later, I got a phone call and was recruited from the Metropolitan Police Department. Because the exams were the same exams. [The recruiter] said, "if you want to come on MPD, you can transfer your score over to our list and we'll hire you immediately." So I didn't want to be a police officer because my brother was in law enforcement at the time. My brother was an officer with the U.S. Park Police. And my wife wasn't that keen on my becoming a police officer. And my mom, she wasn't either. She had one son that was in law enforcement, and she - she never said it - but I don't believe she wanted me to be a police officer. So I respectfully declined. And then about two weeks later, I got a letter from the fire department asking was I still interested and if so, call this number. I called and talked to the personnel officer, who was a Lieutenant Lee, and he told me what day to go for the physical and come for the interview. At that time, the Police and Fire Clinic

was located on the third floor of Engine 16. So I knew where that was. I had to go there for the medical exam. Then I had to go to the Upshur Street Clinic at 13th and Upshur Street and have a chest x ray. And then I had to go to fire department headquarters for the interview. Fire department headquarters was at 300 McMillan drive.

00:12:42 **AMY MAURO**

Right in northeast.

00:12:43 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Northwest. Very near ... The hospital across the street from Howard University. You know where the Old McMillan reservoir is, right? Well, at it right off of fourth Street at. That's where. That's where the fire department headquarters, fire chief's office was there. It was also the fire department communications division.

AMY MAURO

Yes, I remember that.

DONALD EDWARDS

Yeah, that's the same building. The same building. So I went there for the interview, and I came in and I had my application and everything, and I gave it to Lieutenant Lee. And he looked at it and he said, when do you want to start work for us? He never asked me a question. He just said, when do you want to start work for us? And I say, well, sir, I'm currently employed at the US Post Office. I have to give them sufficient notice. And so, they always required a two week notice. So he said, well, look, you call me and he told me the day you call me back on this particular day, the date that he gave me. And I will tell you when to submit your resignation from the US Post Office. So I called him back. He said, two weeks from tomorrow, you submit your resignation. No, a week from tomorrow you submit it effective two weeks from that date. Which I did. And the rest became history. It was at that time the fire department hired hard in spurts, unlike they do now where they hire a class. The day that I was hired, there were only two other guys hired - Tommy Leach and Joseph Stanley. I went to Truck 10. Tommy went to Engine 13, which we were housed at, still there in the same house, and Joe went to Truck 9. Joe resigned before we went to training school. Because I didn't go straight to the training school. I went to the firehouse.

00:15:13 **AMY MAURO**

We talked to another retiree who did it that way.

00:15:18 **DONALD EDWARDS**

And so that was in April of 69. I didn't go to training school until November of 69. So everything was on the job training. You know, I learned how to use SCBA in the firehouse, ladder evolutions, all those things like that. Because I had not been to the training academy, but that the way the department did it. And then once they got a sufficient number of candidates.

00:15:51 **AMY MAURO**

For a class.

00:15:52 **DONALD EDWARDS**

For a class, then we all went to class and my class, there were 25 individuals, and I can say 25 guys, because at that time there were no females on the job. And we started training academy in November of 69. We graduated in January of 1970, and we lost one candidate during the course for academic reasons. But the rest of us continued on. A couple of guys resigned a couple of years later, but most of us remained to retire. And some of us in the class elevated ourselves to be become officers in the department. But that was my introduction into the fire department, it was because I remember having when I came home that day and I told my wife that I was going to go on the fire department and how soon it was going to occur. She had one question. She said, do you really want to do this? She never said no or anything. Like she just wanted to know, do you want to do this? And she hugged me. She said, we'll do this.

00:17:35 **AMY MAURO**

I like that.

00:17:36 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yeah, I lost her 11 years ago.

00:17:37 **AMY MAURO**

I'm sorry to hear that.

00:17:39 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yeah, we were married 45 years.

00:17:46 **AMY MAURO**

Well, the spouse, you know, participates in that job just as much as the firefighter.

00:17:50 **DONALD EDWARDS**

You need an understanding spouse, significant other, in order to succeed in that career because it takes somebody with significant amount of patience, understanding, love, you know, because you're going to miss birthdays, holidays, all types of things. You're going to come home with what you've experienced out there in the street. You're going to bring that home and you need somebody there to understand because I snapped at you. That has nothing to do with you. It's because of what I have experienced the last 24 hours or whatever. Your tour was out there in the street. But it takes a very understanding spouse to see you through that. And I had that. I did. And I don't know whether you know it, but my son followed me into the fire service. He retired last October from 34 years in the Montgomery County Fire

Department.

00:19:10 **AMY MAURO**

Okay. I did not know that.

00:19:12 **DONALD EDWARDS**

I had a nephew that followed me into DC. He retired two years ago from DC.

00:19:14 **AMY MAURO**

What's his name?

00:19:16 **DONALD EDWARDS**

His name was Anthony Peters.

00:19:22 **AMY MAURO**

Sounds familiar.

00:19:23 **DONALD EDWARDS**

He retired shortly after John Donnelly became fire chief and had a brother in law, followed me into the fire department. He retired as a deputy chief, but he's deceased. Richard passed away after he retired. My older brother, the one that I mentioned earlier. He stayed in law enforcement. And he was the first African-American police chief of Montgomery County, Maryland - Clarence Edwards. I want to show you something. [Takes out a book}. He wrote that last year.

00:20:16 **AMY MAURO**

Wow. So he started with DC, MPD?

00:20:19 **DONALD EDWARDS**

No, he started with the US Park Police. And he was there for 20 years. He retired as a major, which is equivalent to our battalion chief's position, and he then became the division chief for the Montgomery County Park Police. And then he went to the job of police chief of Montgomery County.

00:20:57 **AMY MAURO**

That's great. A police chief and a fire chief in the same family. I didn't know that. Incredible.

00:21:02 **DONALD EDWARDS**

So we talk every day. Still. And he's older. He's four years older than I am. And we sort of, even when I was on the fire department, he was very encouraging to me. I remember one day

I was assigned to Squad 2, I thought firefighting - That was our band, you know, I was happy, I was going to fires every day. And he was a lieutenant on the US Park Police, and he came by the firehouse and I was standing out front of Engine 24 with a couple other guys. He made a U-turn and came back where he went outside, one side of me and down the other, saying, there's nothing out here on Georgia Avenue that they're going to ask you on a promotional exam. So get your you know what inside and start studying. And that was an impetus for me to begin to study. And I studied, you know, for promotion, and promoted to sergeant.

00:22:13 **AMY MAURO**

Wait before you get there. So did you go back to Truck 10 after the academy? So you were in southwest?

00:22:22 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yes, I was. In southwest. Not in the station where they are now. The fire station was around the corner.

00:22:28 **AMY MAURO**

Which was probably new then.

00:22:29 **DONALD EDWARDS**

It was when I went there. It was nine years old. The building? Yeah, because it was constructed in 1960 and I went back to Truck 10, and I was there from 69 through 1973. At that time, that was a rather slow company because Southwest Washington was undergoing significant renovation and rehab renewal. They were building high rises all around us and there was very little fire activity. Our biggest activity was going to the White House to stand by for helicopter details. One of the people that I would say had a tremendous impact on my career was my lieutenant when I was assigned to Truck 10. That was Lieutenant Joseph Cooksey. He'd been on the job a while. Older white guy. But I'm telling you, ladies, he was one of the best people to come into an agency like that and train you.

00:24:04 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Was fair, encouraged you, Joe was that. ... His middle name was Donald. So everybody called him Donald Cooksey. And throughout until he retired, he always checked on me wherever I was. He retired as a battalion chief. I had the privilege of driving him at Truck 10 and also driving him as a battalion chief for when he was detailed to the battalion. We'll get to that. That's another assignment.

And I left Truck 10 in May of 1973. I was reassigned to the Emergency Ambulance Service. At that time, all firefighters had to spend one year in the Emergency Ambulance Service prior to the end of your fifth year on the job, because in order to be eligible to take the sergeant's exam, you had to have six years on the job. Didn't have to have ambulance service, but they tried to get that done prior to the end of your fifth year on the job. So that would not interfere with your ability to study for promotion. And I was assigned to Ambulance 4, which was located with Engine 14. And at that time, I lived on Fort Totten Drive, NE. We lived in an apartment and I could walk to the firehouse. Literally. I lived a half a block from the

firehouse. And I spent a year assigned to Ambulance 4. And I encountered someone else who had a significant impact on my career. Guy named you may have heard the name Sonny Mulligan. William Mulligan. He retired as a deputy chief. He was a captain of Engine 14, but I had worked with him on details to Engine 2 and Rescue Squad 1 when I was assigned to Truck 10. He was a lieutenant in charge of Rescue Squad 1. He got me interested in the rescue squads and when I was still at Truck 10, I applied to be what they quote, turned over on the rescue squads. That was like your elite units. At least we thought we were elite and still do. And he was detailed to Rescue Squad 1 for 90 days and for the evaluation, I passed that, and then that made me eligible to be detailed to the rescue squad. I asked to be assigned to the squad and the Captain of the squad said, come back and see me after you get five years on and finish your ambulance service. So in the interim, I was transferred to the EMS bureau and that went out the window. As I said, I Captain Mulligan was a very excellent teacher. I sort of modeled my radio communication skills behind him. I used to listen to him on the radio, you know, he was very articulate. Level mindset, never yelled, got excited. You hear some people on the radio, they're yelling and you don't know what they're saying or what's going on. So I sort of listened to him on the radio and I sort of modeled my radio communications skills after him. His son also became a firefighter. And one of my future assignments as personnel liaison officer, I processed his son through. So, it's the fire service. You ladies know it's one big family.

00:28:47 **AMY MAURO**

I'm trying to remember if I knew them all again.

00:28:53 **DONALD EDWARDS**

It was probably his son. Retired over the last 4 or 5 years, I think.

00:29:01 **AMY MAURO**

Yeah, I think that's the one I met.

00:29:03 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Robert. Maybe.

00:29:05 **SPEAKER_S4**

Yeah. Just checking Facebook.

00:29:08 **DONALD EDWARDS**

He was a battalion chief or deputy chief. And his dad, Sonny, was a deputy chief when he retired. Deputy chief of firefighting. So after I spent my year there on the ambulance, I learned a lot. Saw a lot. Delivered a baby. Saw things that sort of hit you emotionally. For instance. The first time I administered mouth to mouth resuscitation was to a six month old baby that died from SIDS. And I would come home. My daughter was an infant, and I used to come home and sit in her room and watch her breathe. I used to watch my son breathe, who was five years old, five and a half years older than his sister. I used to sit in their rooms and watch him breathe, because I seen that out there in the street. And that's some of the

emotional or psychological things that you experience as a firefighter that you bring home. Some of it is positive like that. Some of it can be negative or have a negative impact on you, your relationships and other things. So after my year in the ambulance, I was transferred to Engine 24. That was in my old neighborhood where I grew up at. I knew all the streets, all the alleys... As the kids said, that was the bomb.

00:31:04 **DONALD EDWARDS**

I was in 24 Engine, road 24 Engine for about a year, and then a vacancy opened up in the rescue squad. Squad 2, which was housed there at that firehouse. We had an engine 24, squad two and Battalion four. And I transferred over to the squad and, oh, that was like heaven. Like being in heaven. We were going to fires every day. You know, it was just, it was fun. Not that we enjoyed what was happening to people who were impacted by what we did. But if there was something going on, we wanted to be there. You know, I always say being a firefighter is not what you do. It's who you are. And it's it becomes a way of life, you know.

00:32:06 **AMY MAURO**

Did you or African Americans have any trouble getting on the rescue squad?

00:32:11 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yes, we did, because at the time when I went on, when I was appointed to the fire department, there were just three rescue squads. There was one African-American on each shift at each squad. That was it.

00:32:26 **AMY MAURO**

And that was mandated, I think. .

00:32:28 **DONALD EDWARDS**

No, it was one of those subtle ... there were a lot of unwritten rules. And that was one, I went to Squad 2, there were no other blacks on my shift. And I know that when I went to 24 Engine, I still remember the names of the three blacks that were assigned to the rescue squad on number one platoon. The platoon that I was on, there was a guy, Frank. Oh, boy. I thought I knew his name, but. From number two, platoon was a guy, Darnell Chase. And they referred to him as the Big Poppa because he was like a bear. And on the number three platoon was a guy named Ronald Jones. And that was it. And each rescue squad had one black per shift. But then when I transferred to the squad, the guy on my shift was no longer there. He was under some disciplinary procedure. He was suspended, which I'm not going to get into, you know, mention that. But I had a battalion chief who was an old squad guy from back in the day, a guy named Harry Gates. A legend, as they would say. And he handpicked people for the rescue squad assigned to his battalion. And I was like, let me go back a moment when I was getting ready to finish up my year's tour in the ambulance. I wanted to stay at Engine 14 because I had buddies there, you know, a couple of guys that I was in training school with me were there. So I put in my request to remain at Engine 14. Chief Gates, who was our battalion chief, called me at home And said he was going to disapprove the transfer request. And so I asked him. I said, well, why? He said, a couple of reasons. He said, first, if you stay

at Engine 14, you'll end up retiring from Engine 14. He said you have too much potential to stay there. And he said, secondly, too many blacks there. And the shift they were on, that I wanted to stay on. Number one platoon there seven people assigned, five were black. And he said, no, he said, you have too much potential. He said, I want you to come down here. And he'd say, but there's one thing you're going to have to do. So I said, oh, here comes the curve ball. So he said, I want you to become my fill-in aide. And I said, yes, I can do that.

00:36:11 **AMY MAURO**

That's great.

00:36:12 **DONALD EDWARDS**

And that's why he wanted me there. And that was another person who had an impact on my career. He retired as a deputy chief, also, Harry Gates. But he was an old, you know, firm. And I think he must. Chief gates probably came on the job in the 40s or late 40s. Yeah. But getting back to my assignments.

00:36:39 **AMY MAURO**

I have a question, actually. So you've mentioned a couple of mentors. I think there seems to be a pattern where they obviously saw something in you that they wanted to develop. What do you think that was?

00:36:54 **DONALD EDWARDS**

They must have. That's what I say.

You know, oftentimes... I was never a self-evaluating person. You know, I evaluated myself. A job was there, I did it, you know, I let other people evaluate my efforts or my performance. But there were a number of people who advised me or encouraged me because they apparently saw something in me. You have named it, you know, about three. There was a former fire chief, Theodore Coleman. I know you've heard that name. He encouraged me, he became a captain of Squad 2 while I was there. He always said, partner, you're going to go places in this job. Keep your head in the books. Keep your nose clean. He said you're going to go places. And that's ... there were a number of people. Another guy I know - you said I could mention people who I felt had a positive impact on my career. Another guy was a guy named Al Linnell. Al was the truck driver at Truck 10 when I was appointed and I didn't know how to drive an aerial ladder truck. You know, I knew how to drive a car, but being a city boy I never drove trucks. Cars were always automatic transmission. We had manual transmission apparatus back in the day. So he taught me how to drive an aerial ladder truck and had an infinite amount of patience Just scraping gears, you know. You had a piece that had the double clutch. When you shift, it was difficult with a large steering wheel. But I learned how to drive it. I learned how to tiller it. So, Al and I still talk through Facebook, we still stay in contact. And Al and I sort of followed one another when got promoted to lieutenant. He got promoted to captain at the same time he was a lieutenant at Engine 22. I replaced him at Engine 22 as a lieutenant then I got promoted to battalion chief. He was retiring as the 6th Battalion Chief. I replaced him as the 6th Battalion Chief. So we sort of followed one another and we keep in touch on Facebook. He'll post something when ... In July, the kids gave me this big party because I turned 80 and they saw a nice post from Al. He

lives in Ellicott City, but the fire department, what I found was when the individuals that you met that you work with, once they found out that you were about the business of the job, you were accepted. And that's why I never, and I can say this, I never had any overt type issues because they found out that I wanted to do the job.

But when I initially went on the fire department, I had no ambition to become the fire chief. It paid more money than I was making at the post office, and I was doing something that I liked or thought I liked. But after about two years, I realized that, hey, I like this. This is good. So I set some goals for myself. The first goal was I wanted to work 25 years because with working 25 years and with my military service and my prior government service, I could retire with maximum benefit. I wanted to make captain before I got 20 years on, because you could retire at 20 years back then with no age. You know, 20 years, you could go with minimum of 50% of whatever your salary was at the time. I made captain in 16 years. And I wanted to retire in relatively good health. I spent 31 years there, retired as a fire chief, and I retired in relatively good health. So my goals were over. You know, I achieved my goals and more. But there were individuals that you met that I know I met that were extremely helpful to me in my career, throughout my career. There was always somebody there to encourage me or to tell you to do this. Don't do that. Things like that. And I think you needed that. In training school, for instance, there were 25 guys in my class, 13 African-Americans, 12 White guys. All 11 of the White guys had been volunteer firefighters. Right. So that made their efforts there to train the school easier than all of us were. All of the brothers. We were from D.C., you know, there was no fire volunteer fire service available to us. But that experience showed me that, hey, you can do what everybody else can do. Just have to put forth the effort. And that's what it's about.

But getting back to my assignments, I went into Engine 24 and I transferred to across the floor to Squad 2 and I rode the back of Squad 2 for about three years. And then I got the battalion chief's aid job, and I drove the battalion chief for a year, and then I was promoted to sergeant. And my first assignment as sergeant was fleet maintenance. And once again, I did not realize that somebody was prepping me. Ladies. I was teed off because I wanted to stay in firefighting. I called. I got permission to talk to the then operations chief, and he said, I hear you're dissatisfied with your assignment. This was, you know, the order. Special order came out with your name on it. It was effective, like two weeks or whatever it was down the road. So I said, yes, sir. I said, I'd like to stay in firefighting. So he said, you remember when you went before the promotion board, you answered the question or a question was asked of you. Would you accept a position in another division? And do you remember your answer? So I said, "yes, sir. I said, yes". He said, "you still want to be a sergeant?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "I'll see you next Monday in maintenance" and hung the phone up. But you know, I was still sort of peeved. But then I realized, hey, pay is the same. I was working.

00:45:37 **DONALD EDWARDS**

All day work. You know, they had fleet maintenance. Other than at one weekend out of the month, I was the duty officer at fleet maintenance. So I stayed at fleet maintenance. I was only there for about 8 or 9 months. Oh, and the reason I left there was another guy who was on the sergeant's list also, but he was further down the list. He came up, he moved up. It was time for him to be promoted, but he had a serious back injury. The doctor said he could not go to firefighting any longer. He needed to be in a non-firefighting job. So they moved him - Jimmy Flowers, they moved him to fleet maintenance and they moved me back out into firefighting. And I went to Truck 4 and once again I was in heaven. Truck 4. That's where

Engine 6 was New Jersey Avenue.

00:46:44 **AMY MAURO**

And so that's where you would have spent some time with Vito. And Squad 1.

00:46:50 **DONALD EDWARDS**

But I was in that house three times.

00:46:54 **AMY MAURO**

Oh okay.

00:46:54 **DONALD EDWARDS**

I'll tell you as I go along. I was a sergeant there. Sergeants are fill-in officers when the regular platoon commander, lieutenant or captain is on detail somewhere. You then are in charge of that unit. Well, the captain of truck 4 at the time was an acting battalion chief. So he was gone all the time. So I was in charge of Truck 4.

00:47:32 **DONALD EDWARDS**

There quite a bit of days where, as a sergeant, you may be at Engine 2 today. And under that old shift, are you ladies familiar with the shift that we were at that time? We worked three days day work, three nights on night work, and you were off three. And during that six-day work cycle, as a sergeant, you could be at six different fire stations. Wherever there was a need for an officer, you would possibly be there. So most of my time as a sergeant, I spent at Truck 4 when the captain wasn't there and he was gone quite a bit because he was up near the top of the list to be promoted for battalion chief. So he was filling in as an acting chief, in other battalions. So I stayed there for four months. 1982. And I was promoted to lieutenant. And I went to Engine 22 as a lieutenant. Well, the city was undergoing some financial difficulties.

00:49:05 **AMY MAURO**

What year was that?

00:49:06 **DONALD EDWARDS**

That was in. Well, actually, they had begun back in the 70s because they were rotating closing of companies and a number of various budget issues.

00:49:17 **AMY MAURO**

Did that happen after Home Rule?.

00:49:21 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yes. Because the mid-70s was when.

00:49:28 **AMY MAURO**

We got home rule in 74, I guess I yeah, I didn't realize talking to a couple of people that the financial problems pretty much started right away.

00:49:38 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Right away. Yeah. Because there were certain services that the federal government had been providing.

00:49:49 **AMY MAURO**

Right. And we didn't have a state, as all other cities do.

00:49:53 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Exactly. To help.

00:49:53 **AMY MAURO**

To do that.

00:49:54 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Right, right. The budget had to be approved by Congress and signed by the president. One of the last three budget years, while I was fire chief, I had to testify before Congress for my budget, before a House subcommittee. Referencing your budget. And that was one of the things when I would go to fire chief conferences, that was a unique thing that only I had.

00:50:26 **AMY MAURO**

Absolutely. right.

00:50:27 **DONALD EDWARDS**

And so, there were issues, you know.

00:50:35 **AMY MAURO**

So you were saying, as a lieutenant, there were financial.

00:50:39 **DONALD EDWARDS**

There were some financial difficulties. But the department still met its mission in spite of it. I was at 22 Engine for about almost two years, and then I was suddenly transferred to Truck 6. And I think I know the reason why... And this was not in the station where they are now. That was the old station on Park Road. During the early to mid 80s. Today everybody talks

about the fentanyl drug issue. Now, we had a significant heroin issue in the city.

00:51:37 **DONALD EDWARDS**

And even though Engine 22 is in upper northwest and the upper part of Ward 4, there was a significant large amount of drug activity, people overdosing, things of that nature. And one evening we had a run for a drug overdose across the street from the Takoma Rec Center, which was part of the Coolidge High School complex. And we had a young man who was about 18. And as you know, opioid overdose sends you into respiratory arrest first before you go into cardiac arrest. So we are pumping. We're doing rescue breathing with the bag mask and everything. Waiting for an ambulance. Waiting for an ambulance. Lady came out of her house. Matter of fact, she was standing on her porch across the street. She came up. She said, where's the ambulance, young man? So I told her, I said. There used to be two ambulances at Engine 14, Ambulance 4 and Ambulance 14. I said the department moved Ambulance 14 downtown to the quarters of Engine 16 to handle the daily influx of people. I said, but, ma'am, you are out here. You're a taxpayer. You're a property owner. That service is now given to people who are just coming into the city to work as I see it. I just suggest you contact your council member and find out what went on with it.

00:53:35 **DONALD EDWARDS**

I don't know whether the lady contacted the then Ward 4 council person, but about three weeks later, the department had a series of in-service trainings going on at the Training Academy, where they were bringing in representatives from other parts of the department. They were bringing companies down there so that you could find out what does budget and accounting do. What does fleet maintenance do, you know, explaining the mission of the other agencies that supported what we only saw on the fireside. So after they had people talking and then afterwards they had a question and answer period. And then operations chief, he said anybody have any questions or concerns? So I said, raised my hand and he says, yeah, Lieutenant, what do you have? I told him, I'm a lieutenant at Engine 22. I said I had a response a couple of weeks ago for an overdose, and a citizen inquired as to why the it took so long for an ambulance to get there, and I told her that Ambulance 14 had been moved to Engine 16, and I think that she should contact her council person to find out what's going on, if it was going to be replaced or what. Well, you know, you shouldn't have done that, Lieutenant.

00:55:15 **AMY MAURO**

You gave yourself up.

00:55:18 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yeah, I gave myself up. That was it ladies.

00:55:23 **AMY MAURO**

That was Truck 6. Is that what's coming?

00:55:25 **DONALD EDWARDS**

That was a Tuesday. The next day I was on paddle day or Kelly day off and the phone rang at home and I answered it. It was my captain at 22, Captain Bucko, and I thought he was calling me to come in to work overtime, and he said, Lieu, I'm not calling you to work overtime. See, I want to read you something said by order of the operations chief, Lieutenant Donald Edwards, Engine 22, number two is transferred to Truck 6, number three at 0800 hours that Sunday. So I went to spend about 5 or 6 months at Truck six, which I didn't mind because Truck 6 was another firefighting company. It still is. It was in my old neighborhood, too. So it wasn't any deal, big deal with that. But in the interim, as I mentioned earlier, in reference to the budgetary issues in the city, the rescue squads had been turned into combination companies. Engine 6 and Squad 1 were in the same house and that became Engine 6. Squad 1, if the engine company got a run, was first due, you took the engine, the rescue squad was out of service. And where before you'd have ten people five for each of the companies. Now you have five. And so the three rescue squads were what we refer to as combination units. Then in April of 1984, Rescue Squad 1 was slated to go back into service, full service. So I applied for Lieutenant at Squad 1. And I got that and I went to Squad 1, and that's when I really ran into Vito, you know, because I think he was still with CNN. Yes, at the time. And he and another guy who was a photographer, Eliot Goodman. And Eliot rode with me when I was in the back of Squad 2 as a firefighter. He was riding Squad 2. But that's, you know, when I got to Squad 1 and I was at squad 1 for about a year and a half as a lieutenant, and then I was promoted to acting captain, and I went to personnel as a personnel liaison officer. Now, the reason for the acting captain, there was a racial discrimination suit in federal court.

00:58:32 **AMY MAURO**

So now we're in the early 80s?

00:58:34 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yes.

00:58:35 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Early to mid 80s. And all promotions were held in abeyance. Permanent promotions. Now they promoted us. I mean, we were designated acting captains. And because of the duration of the hearing, I mean, the trial, they started paying us at that new rate. And I was an acting captain from 85 to 1991, I believe, but I didn't mind because I was getting paid. I was getting step increases. So when I got promoted to captain, I was top step captain by now. So monetarily speaking, it didn't harm me. But all of those what they did, they then backdated your promotion to when you were supposed to have been promoted. Once that case was settled, that case was settled in U.S. federal court, and there was some monetary compensation for African Americans. And that was in 91, 00 or 91. That was when the fourth platoon came into being, because before that there were only three platoons and There were not enough personnel to fully staff the fourth shift, so there was a tremendous amount of overtime. I used overtime to put my daughter through college. I did. For four years, I worked the maximum amount of overtime that I could, which was 36 hours every payday, and that helped pay for, you know, her tuition. So it was a benefit, you know, to me. But I said I went to Squad 1. I was at Squad 1 as a lieutenant when John Williams lost his life on the fireground. It wasn't my shift, but I was a pallbearer for him in the funeral services. I knew John because he had been at 22 Engine when I was there as a lieutenant. We weren't on the same shift, but he transferred to Squad 1, and he lost his life at the Casino Royal fire on 14th

Street. That wasn't the first line of duty death that I had experienced. When I was at Truck 10, Firefighter Turner, Maurice Turner, lost his life when a wall collapsed at a warehouse at 4th and L Streets, NW. I was on that fire. We were Truck 10. We ran the third alarm.

01:01:57 **AMY MAURO**

We interviewed Robert Banasik. Did you know him? He was there also.

01:02:02 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yeah. He was.

01:02:02 **AMY MAURO**

I don't want to interrupt.

01:02:03 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yeah, we were - that fire occurred on a Saturday with Maurice, and he was assigned to Engine 16. Banasik may have been at 16.

01:02:17 **AMY MAURO**

I think so, yeah.

01:02:18 **DONALD EDWARDS**

At the time. I'm not certain. I was just a back step firefighter. There was a street fire alarm box on the corner of 4th and L, and people used to pull it all the time. Engine 6 would run it. False alarm. False alarm. And that Saturday that box was pulled, I think. And then they filled out the assignment. And I remember walking out of the front door of Engine 13 onto 6th Street and looking north, and you could see the column of smoke. And we knew it was a working fire because they asked for a second alarm right away. Well, then they transferred us to Truck 3 at the quarters of 16. And while en route, they hit the third alarm. And I think that's when the wall had collapsed because they initially went inside and they came out. And as they evacuated the building, that's when the wall fell. And it got Firefighter Turner. But that was the first firefighter death that I experienced. That was back before cell phones. By the time I got home from work that evening, everybody had called, was wondering, called my wife, you know, you heard from Donald, you heard from Donald?. Well, no, she hadn't, because nobody had cell phones at the time. And because by that time it was on the news and everything. This firefighter had lost his life. But that was a sort of tragic occurrence, sort of opened your eyes to the danger involved in firefighting because we know that danger is there, but you put it in the back of your mind. You don't think about it, because if you thought about it, you wouldn't do it. You would not do the job.

01:04:27 **AMY MAURO**

And what was John Williams like? You were his pallbearer. So you must have been friends.

01:04:34 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Good guy, good guy. We used to call him the gentle giant. Actually, John went to Cardozo with my younger sister. They graduated from high school together. Nice guy. Nice. I mean, a gentleman, you know, big guy. He was about 6-1, you know, big guy.

01:05:00 **DONALD EDWARDS**

You know, he lost his life, but he was a good, good soldier. Good guy. So I was, like I said, I was at Squad 1 from April of 1984 to August of 85. And then I went to Personnel. Personnel liaison officer. Acting captain. I was so naive. Or so in tune to firefighting. I didn't even know where the personnel liaison officer's office was. It just so happens it was in police headquarters. It was at 300 Indiana Avenue on the sixth floor. I thought it was at the office of the fire chief at Grimke School.

01:05:49 **AMY MAURO**

You went to the wrong place?

01:05:51 **DONALD EDWARDS**

No, I knew, but I had to ask, because once I got the assignment, you're going to personnel liaison officer, and the then fire chief, who was TR Coleman, he said, I'm sending you there because I need somebody in there who I can trust who's going to do the job. And I'm looking to hire - we need more minorities. Not based on quantity, but quality. I want you to hire quality people. And we were under a court order that the applicant or candidates list was being monitored by the U.S. District Court. Each week, I had to prepare a report showing where everybody on that list was - well over 1500 people, where they were in their investigation, in their background investigation ... I had to prepare that, it was easy, it wasn't difficult, but it was because it was repetitious. You know, I had to do it every week. And then the director of DC Office of Personnel had to sign off on it, and then it had to be carried to the US District Court for the judge to review. And I had to follow ... that's when DCOP had developed strict hiring rules for the fire department because there had been discrimination, prior to that, where people weren't called or no follow ups or a multitude of things where persons of color were passed over. So the courts required them to put into place these procedures and very much like police departments when the Justice Department puts them under.

01:08:01 **AMY MAURO**

A consent decree.

01:08:02 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Consent decree. Right, right. And that's what I had to do. But I didn't want to go there, did not want to go to personnel because that was all day work. I didn't want that. I wanted to be out in firefighting. So one day I was in my office down there, and the assistant director, Mrs. Green, she called me on the phone. She said, "captain, are you doing anything? You busy?" I said, "no, ma'am." She said, "come on over, I want to talk to you." And I went in her office. She said, "close the door, sit down." She said, "you've been here now about a month, month and a half, and I know you don't want to be here," she said, "because you are a street fireman.

You want to be out there in the street, I hear you. We can be in a meeting and hear the apparatus going by the building, and your ears perk up.” ... She said, “but you were sent here for a purpose. Somebody has seen a future for you in this department. And this is the place. There's a whole two rooms full of people to help you in administering or doing what you have to do. Use them. Make the best of this. Everybody that has been here before you retired, at least as a battalion chief.” But I say this from an administrative standpoint. That particular assignment prepared me more to be fire chief than any assignment that I had prior to that, because I saw the department. I take off the lens of firefighting. I could see where the department fit into the that pie for the city's pie. You know, and I, for instance, I did not know how much it cost or how much effort went into recruiting one person. The work that had to be done. I didn't know that because I'm sitting in the firehouse all the time. So you get almost tunnel vision because you think, oh, this is it. This is the firehouse. This is where everything is. But you forget what happens when the air conditioning breaks. Somebody from another division, or even an outside contractor, has to come in and take care of it. When the apparatus breaks down, you got fleet maintenance. If there's a severe problem with it, it may have to go back to the manufacturer. As a result of that, I learned administratively how the department operates within the city government, and that really, I think, prepared me to be the fire chief, you know?

01:11:11 **AMY MAURO**

It's important.

01:11:12 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yeah. Very important. So I stayed there from 85 to 87, and then I came back in. I wanted to get back out there because you want to maintain your skill sets. So I requested to go back out into operations. And the fire chief says “well, you can go” – it was still Chief Coleman – “but you have to find somebody to replace you.” So I said, chief, you found me.

01:12:02 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Ladies, there was a lieutenant - Terry Francisco. He was in the administrative division. He was with the casualty investigations unit at the clinic. And I saw Terry some months ago, and he said, “you know, if you ever want to leave, you know, I got it. I'll take it.” So I left the fire chief's office that day. I drove back down to Engine 2, parked, walked over to my office. Well, I was walking over to my office when I came up out of the garage at Engine 2. Guess who's coming down the steps to the garage? Terry Francisco. And I said, “Terry, man, you are not going to believe this.” You know, we hugged and everything. So I said, “I just came from the fire chief's office, and I want to come back out in fire fighting.” But he told me to find somebody. He said, “well, you found him.” He was getting ready to be promoted to captain also. Oh, I was already an acting captain. He was getting ready to be promoted to acting captain. So I turned around and went back to the fire chief's office. And I told him. I said, “chief, I found somebody.” He said, who was it? I said, “Terry Francisco.” He said, “that was awfully quick”. So I said, “Chief Coleman, I ran into him, when I got back down to 2 Engine.” So he said, “well, go see Chief Dixon,” who at that time was the operations chief. “See if he's got a spot for you.” So I went over to Chief Dixon's office and told him what was going on. So, you know, he had the big board up there with the officers and the vacancies. So he said, “I need a firefighting captain at Engine 4. You want that?” I said, “I got it.” And so

two weeks later, I went to Engine 4.

01:14:08 **AMY MAURO**

Lots of time in the 4th Battalion.

01:14:09 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yeah, a lot of time in the 4th and 6th Battalion. I was in the 4th Battalion when I was a sergeant. 6th Battalion when I was appointed. Then I went to ... Well, when I went to in the ambulance, I went to the 4th and then stayed in the 4th until I got promoted to sergeant, went to fleet maintenance, then came to the 1st Battalion. And then when I got promoted to lieutenant, I went to the back to the 4th Battalion, Engine 22. And I stayed in the 4th until I went to Squad 1. Back to the 1st. And then when I got promoted to captain, I went to personnel. And then I came back to the 4th from personnel. And then I went back to - I was at 4 Engine for almost a year and Captain of Squad 1. Captain Gregory was getting promoted to battalion chief. I didn't even put in for that. They had promised me captain of the rescue squad when one opened up as a result of my two years in personnel. Operations chief called me and said, "You still want to go to the squad?" I'd say "yes, sir." He said "Squad 1 in 2 weeks. Tom Gregory is getting promoted to battalion chief". And I went to Squad 1, and I was there as a captain from 1888 to 93 when I was promoted to battalion chief. And that was it. We were in heaven then, you know, a squad when I had an excellent crew, excellent ship because it was Squad 1, Engine 6 and Truck 4. That was before the squad moved to Engine 2. We were called the Big House because that was the only house in in the department with three companies in it. We had Engine 6, Truck 4 and Squad 1.

01:16:35 **AMY MAURO**

Did you work with Bea Rudder?

01:16:37 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yes. Now that you ask. You mentioned her when she was promoted. I mean, not promoted, but when she was hired, I was a firefighter at Squad 2. We were housed with Engine 4 on Sherman Avenue. When that station opened up, we moved. I mean, the squad moved from Engine 24 to Engine 4, and Engine 4 came from R street. Bea was appointed to Engine 4. We were there at the same time but different shifts. So you know I worked with her there. And then when I was a lieutenant at Squad 1 she was on my crew. She was assigned to my shift Squad 1. So we worked together. Yeah I knew Bea. Watched her grow in the department. Very tough female. And very cerebral. Did the job. Caught all types of flack. You know, as the first female. But she, you know, hung in there. Stood the test of time. And she did. She did well. As you probably know she retired as a deputy fire chief.

01:18:11 **AMY MAURO**

Yeah. So during your fire chief administration, what rank would she have been?

01:18:20 **DONALD EDWARDS**

When I was fire chief ... She may have been a lieutenant, I think. Okay. I think she was a lieutenant. Yeah. When I was Fire Chief. Because we had no female command officers

battalion and above. She may have been a captain. Bea came on in 79. I think it was 79, 78 or 79. I became chief in 97. So she was either a lieutenant or captain. I believe she was a good worker, excellent worker, excellent work.

And now I'm the captain at the squad. And that was during an extremely violent time in the city. So that was when DC, unfortunately had become known as the homicide capital of the U.S. I mean, I saw so many young people lost their lives during that that time in that area right around Engine 6 on New Jersey Avenue. I referred to it as a killing zone. I mean, young people, you know, 18, 19 years old, just every night, every night you could have been in the bed in the firehouse down there in my in my bedroom, and you could hear gunshots and lights would come on. Either the engine or the squad would be running a shooting, you know, in front of the firehouse. There were overdoses. It was just tough. It was a tough time. And those are the types of things that you experience out there that create anxiety, frustration, all types of emotional tugs on your system and you bring some of that home, you know, and that's where you need that strong presence at home. That's where that family thing comes into play.

I'll tell you a little story about my mom when I requested to leave personnel to come back into firefighting. I go down to see Mom and Dad. And I said, "well, two weeks from now, I'm coming back out in operations". She said, "Operations?" I said, "yeah, I'll come back out in the street." She went off, "Why are you going to do that? You're working five days a week. You're in an office. You're not out there smelling all that smoke and running up and down the street. You're at home with your family at night and on the weekends. You must be out of your mind." She went up one side of me and down the other. My father was sitting there, and I'll never forget. Dad said - my mom's name was Irene. Said "Irene, leave that boy alone. He knows what he wants to do. Leave him alone." And she was, you know, she settled down, but she was - She didn't want me to come back out in firefighting."

01:22:14 **AMY MAURO**

Understandable.

01:22:15 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yeah. Understandable. And I often think how my wife dealt with me and Greg being in the fire service at the same time. You know, my son, we were in the fire service at the same time. So I don't know how she dealt with it. I have a scanner upstairs on my nightstand. I got one downstairs in my office. She never turned those things on when I wasn't here. Never turned them on. And I've had a scanner since I finished my probation on the fire department. But she never listened to it. Just shut it out of her when I wasn't around. Now, when I was home, of course it was - I listened to it. But when I wasn't here, she never listened to it.

But getting back to my assignments - when I was at the squad for about five years as a captain. That's when I'd see Vito all the time. We had we had a lot of fun together. Vito was in the firehouse because he would be in the firehouse on all four shifts. We had some good times down there, you know. So when I say good fires, I mean working fires. We had a number of working incidents, and it was interesting work. Being there, being in the squad, running all over the city. And it was good. And I had, as I said, a great crew of people from my driver to the five people in the back, you know, they were all good. All of those guys that

were assigned on my shift were eventually promoted to officers. All of them. They were about the business of the job.

01:24:30 **DONALD EDWARDS**

I was there five plus years. Then I was promoted to battalion chief and I went to the 6th Battalion, which was downtown again, first doing everything down there. You know, another bundle of fun. I think shortly after getting promoted to battalion chief, they reduced the number of battalions. They realigned that part of the department. There were formerly eight battalions, and they reduced it to six and realigned units so that once again there was a budget tie to the department. Also during that time period, the city was undergoing significant budget issues. They weren't purchasing apparatus. Apparatus, you know, was purchased out of the capital improvements budget and demand for service was increasing and we were running apparatus into the ground. You know, there were units out of service. Some of the limited number of reserve units or replacement units. And it was ... it was a tough time. One assignment that I had when I was initially promoted to battalion chief, because the 6th chief is the first new chief due at the White House, the Secret Service had requested the response plan to the White House be rewritten. Guess who got that task? But I had excellent help with the Secret Service, the technical agent, the agent in charge of technical issues at the White House, Richard Cohen. That's who I worked with. I used to go to the White House every day. I would go to work, and in the morning, I would drive to Secret Service headquarters. They had a building on New York Avenue in the 1700th block, on the west side of the White House. And I get Richard, and he and I, we'd walk to the White House and we'd walk through and they were mainly concerned with response to the mansion.

There's specific response procedures in place for reported fires at the White House. I don't know what it is now. But that was part of the fire department bulletin. Everybody throughout the city had to know because anybody could respond to it. And so I helped rewrite the plans for that. And that was a unique experience, you know, working with the Secret Service. And so ... it was interesting and also a learning experience for me, learning how the Secret Service worked. Their roles in protecting the president and other important people within the government. That was good. But the 6th Battalion, that was busy. It was Downtown. You ran any major incident. All government buildings, government facilities, museums, all of that was in the 6th Battalion.

And good crews. I had good companies in my battalion on my shift. That was good. And I was always the type, I think my style of management and inclusive style, meaning just because you are a back step firefighter, that doesn't mean that the idea that you have about a solution to an issue, isn't valid because you're not an officer. I wanted to hear what you had to say. I remember when I was a firefighter, a back step fireman, they would have staff meetings. The battalion staff and you'd go to battalion headquarters and all the guys would be milling around. The officers went up to the battalion chief's office and had their meeting. Then the officer would come back and tell you what the battalion chief said. When I became battalion chief, I included everybody in my staff meeting, and I remember my first battalion staff meeting. The guys, they were all the crews. They were accustomed to going outside or just milling around. I said, "no, no, no, no. Everybody into the sitting room. Everybody in the lounge." I said, "I consider every member here a part of my staff." And I said "when I give out a directive or an order, I don't want a lieutenant or captain or sergeant going back interpreting what I say to you, I want you to hear it from the horse's mouth." And that was the way I managed. You know, I included everybody because I'm from that school of thought

that in any organization you have two customers, especially service organizations. You have the external customer, and you have the internal customer. And if you keep the internal customer happy, then the exterior customer is going to be happy. So that was something I learned years ago. Management school. I use that triangle of management. There are many managers that want to be right up here at the apex of the triangle, with the two sides and the bottom of the triangle supporting them. My mindset was to invert that triangle. My job is to support the sides because if I'm supporting them, guess what? They're going to make me successful. If they're happy, I'm going to be successful as a leader or as a manager. And that was my style. ...

I liked the street and I heard your excerpt that you sent me from Vito and what he said, it was extremely heartwarming. But as a fire chief, I probably responded to more incidents than any fire chief in the history of that department, because I would just go. I might run a medical local if I was in the area. If I was out and I heard it, I'd tell my aide. I said, Smitty, let's run by there, see what's going on. Not to take over. I never assumed command of any incident as a fire chief. Never. Because I got assistant chiefs, deputy chiefs, battalion chiefs. My job is to make sure you have what you need to handle the media, if they show up. Keep that pressure off you, so you, the incident commander, can keep your mind on solving, mitigating what's going on here. And I think that sort of endeared me to the troops, because they would see me. They would see me on a fireground. They would see me on a significant incident. And I always left the scene when I was fire chief, Deputy chief, Division two. To "communications advise all units operating on the Fireground. Such and such a good job well done," and broadcast that over both channels. And I did that because that's where I came from. I was a firefighter, you know, I came from the street and I tried not to forget that.

01:33:26 **AMY MAURO**

I've never heard a chief do that.

01:33:29 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yeah. But I did every working fire in particular when I became deputy chief. And when I go into my duties there later. But if I responded and assumed command as a deputy, when I relinquished command back to the initial incident commander, I thanked the troops that were there. Because they did their job, that lets them know, "hey, I care about you." I always felt that I was always approachable as an officer. Company officer right up. You know that. Stop and talk because I got to keep you guys happy. You ladies happy. And that, when we began to get females into the job. Now I got to remember to say, guys, women, males and females.

But like I said, I was a battalion chief for two years. And then during that two-year period, the then fire chief, Chief Alfred, retired. Ray Alfred. And the first chief of the department from outside of the agency was appointed by the then mayor, and that was Chief Otis Latin. And Chief Latin came in and he came from Houston. He was a - I think Otis was a retired deputy or assistant chief in Houston, and he brought new ideas to the agency. Some were resisted, very, very, very much so. For instance, he wanted to have captains in the truck companies. See, before, every company had a captain. So there were 54 captains, and he wanted to assign captains to the truck companies, because that's what they had in Houston. The union fought him because there was a loss of positions.

That never came into being - one of the other budgetary restraints, as you probably know, there was a reduction in staffing on the units when I was appointed. Ladder companies. Truck companies ran with six personnel. Budget reasons had reduced it to four. Over a period of years, engine companies. We had a two-piece engine company operation. Because of budget reasons, they did away with the pumper or the second piece reduced the engine company staffing from 5 to 4. The rescue squads remained at five. The fireboat remained at five and the hazmat unit remained at five person staffing per shift. But there were a number of changes that occurred during that time frame from, I'd say, the late 70s through the mid-90s, and most of it was related to budget issues. Not so much fire department budget issues, but city budget, budget issues and being a part of the city government. Everything comes downhill sooner or later. We know what that is.

But I, as I said, I was 6th Battalion chief for two years, and then Chief Latin promoted me to Deputy chief. Now, before Chief Latin came, there was a deputy on each shift. And that's usually the way they do it now. Well, I went back to it when I became fire chief, but he divided the department up into two divisions - Division 1, Division 2. And you had two deputies. And Chief Madison was Division 1. I was Division 2. I was responsible for all operations and administrative everything, fire department wise, in Wards 1, 2, 3 and 4. Floyd had wards 5, 6, 7 and 8, and all the units assigned in those wards. And so we worked five days a week, but we brought a car home. If there was a major incident in your division, you responded back at night.

01:38:39 **AMY MAURO**

So you had a day work schedule as a deputy chief of operations.

01:38:43 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Day work schedule. But if there was an incident after your normal 9 to 5 hours because Chief Latin gave you a response vehicle. I had a car with all the warning lights, everything on it. I drove that back and forth to work every day, the weekends. I used to even drive, believe it or not, that car to church.

01:39:13 **AMY MAURO**

Yeah, of course because anything could happen at any time.

01:39:20 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Right. Because the wife and I, she drove her car and I drove the fire department car. And there were several times during those years where I had to leave church, the pager would go off, I would go out in the vestibule and look at it, and it would be a second alarm or something in my division. I'd have to leave. But that was Chief Latin's policy. That's what he wanted. And that's what we did. We had Division 1, Division 2 deputy, And I was promoted to deputy in 95, and I was deputy chief for two years before I was promoted to fire chief.

And I liked being deputy. I did. That was fun. It was interesting. It was invigorating. You know, you were truly making decisions that impacted things. Now you're part of the senior command staff for the department and you're involved in disciplinary procedures. All of those, a number of things that you were involved in as a deputy chief. And during that

timeframe, from the time I was a captain, through being appointed to the time I was appointed to fire chief, there were a number of committees and things within the agency that I was on the when the department was transitioning from a two-piece engine company operation to a single-piece engine company. I was selected to be on the committee to write the new procedures for that. I was chairman of the Disciplinary Investigation Board as a captain. I was appointed when I made battalion chief by the mayor to the Police and Firefighters Retirement Board. There were a number of things, internal committees and assignments that I had as a result. And I think, not just me, but other individuals who were in certain positions because it's there's so much, so many other things that go on in ensuring that the department is run correctly. One of the more interesting assignments I had was when I was deputy chief. I served as the liaison, the department's liaison to the inaugural committee for Bill Clinton's second inauguration. And that means that I was going to meetings beginning in February of the year before, putting together everything, dealing with the upcoming inauguration, that was regardless of who was going to win. That was, from a learning standpoint, that was a tremendous amount of information that I gathered. Or obtained by doing that. I was dealing with providing fire protection for the parade route, the inaugural balls, all of those things. You know, it was quite interesting. So as deputy, your responsibilities were running that division, responding to working incidents, multiple alarms, taking command if necessary which I did, you know, as deputy. Staff meetings with the fire chief, staff meetings with your battalion chiefs. So it was a 24 seven type thing.

01:43:46 **AMY MAURO**

Did you interact much with the mayor and council? Or did that did that wait until you were fire chief?

01:43:55 **SPEAKER_S4**

Mainly when I became fire chief because I was appointed by the mayor. I was appointed by Marion Barry. And shortly after I became chief, the federal government or the Congress put the control board in place. So now I'm in a quandary. I no longer report to the mayor.

01:44:23 **AMY MAURO**

I wonder. So we're at Fire Chief. Does anybody need a break?

01:44:29 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Oh, it's up to you guys.

01:44:30 **AMY MAURO**

Are you okay?

01:44:31 **DONALD EDWARDS**

I'm okay. You're good. Okay. Yeah. I'm good.

01:44:34 **AMY MAURO**

All right. Tell us about your appointment. Was there a phone call? Was there an interview? So Chief Latin was ready to go. What happened there?

01:44:48 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Chief Latin one day called Chief Madison and I to his office. And at that point, he told us he was being selected as the fire chief of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and he was leaving.

01:45:07 **AMY MAURO**

And I've had enough fun here, guys. I'm going to Florida.

01:45:12 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Well, he was born in Louisiana, raised in Texas. And I think his wife didn't like the cold weather here. She was from that area of the country also. So he applied for the job at Fort Lauderdale and he got it. He said, well, I want one of you guys to replace me. But there was an application process. You know, you had to put an application, sample of your writing sample, your training. What you think you had done in your resume. You had to submit that. And then there were the interviews with a panel of a retired fire chiefs on their on board. On the panel had somebody from the business community, a member of the city council, somebody from the mayor's office, somebody from Office of Personnel, a fire chief from outside of the department. And you went through this grueling type interview process. And that was all applicants. And they were applicants from all over the country that had applied. Well, the day that Chief Latin informed Chief Madison and I that he wanted one of us, when we got back to our office, we made a pact to each other. Promised to each other. We would both compete for the job, but not against each other. If either of us got the job, the other one would support him. And that's what happened. I was in the office when rumors were, you know, going around, you know, who was going to get the job. Blah, blah, blah. And then the phone rang and it was somebody from the fire chief's office, and he said, Chief Latin wants to talk to you. So he told me, he said, the mayor wants to see you at 4:00 this evening in his office. So I told Floyd. Floyd said yes to go down and see what's going on.

So I go down and it's Mayor Barry and Mike Rogers, who at the time was the city administrator. And went into Barry's office. We sat down, we closed the door, and he said. "Well, chief, we made our decision as to who is going to be the new fire chief, and it's you." And I sat there for a moment, ladies. And I then got up and said, "Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor." You know, I got my thoughts together, shook his hand and he shook my hand. And then he started. We sat down and had a conference. You know, what was going on, what he wanted me to do. He said, I believe it was a Monday, "on Wednesday, we're going to have a press conference where we will make the official announcement. And I want you, your family there when we make the announcement". So my wife was working ... for what used to be HEW. HHS, Health and Human Services. Federal. She was an EEO investigator for them. So I called her at her office. I said, you come straight home, I got to tell you something. She said "well, you know, I come home anyway." So she came home, I told her what was going on, and I said that Wednesday at 2:00, they're having a press conference at the mayor's office, and I want you to go with me. Yeah.

... My daughter, she had graduated from college. She was working. And she was working in Baltimore at the time. So I told her, well, she's going to be there. My son was there, my

younger sister and my wife who, we were there. Then we had the press conference. I had developed a rapport with the media because one of the jobs that I filled in occasionally was as the PIO officer and when I was a lieutenant. And so I knew people in the media, I knew how to deal with the media. I knew that the media can make you or break you, so you cannot have an adversarial relationship.

01:50:34 **AMY MAURO**

You served as a PIO as a lieutenant. Okay.

01:50:37 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yeah. I was, that was when, back then, the PIO was a uniform position.

01:50:44 **AMY MAURO**

Right, Ray Alfred served as well.

01:50:47 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Right. And as a matter of fact, Ray called me one day and said. I want you to - I think Ray was a battalion chief, or I think he was either a battalion chief or deputy, 1 or 2. And he called me and said, look, I want you to fill in for Ted Holmes when he's off. So they detailed me up there for two weeks to the public affairs office. And I served when Ted was gone, I filled in as the as the PIO officer when they had a riot...

01:51:37 **AMY MAURO**

In Mount Pleasant.

01:51:38 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Mount Pleasant. Right. I was PIO Officer doing that because Ted was away. So I had a number of other assignments, still not realizing that somebody was programming me for something.

01:51:54 **AMY MAURO**

Okay, so you've got a good rapport with the media. You've seen them on scenes as a deputy, right?

01:52:00 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Obviously on the scenes of emergencies. So at the at the press conference, I felt comfortable, ... thanking the mayor and the selecting body ... that had interviewed me and that went great. I alluded to my parents who by that time both were deceased. My dad passed in 92 and mom passed in 94. So I told them I'm here because of them ... From that point, it was now I've got to be approved by the city council. But I had a setback. About a month after that, when I had to have my physical, my medical exam for promotion, I got a letter indicating that they detected blood in my urine. So what is this? It didn't say that. It said something unusual about

your urinalysis. Well, I didn't smoke. I didn't never use drugs. You know, I drink my wine. But I said, what is this? And they advised me to go to my personal physician. So I went to my personal physician. She then said, well, I want to look at your PSA score, which I had had that done in January of that year. Well, it had doubled between January and June. So she said, well, I'm going to get you to a urologist. And I was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

And I was just now I'm acting fire chief. And I said, look at this. So my urologist told me, he said, you should go away and decide. Just take off and decide on a course, what you want to do. And he laid out the various courses of treatment that he would recommend. So the wife and I, we went to the Bahamas for a week and stayed on the beach one day. And I made the decision, and I had the surgery, and I've been cancer free since 97. But it was so much when John Carter lost his life. The night before, my wife and I had just returned from the Bahamas. I wasn't in charge of the department. I was in charge. But Chief Madison was acting... And I got the phone call that John was missing. This on the fireground. And that's why if you saw some old pictures of me, I look haggard because I had that mental.

01:55:33 **AMY MAURO**

And nobody else knew.

01:55:35 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Not on the department, not at that time. Yeah, but I had to notify the department when I went off for the surgery because I was off from November through January, recovering from - because the surgery back then was much more invasive than it is today. But things worked out okay. But I sat in the office, contemplating resigning, retiring because I didn't know, I didn't know what the future was going to hold. But things worked out. Worked out fine, you know, I had no problems, recovered fine and no.

01:56:21 **AMY MAURO**

A tough couple of months.

01:56:22 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yeah. Tough, tough.

01:56:23 **AMY MAURO**

97.

01:56:24 **DONALD EDWARDS**

97 was a tough, tough year. It was exhilarating in the fact that I was appointed fire chief. Then I get this medical diagnosis and then John Carter loses his life. That was the first fatality we'd had since 84, since John Williams and the first line of duty death since John Williams had been 13 years. And I had never, now I've got to lead this department through this. And on the scene at Kennedy Street, when Vito mentioned my embracing another firefighter. I come from home that morning because my wife and I, we had flown. We got home about 9:30. Drove from BWI airport. Home, and I was because she kept the house here. I had an

apartment in DC, but I was on leave. So I was here and the phone rang about John and I had to go in for that. Now I'm thinking, I've got to go and tell this man's wife that he's not coming home. But I got support from a member of the media on the fireground that day on 4th and Kennedy Street, Jackie Bensen. Jackie said, "Come on, chief, let's walk up the street." We walked up 4th Street towards Missouri Avenue and we stopped in the middle of the block. And she said, "Chief, you now have to be strong for your department. They need you. And you can do it." And she hugged me. Never forget that. And she said "I'll see you. I'll be around."

And I walked back up to the scene and they were bringing John out. By that time, because they had found him in the basement, we were bringing him out. And that gave me the strength to go to see his wife. And then his wife was - Debbie was the strength that she showed. They were from a firefighting family. You know, his brother Jimmy was a fire DC firefighter. His father was a retired assistant chief of Montgomery County. Brother-in-law was a battalion chief in Montgomery County. So they were members of the fire service. And I went to the house that day. By the time I got there, she knew because a bunch of people were there. So I went to the door, rang the doorbell, there were people outside and somebody said come in, come in. I said, "Where's Miss Carter?" And somebody said, "she's in the bedroom." They had a single family. I mean one single story house. So I came in and that lady Debbie was sitting on the bed and she saw me. And you know what she did? We hugged each other, cried, and she said we could make it through. Then she told me what had happened that morning when John left the house...

02:00:36 **AMY MAURO**

Yeah, Incredible. No, Kate doesn't know the story. She went out and said goodbye a second time. That morning.

02:00:45 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yeah. Incredible woman. She told me. She said she ran outside barefooted. When he left for work. And the thing about it, I didn't know John. ... John had always worked in different parts of the city. I didn't know him, but he was a firefighter. You know, you got 1200 firefighters. You don't know all of them.

02:01:16 **AMY MAURO**

So only 1200. We have 2000 now.

02:01:22 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Then it's about 1200 in firefighting. And we had EMS and the other areas.

02:01:31 **AMY MAURO**

Oh that's right because that was separate. Well thank you for talking to us about that.

02:01:36 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Well that was difficult. That was a difficult time, you know, that year.

02:01:40 **AMY MAURO**

And I remember the controversy because it coincided with the control board and some of the decisions to further reduce staffing.

02:01:52 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Right. Because one of the things that I had done immediately upon being appointed the fire chief, I put a deputy, brought the deputies back on each shift. And really and because that time of day that it occurred, the deputy would have probably been en route if under the old Division 1, Division 2, the deputy would have been en route to the office. But what I did, I wanted a senior officer on each shift that was in charge of the department and particular operations. And so I put the deputy, promoted three people to deputy fire chief and put them in firefighting. And that's when we got the four deputies back. You know, we did away with that, Division 1, Division 2. You know, we had the deputy on each shift. Each platoon had a deputy fire chief, and that's the way it had been when I came on the job up until Chief Latin came. And we also instituted a safety officer. There were a number of innovations that we put in place as a result of John's death.

02:03:17 **AMY MAURO**

The Council reinstated the fifth man on the ladder truck and the battalion chief's aide.

02:03:25 **DONALD EDWARDS**

And what we did with the battalion aide because my concept was I used sergeants when I was fire chief as a battalion aide because I felt, sergeant, you're learning the position of an officer. What better way to learn it is when you're under direct supervision of the battalion chief, and you can observe as the aide, because you're not throwing ladders, you're not running hose lines. So you can observe the fireground operation from the standpoint of the chief. And you are also becoming familiar with the administrative side of being an officer. What reports do, what you know, things of that nature. So what I did, when you got promoted to sergeant, you became the aide. You were the aide. And it reduced the number of sergeant positions. But it didn't do away with it because what they wanted to do was do away with the position of sergeant. Okay. And so what I did, I came up with that plan because that allowed the department to retain the position of sergeant. And that satisfied the union to a certain extent. So that worked out.

But the fifth man came back on the ladder truck. And in many instances, what we did was we adapted or changed our evolutions to allow for a four person ladder truck before in a ladder truck operation or fire fireground operations. There are simultaneous tasks that should take place. You have got a water supply. You've got to secure. You've got to advance the hose line. You've got to ventilate. You've got to search, force entry. Many of those things have to be done simultaneously in order to have a successful outcome. When you reduce your staffing levels now, you have to prioritize things based upon what you see when you get there. When before you drilled into your mind that you got to do this, this, this, this and this. You have the staffing to do that, but reduced staffing levels can create a problem.

One of the reasons - When I was deputy, I applied for the fire chief's job in Prince George's County with about three interviews. And I believe one of the reasons I was not selected was the then county executive wanted to reduce the staffing levels, and I adamantly refused in every interview. I was not going to do it. I was not going to do it. But now I'm the fire chief. The control board is taken over. Each member of the control board had certain agencies that reported to them. My member of the board that I reported to was the chairman of the board, Doctor Andrew Brimmer. He was an economist by trade.

02:07:26 **AMY MAURO**

Oh know. That and the fire service is not a good combination.

02:07:30 **DONALD EDWARDS**

But this is what he said. When I went down for my interview with him. He said, I'm taking the fire department. And that was the only one he had. Some of the other board members had multiple agency heads to report to them. We ... no longer reported to the mayor even though we were appointed by the mayor. I'll never forget sitting in his office. and he said, "Chief Edwards. I'm going to tell you something. I don't know a damn thing about fire departments. But you do." He said, "I want you to run your agency. If you need me, I'm here. I want you to make decisions. But whatever decision you make, you are going to have to justify it. If there are any issues, you're going to have to tell me why you did such and such. I've got your back." And he never interfered with me by running the agency the entire time. You know, he was there.

02:08:50 **AMY MAURO**

That's so interesting. Why do you think he wanted the fire department?

02:08:54 **DONALD EDWARDS**

I have no idea. And I thought the same thing, Amy. You know why? You know the fire service. ... And he was a doctor, a PhD, and he had been on in, I think, Ronald Reagan's cabinet as a cabinet member. You know, I believe it was Ronald Reagan because he was a Republican. But just said, "I'm taking the fire department."

02:09:21 **AMY MAURO**

But then they made those decisions to reduce the budget. So what was that conversation like?

02:09:29 **DONALD EDWARDS**

What they wanted every agency - when the control board took over, we had to hire consultants to do a total review of your agency. They didn't come in and cut things right away. What they were trying to do was get spending and debt under control in the city government, putting railings or getting the city's finances back on track like other big city agencies, because this is what else they did. Each of us had to come in and they determined whether they were going to retain you. And they kept me. Not only that, but I got a significant pay raise because prior to that, congressional laws or laws governing the city that had been passed by Congress mandated that no agency director salary could exceed the

mayor's. And so you had a ceiling. When I was appointed fire chief, I was a top step deputy. Pay raise was like about \$9,000. When after reviewing my resume and what I had done and what the agency's responsibilities were, Doctor Brimmer gave me a \$30,000 raise to bring you in line with agency directors and other jurisdictions, you know, with the same responsibilities and things like that. But Congress had always kept a lid on. Once Home Rule came, they kept a lid on cabinet members' salaries. It could not exceed that of the mayor, but everybody's salaries increase. That's why they like superintendents, school and the police chiefs in DC. And that was a result of the control board because they saw a need to keep qualified, to attract and maintain qualified people. You got to pay them. And a lot of people that were qualified avoided applying for jobs in the city... You're a higher level job. So that was one of the positive things that came out of the control board being in place.

But I was like I said, I still was caught in the quandary with Mayor Barry because I had interacted with him, not real closely, but officially before, and you wonder, people appointed you and now suddenly you no longer report to them. But you know, you got you do what you have to do. But getting to your question about them cutting the budget, their job was to get the budget under control. They put certain things in place, like chief financial officer, chief, the CIO, chief information officer, to sort of make things uniform, purchases and procurement as an example, technology, equipment. It had to come through the CIO when before the agency was going out, buying things on their own. And now you got systems and things not compatible with one another so that you don't have that seamless operation like you should have. So they brought new ideas, controlled spending. That was their purpose. And the fire department, we didn't lose anything. What we did gain was the ability to purchase new apparatus and things of that nature. I mean, we had run apparatus into the ground because the city for three years had not purchased any equipment.

02:14:25 **AMY MAURO**

And so the consultants recommended that, yes.

02:14:28 **DONALD EDWARDS**

They are consultants. For instance, my agency, the consultants said, you got an agency, you don't have an executive officer. Why not? So I created a position for executive officer. They had done away with the personnel liaison officer. I put that back in place. The safety officer now. We got safety officers on every shift. Risk management division came into being as a result of their evaluations of the department. And those were things we just didn't have. Just didn't have. It was dynamic change of things, you know, in the way business was done. But I don't think - this is my personal opinion. The fire department did not suffer as a result of the financial control board being in place.

02:15:36 **AMY MAURO**

Well, that's a novel view that I have not heard before.

02:15:42 **DONALD EDWARDS**

And I'm speaking from having.

02:15:43 **AMY MAURO**

I'm being educated.

02:15:45 **DONALD EDWARDS**

We just didn't, you know, of course, there was resentment to Congress putting an independent body in control of city government. But what we could do. I was never restricted based upon the resources that I had. You know, you had to get everything under control.

02:16:09 **AMY MAURO**

So you had come up with these workarounds for the aide and ladder trucks.

02:16:14 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Right. The ladder truck thing really came into that. They did allow us to do that. The aide side was a workaround thing. The aides became a permanent fixture, I think, after I left, shortly after I left. Well, prior to my leaving, they had disbanded some companies back before I became chief. During my tenure as chief, nothing was closed. I did not close any units, reduce any staffing or anything like that. But Engine Company 3 where the museum is, that was disbanded in the 90s. And then Chief Tippet, who replaced me for a short period of time, he was able to get that reopened. And Tom was heavy in the Union and Congress and all. So he had their backing, that enabled him to do that.

Once, I took a class at the National Fire Academy on Change Management. That helped me in dealing with change. One of the things when I was appointed and approved by the City Council. One of the performance measures was to reduce the fire death rate in the city. Even though we only had like ten fire deaths during the previous year. But the fire death rate is calculated based upon so many deaths per 100,000 people in DC. Even though it's not a state, it's considered a state under certain things. And so we had what was deemed to be an abnormally high fire death rate. So what I did, you can only correct that through public education. That's what you have to do. So I did a couple of things. I met with, well they called me, I think it's called the Washington Real Estate and Property Owners Association or something like that. Some organization like that. They invited me to breakfast one morning and they asked me what could they do to help? So as a result of that meeting, they purchased a fire safe house. And I don't know whether the department still has it.

02:19:15 **AMY MAURO**

I remember that.

02:19:18 **DONALD EDWARDS**

And it would go around. It was set up with the three basic rooms of the house - kitchen, a living room, a family room and a bedroom. Smoke detectors. It had the the capability to pump non-toxic smoke. It had the door handles, door knobs that they could warm. And we that went around to schools.

02:19:44 **AMY MAURO**

Yeah. The department does not have that anymore. And it's pretty cool. They have variations but yeah nothing like that.

02:19:52 **DONALD EDWARDS**

And they even gave us a vehicle to tow it with. And it was on the outside. The State Farm Mutual had a system where a child could pick it up and dial 911. They had a recording talking to him and ask him their address and stuff like that. Because what I explained to those people, I said, if we can educate the younger generation on the need for fire safety, then as they age and mature and become owners or renters in your properties, that's going to lessen or reduce the number of fires that ... will occur in your property because you're going to have to repair your property. If I rent from you, the only thing I'm concerned with is my personal items. But the building itself or the property owned or the property management organization has to repair that, see, so that will reduce your cost in the future. So that was a program, one of the things that I put into place also when I went on the fire department, and to a certain extent, it still exists today in the fire service.

The fire service was a white, male oriented, dominated organization country nationwide. The doors were closed. People who paid for it had no idea what went on in the firehouse. No idea. So part of this program, this course I told you I took up at the National Fire Academy dealing with change management. We were divided up into groups and had to come up with a project. And our project was to develop an open house policy for your mythical fire department that gave you a city with a population and all the demographics for a particular city. And these were firefighters from all over the country. And we developed this open house policy. I was a deputy at the time. So when I became fire chief, I put that in place.

I had met this gentleman, lived up in Palisades, up in 29 Engines. Very community oriented. You know, they had the big parades on Memorial Day and 4th of July. And I would go and I met this gentleman. His last name was Cohen, and he was the vice president of public affairs for Giant Foods. So he said, how can I help you, chief? You need anything? So I told him about the open house thing. He gave me, meaning, the department, an open checkbook. Whenever I had these open houses, I'd send someone from my procurement section over to the giant warehouse. They gave us hot dogs, hamburgers, all of the foodstuffs, ice sodas, things like that. And once a month, I selected a firehouse in in each ward. We had open house on Saturday. We invited representatives from other agencies in the city government - school system, National Guard, police department, health department, all of the other agencies that the citizens have to deal with so that they came in with their tables and they could present information to the citizens who visited the firehouse. Plus, the doors of the firehouse are open. That firehouse was out of service that day from 10 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. while the open house was going on, weather permitting, they cooked food and served it, you know, to the neighbors that opened up the firehouses. And I think that that for me was one of the things, those two things when I was fire chief really stuck with me, because we were there to help, and I wanted to open up that agency so that the citizens knew what we did. We just didn't sit in there and play checkers. You know, and I think that the fire service in general needs to educate the public about what we do. And especially now, because the role of the fire service has changed so dramatically, our service requests and demands are far different than it was 40 years ago when I went into the fire department. You know, it's just different.

02:25:20 **AMY MAURO**

Absolutely. That's part of the mission of the foundation and why we're doing this project.

02:25:24 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Good, good.

02:25:25 **AMY MAURO**

We obviously agree with you. I wanted to note that Giant Food has also been supportive of the foundation. So very good. They've always been a good community partner, it sounds like.

02:25:33 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Good partner from the private sector to help out and they even, as a result of my interaction with Mr. Cohen, the Palisades Civic association, they had a raffle for 29, shortly after I became fire chief to where a family wants to, they bought the ticket, bought the raffle ticket and they had a dinner. The family that won the raffle had dinner with me and my wife at the firehouse. Oh that's great.

02:26:21 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Right. But that's the demographics of that particular part of the city... You know, I mean, in this family and one, it was a husband and wife, and they had two small kids. And the kids were just so enthralled, so enraptured with being in the firehouse, getting on the fire engine. We had this nice dinner set up for us. But it's very important that we stay connected to the private sector, to the NGOs and those things like that because you need them. You need them. You know, oftentimes people identify with them or interact with them far more than they do with those of us in the public sector.

Donald Edwards 2

00:00:02 **AMY MAURO**

Okay. So we talked about your pride on fire prevention, education and the open houses.

00:00:13 **DONALD EDWARDS**

I know you ladies know because you're in the business, but firefighters' first mission is fire prevention. And the way that that's done, that's done through enforcement of codes, public education, a number of things that that are not about opening up a hose pipe or throwing a ladder, that my mindset is this. And people don't agree with me when I say that. For me, if a fire occurs than I failed in my mission because my primary mission is to prevent it. I know I can't prevent them all. You know that. But that should give you incentive to increase your fire prevention efforts.

00:01:09 **AMY MAURO**

And you certainly should prevent fatalities, because that means probably not a smoke detector or something contributed to that.

00:01:17 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Right. And that's part of that education process of the general public. You know the what? First, explain what is a smoke detector. What does it do? Why do you need it? Code enforcement, rigid code enforcement. Those are things that are needed. And that I think has reduced the number of fatal fires. I know in this, in the DMV, is code enforcement. The demographics have changed. I don't have any clothes, my friend, she used to say. Empirical data to prove this. But people, the more people are at home, the more fires you're going to have.

00:02:09 **AMY MAURO**

I think we did see an increase during the lockdown.

00:02:12 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Right? Yeah. Because people are home. And under normal circumstances today, we have so many other things we can do. You know, we're gone. You know, people, I think, have become more cognizant of fire safety. And therefore, people want the smoke detectors, you know, they want the sprinkler systems. I'm a proponent of total sprinkler systems everywhere. I don't have it here. But because this house was built before it was required. I think all homes built after 1990, I believe, have to have sprinkler systems. Then you have to educate the people about what a sprinkler system does, because people think that it's going to be massive water damage. You know, they only hear that it's going to open up. It's over top of the fire. Usually, but public education and not just for fire safety, but for health safety.

One of the reasons I believe that there's such a significant demand for EMS services is a lack of education about general health. People are either unaware or they don't have health insurance or a primary care physician, and their first avenue or venue you call or access into the health care system is an ER, the emergency room. And then there was that misconception that if I call for an ambulance, I'm going to the front of the line when the ambulance brings me in, and it doesn't work. You're going to be triaged and depending upon what the triage nurse finds or whatever that assessment finds, you're going to get, say, have a seat and you've got to wait. But the demand for EMS service has changed the fire service. And it's changed. It's increased the demand for service. It's increased the need for additional resources to meet that demand. And that could be in the form of additional units, train personnel. Everybody is now going to the paramedic stage. You know, the paramedic engines and trucks, medic units and all those things. Because that initial treatment patient receives in the field can result in a better patient outcome. You know, when that patient gets to the hospital, but the fire service has changed.

00:05:23 **AMY MAURO**

Did you know, we tied for first place in Utstein cardiac arrest survival last year? So, yeah. Still celebrating.

00:05:34 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yeah. And it's amazing. And that's just that, you know, that's part of the education process. Because now you have people wanting to learn CPR. You have public areas that have AEDs in place. And the AEDs now are so easy to use. You know, they're telling you exactly what to do. And that increases your outcome, your survival rate. Like your fire service personnel arrive on the scene. The first responder units, although I remember I was the 6th Battalion chief and this was one of the other inside mission that I had was setting up the training schedule for all units to be trained on the use of the AED when they put them on the apparatus. And I remember the big ceremony that they had at Engine 2 when they put the AED on Engine 2, they had the mayor, then Mayor Sharon Kelly. We had this big news conference thing, which was good. And now you've got AEDs in public spaces. You know that all of our people are trained in using them. And that's throughout the fire service in at least the basic life-saving skills that are required. So it's really changed. And then when we look at other things, we have to look at the impact that technology has had on the fire service. The increased awareness of personnel safety, all of those things are positive things for the fire service. Unless you have a 9/11, it's something that's unusual. Extremely unusual occurrence. But the number of fire deaths. Actual line of duty on the fireground deaths of firefighters has decreased.

00:08:09 **AMY MAURO**

Yeah. I often think about the fact that John Carter did not have a radio with him.

00:08:13 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yeah, he had a radio, but they said they had some problems.

00:08:16 **AMY MAURO**

That's right. It was broken.

00:08:17 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yeah. And somewhere in.

00:08:20 **AMY MAURO**

And he was a sergeant so he had one. But at that time maybe all of the firefighters did not have that. Is that right? So today everybody.

00:08:28 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Everybody, that Amy, is one of the improvements. When I came on board the engine officer had one. The truck officer had one. The rescue squad officer had one, and one member of the rescue squad had a portable radio.

00:08:49 **AMY MAURO**

Yeah. So we're watching all of this old fire footage, and I see them going in without a radio. And it's just hard to imagine.

00:08:58 **DONALD EDWARDS**

The entire time I was a back step firefighter, it never occurred to radio until I got into the rescue squad. And then if I was the senior guy in the back of the squad, I had the radio. Because you're working two teams and the senior guy in the back is charging as one team and the officers as the other team. Team A, Team B, I don't know how they use what they use for identifying signals today, but things like the thermal imaging, that was unheard of, you know, and for minor incident incidents, for instance, I can remember running smoke in an office building. You get there, you know, it's one of the fluorescent fixtures, but you don't know which one. So you got to have to get a stepladder and pull down and look at the light, the ballast to make sure to find out which one. Now with the tick, you point it at each one, and when it heats up, I mean it shows this one is overheating. That's the one. It's a simple use. You have a working fire, or you have fire in the walls or partition. You can point that camera at that and that'll tell you where the hotspot is. It's also used to find people that are down in the fire. I remember when I first came on. Didn't have a PASS device. You know, you're right. And then we got the external device. Now, with when John Carter lost his life, the device was external, meaning that you had to turn it on, the firefighter. Now it's integrated into the regulator.

00:11:04 **AMY MAURO**

So if you don't move, it makes the alarm.

00:11:06 **DONALD EDWARDS**

But you don't have to. When you activate the air cylinder now, it activates the PASS device before you can put your face piece on, turn your cylinder on. Now you got to turn your PASS device on and people would forget it in the excitement trying to get in and do what you might forget to turn it on. And they work the same. If you're motionless for certain number of seconds, it starts giving off that ear piercing sound like a smoke detector, but that was brought into the fire service to help locate firefighters. Down firefighters because you could be rendered unconscious and down. And we are trying to find you. We can't find you. The PASS device, the tick, all of those things are implements that are a result of technology. The face, the mask. When I went on the job, you had a demand regulator, which meant you only got air when you inhale, you would inhale, you hit the record regulator. Uh, the regulator made noise. Now you have a pressure demand device. So when you turn it on, you have a constant flow of air on your face. So if you go down, you still have air. But those are some innovations that have come about, over the years, as a result of research, so many innovations came out of the space industry. The use of lightweight materials.

When I came on board, the couplings were made out of brass. The hose was cotton with rubber jacket, and it was heavy as all get out. Now we've got the hose that's got power light couplings. You've got hose that is lightweight. It's much lighter. When we would have a working fire when I came into the department in the late 60s. The hose that you use, you drain it and roll it up. Put it on the back step and you got back in the firehouse, you have to hoist it up in the hose towel to hang it to dry. Then you drop dry hose down. Now you drain it and put it back on the apparatus. It's almost like a wash and wear clothing. You know the

same principle. But there are so many things that have changed. You know, your communication systems have changed with everything. When I came on, you had low band radios, significant interference from others, other radio sources. Then we went to the 800 radio. That was when everybody ... all positions on apparatus, had an individual portable radio that added to firefighter safety.

00:14:33 **AMY MAURO**

So what else do we have to cover? There were some additional difficult times before you retired.

00:14:41 **DONALD EDWARDS**

The fatalities, the firefighter fatalities were very challenging because having gone such a significant period without them, and then to have really four boom, boom, boom, boom, we had John Carter and we had Costello Robinson. Now that Costello was in the hospital because he had injured his knee trying to get away from a dog.

00:15:22 **AMY MAURO**

That was such a sort of freak thing.

00:15:25 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Freak thing, right. And he was - I don't know whether you know it, but he was the oldest member in the fire department. He was right and still could go. He was a wagon driver. Engine 2. Costello still was. I'm telling you, that man was - there was nothing that he did not know about the city. He probably knew every alley in the city. He was an excellent wagon driver. Technician. You could, if you were an officer, and he was driving you. You didn't have - the only thing you had to do was blow the air horn and sirens, because everything else, Costello. You know, he was known as the Colonel. What happened to him? They had run a trash fire, dumpster fire, and a dog got loose and ran after him. The dog didn't bite him. But in his efforts to get away from the dog he injured his knee and had to have surgery. And he was in the hospital awaiting surgery. And I got a phone call saying he had died. I could not believe it. I could not believe it, but I don't know. He apparently had a stroke or, a massive stroke or a heart attack while in the hospital. But it was line of duty.

And then we had Firefighter Matthews and Firefighter Phillips. You know, that lost their lives at Cherry Road. And that was during a time period when we were having extreme difficulty with apparatus. I remember one day sitting in my office one night. I used to find as the fire chief I could get more paperwork done after normal business hours, of course. And I was in the office, the office was in Grimke. And I swung my chair around and I stood up and looked out the window and I asked myself this, "Donald, why in the hell did you throw your hat in the ring for this?" That's what I said to myself, you know, because that particular day, that particular night of the 16 ladder trucks, there were only eight in service. And you're hoping and praying that we do not have a major incident because everything was either down mechanically, most of it was down mechanically. We didn't have the reserve fleet to put in place. And we those were some challenging times.

And on the Cherry Road incident, there was rumors - not that it was a reason for the loss of life, but the second due ladder truck was out of service mechanical. That assignment called for Truck 15 and Truck 13. Truck 13 was out of service. So that meant Truck 4 now became the second due truck and which was coming from New Jersey Avenue all the way out there. They were doing the rear of the building. And, you know, it was - I'm not getting into the specifics of that incident, but we lost two firefighters and another one critically burned. And it was, you know, that particular - I get a call that night about midnight, saying that communications section told me that they were transporting one firefighter in cardiac arrest doing CPR. There was another one that was missing and so I immediately left and headed there. By the time I got to the fireground, they had transported both, and I then left the fireground and went to the burn unit. MedStar. Horrible, horrible. And I had three men there when I got there, one and I don't remember which one was already deceased.

00:20:04 **DONALD EDWARDS**

And the other, the doctor told me 12 to 18 hours. That was what he had. And then they were trying to firefighter Joe Morgan. That's who they were. He was a viable patient, even though he was had significant second and third degree burns about 60%. And to see three people who left home that previous morning and to see them there, you know, now I've got to steel myself to get ready for what's coming. The union's on my back, the media, everything. You know, it was. But you know, you do what you have to do and you make it through. You know, it's, uh. It was tough. That was another - 99. It was a tough year. It was a rather tough year because of the fatalities.

00:21:13 **AMY MAURO**

Right. And you mentioned the sort of incidentals that come with that. It's not just the tragic loss of life and the families and the emotional impact that it has on your workforce and yourself, but you're also in this very charged arena of media and union and council. Can you talk about, I mean, how do you, how did you cope with that and work through it?

00:21:42 **DONALD EDWARDS**

You are speaking of the politics of the job. And even though I didn't define myself as a politician, I was a politician because I had to deal with it in the DC Fire Department. Your very strong union. Well, first and foremost, you're the nation's capital. Everything that happens in DC is viewed by the media the same way that the federal government is viewed. You're under a microscope because it's DC. Then when you have a strong union presence, which I know labor and management have their differences, but they have to coexist. ... I had a decent relationship with the union. I think that may have come from the fact that they knew I had come from the street. You know, when I say the street, I'm speaking of operations out there where the rubber meets the road. So in dealing with the union, I have to understand their position. But then I also have to be able to get my position over as to what I am responsible for, what I have to do as the leader or the chief of the agency. So you're working through that. I had taken a course once again at National Fire Academy on the fire service labor relations. So I had some idea about union management relationships. I also used before when I told you I went to Howard. My major was economics, and I wanted to be that type of labor relations person. So I had some of the courses dealt with management and labor union relationships.

And I knew that the union has a place in the workforce, because I always say historically, there was no middle class in this country until the labor unions came into play after World War II. You had the haves and the have nots and the labor unions created middle class America, which is great. ... You know they did. I never dreamed that I would be in the position I am today. But the fire department union had much to do with that. Not only me, but everybody who was in that organization. So you learn how to develop working relationships with the union.

Now, when we move to now, I also had to deal with the city council. So now you have to pick out those that you may consider your allies on the council. There are some you know you're not going to get along with, so you just leave them over there. Don't bother with them. There are others that you can talk to. You can approach. They understand what you're doing. One of the things that helped me dealing with all of those entities, meaning I'm not speaking to the union, but I'm speaking of city council. The mayor and the control board was that. And Congress. I knew my job. And if they had not done my job, you don't know my job. So I felt confident in what I did because I knew what I was doing. And I was, I'm not going to call his name, but, an anchor guy on one of the local TV channels called me cocky on TV one night. He said that fire chief, he's cocky, but it's not cockiness. I'm confident, its knowledge. You know, if you haven't done what I do, you can't tell me how to do what I do. You know, I can't tell you how to run your newspaper or how are you going to vote on this bill? I may have opinions or ideas about it, but you are the one that do it. That is responsible for doing that work. So I can't tell you, so I that's how I dealt with the media. I knew there was no reporter out there that knew my job and see, and I knew my job from the ground up because I started as a probationary firefighter and went through all aspects or areas of that that job.

So I was never afraid of the media. You know, I dealt with the media. I treated them all courteous, in a courteous manner, no matter what questions they would ask and the dealing with the city council. I never really had significant issues with the city council, Congress sometimes. But Congress was like this. When you had to testify, they would send you the questions that they were going to ask ahead of time. And then when you got there, once you answered that, then they might go into something else. But what I found that if I did not know the answer, I said, "I don't know, but I will get back with you." And I tell them within 24 hours, 48 hours, whatever time I thought it would require me to find the answer that they were looking at when I went to testify or appear before any of these committees, be it the City Council or Congress. Financial Control Board was always one on one. You know, you didn't bring anybody but going to city council and Congress. I carried operations chief, my CFO and my medical services officer. When I came on board, Doctor Moore was the EMS officer and then Doctor Fernando Daniels. ... He came over. But I had good rapport with both of them, you know. But whenever I went to have to testify, I always carried those three people. And when questions come up in reference to a particular subject matter area and one of those people were there, especially during budget time, I defer the question to them. And I would tell them beforehand, you be prepared to answer questions. I'm not just taking you up there for decoration. You know, if you're the CFO, you better know everything about everything about this budget, about the budget process, about what we spent and why we spent it or where we spend it. I can tell why we spent it. But that's a sort of level of confidence that I have always had in myself, dealing with people outside of my area of expertise. My mindset has always been, you haven't done what I did or what I do. Don't try to tell me how to do what I do. I mean, it's a play on words, but for me, it's the truth.

Sounds like a good strategy.

00:30:17 **DONALD EDWARDS**

And so the media at times only had one person that was always on my case. And. I'm not going to get into it.

00:30:30 **AMY MAURO**

So when and why did you decide to retire?

00:30:36 **DONALD EDWARDS**

One of the reasons was this particular reporter. They began to question where I lived. And I came out of a meeting. I had had a city council meeting one day. And I was trying to get additional funding to put five new ambulances units in service. So I'd done the cost of, pricing. So when I came out of this meeting, this particular reporter was there and he said, "You got a minute, Chief?" I said, "yeah." So he said, I thought he was going to ask me something about the meeting. He said, "do you own property in Maryland?" So I said, knowing the media when they asked you that, they know the answer. So I said "yes." He said, "Well where do you sleep at night?" So my old street mind came back and I said, "As long as you don't see me coming out of your house in the morning, don't worry about it." To help you, do you have an address in DC, which I did. We had bought this house about a year before I was designated fire chief. But as the fire chief or any agency director, you have six months to obtain residence in DC. So when I was selected, my wife said, "I don't want to move back into town, you know. So I like the house. I want to stay here." So I got an apartment. I had an apartment at the Rittenhouse Apartments, 16th and Rittenhouse Street Northwest, and they worked it. I was paying D.C. taxes, the whole works. But they thought that I was living here.

And one of the incidents that really say now you're interfering that occurred, that I felt was interfering with my family. I was in ... my apartment. It's about 7:15 in the morning, and the phone rang and it was my wife. And she said, I want you to listen to this. She went out on that deck and held the phone up, and Channel Four's helicopter was sitting right up over the top of my house. They thought I was here, and they wanted to catch me leaving here, going to work. And then when I came home that night, my wife and daughter, we were standing there in the kitchen, and my wife started crying and I said, "Nah, this is it. I've given this city 31 years of my life. I'm coming home." And then the Mayor, Anthony Williams. He called me down at this big meeting one night, and at the time, the mayor's office was - they were renovating the Wilson Building. And the mayor's office and the city council were at 441 4th Street. So 7:00, they wanted a meeting. Wanted me to come to the mayor's office. So I went on down there and the deputy mayor for public safety, he's a judge now.

00:34:49 **AMY MAURO**

Oh, boy. Who was it?

00:34:53 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Good guy. Good guy. He came. DC guy.

00:34:59 **AMY MAURO**

Tony Williams... Was it before Margret Kellems?

00:35:07 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yeah so I can't remember now, but, he's a judge on the D.C. Superior Court now.

00:35:12 **AMY MAURO**

Oh, Erik Christian!

00:35:14 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Erik. Right. He was the deputy mayor for public safety. And when I parked in front of 441, he was standing outside. It was dark because it was in November, and I came up. He said, "Chief, it's a zoo up there on the 11th floor where the mayor's office is." And I said, "What?" He said, "It's a zoo. The media is up there. So you want to go up the back way?" I said, "No, no, no no, no."

So, you know, we go up on the elevator when the elevator door opens. You would have thought that I was a celebrity. Every news media outlet in the area was there with cameras and video. You know, they were trying to question. You want to know, so what was I there for? Blah blah blah. Well, see, somebody had notified the media about this meeting because that was an area of that building where the media didn't even go. Because the media room was on the ninth floor. The mayor's office was up there. The mayor and the deputy mayor's office were up there. So I go in and Anthony Williams is there and we're talking. He said, "Well, chief, you know, I'm thinking about going in a different direction and, you want to use, I know you got a lot of leave, you want to use leave until the end of the year." I said, "No, Mr. Mayor." I said, "You remember when you came into the office, you asked for the resignations of all of the executive, I mean agency directors," Which is normal. And I said "That particular memo that I sent to you is still on my hard drive." I said, "I'm going to change the title, the subject to request for retirement, and it's going to be effective at close of business tomorrow," because I'd already been to personnel, already figured out what my annuity and stuff. I'd done that at the beginning of the year because I was seriously contemplating retiring at the end, at the beginning of 2000 anyway. So I went back to the office, pulled up that memo, changed the subject, the matter, the title on it, put it in a shotgun envelope, put it in the mailbox, addressed to the mayor and close of business. The next day I was out of there. I was out of there. Because it had begun to impact my family. And you can never let your job or something outside of your household interfere with your relationship, with significant other people and significant others in your life. My wife had never stopped being with me, went through all, you know, all kinds of stuff with me when - what I mean, as far as the job was concerned, being away, you know, for 30 some years, 30 plus years. So I wasn't putting her through anything else like that.

00:38:35 **AMY MAURO**

Well, I want to apologize. I'm sorry that you went through that personal sort of treatment because you gave a lot to the city and the department. You were a strong leader, I think, as we've heard today. And all of that should outweigh and some of those things that happen in that atmosphere that are beyond your control. So I think that my experience having worked in politics at that time is that, history has, as they say, been kinder to you. And I think that history recognizes in the long term what your contributions were. And that was an unfortunate short term situation.

00:39:25 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Right, And it was also, Amy, it was a situation that I knew. When you ascend to those positions, politics plays a significant role in just about everything you do. So I had a choice when I accepted the position. You serve at the pleasure of somebody. You know what can happen. So I was very, not fortunate, but blessed the day that I was sworn in as fire chief. I had been eligible to retire for seven years. See? So, you know, and they still compensate me very, very, very well. But you as you say it, I know politics. I know what happens when politics play their role and when you're at that level of management or when you, they say you move into the executive suite, you better be able to accept that, you know. So I came home that night and told my wife what I was doing. She said, "okay,"

00:40:47 **AMY MAURO**

It also triggered a period of instability for the fire department, unfortunately.

00:40:53 **DONALD EDWARDS**

That's what I heard.

00:40:54 **AMY MAURO**

So there were repercussions.

00:40:57 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Yeah, I hear repeatedly - I see guys or I see posts on Facebook and I, like for my birthday, I saw all these posts. You know, I don't post that much. I don't post, but my daughter, she does. And people were - "Happy birthday, Chief. You were the best ever." You know, I hear - there aren't many guys left now that were there with me. Everybody in my age group is gone, but, there are those, though, some still ... recognize me. I had a very significant, meaningful interaction with a female firefighter at the awards ceremony that night. And this firefighter came up to me. I didn't know her. And she said, "Chief Edwards." She said, "I'm on limited duty up at the fire chief's office." And she said, "I walk down the hallway and I see your picture. And I thought I would never meet you. I hear people talk about you so much." And I don't remember her name. You know, she introduced herself to me and I said, "Well, it's so nice meeting you, and thanks for recognizing me." I say "And the best to you and your career." But I have had a certain rapport with the firefighter because that's what I am.

00:42:40 **AMY MAURO**

Yeah, there's a lot of respect for you.

00:42:42 **DONALD EDWARDS**

And I feel that as a leader, you have to have that for your people that work for you. That's been my way of doing things all along. You know, all along it was it's been good. It was good. And I still, even after retiring, I stayed abreast of things. For one thing, my son was in the fire service. My nephew was in the fire service. So my son, we still talk shop, you know, and he had a choice, a chance to come to DC because he had taken the exam. But when they called him, he had been a firefighter in Montgomery County for almost five years, and he didn't want to make that transition to become a probationer again, because there's no lateral transfer, in the area. But it was an excellent career. I mean, I had some low lights, you know, not so good times.

00:43:59 **AMY MAURO**

I ask everybody two more questions. So I'll ask you - I think you were going there anyway, but, how does the your experience in the department continue to impact you?

00:44:11 **DONALD EDWARDS**

It has helped me in dealing with people. Knowing how people think, being able to understand and appreciate someone else's opinions or thoughts about the same subject matter. One of the ways that it initially impacted me, for about eight years after I retired, I was a consultant. I worked as a consultant for a company over in Annandale, Virginia, senior public safety consultant and I developed emergency management or emergency preparedness exercises for various entities, mainly for the Department of Defense. I did two projects for DC. Two full scale field exercises for DC for COG. So you know, what I learned in the department helped me in that manner. I did that from May of 2002 until about 2010, or when my wife started chemo and I just said, you know, when you go, I'm going.

But in that way, you know what I learned? Things that I learned there, connections that I made there, I was able to use in that new career field. And I did a lot of work. 9/11 created a whole new industry of emergency management, emergency preparedness and things like that. And I did develop exercises for various military installations. I did Andrews. I did Quantico, Norfolk Naval Air station. Number of bases where we start with. Everything from a discussion exercise up to a tabletop, full scale exercise. But the impact of the DC Fire Department. The impact that it had on me helped me in being successful in doing that, because I was dealing with people. I was also dealing with people from the same background that I had come from. So had I not been in the fire service in DC, I would not have known how to deal with other firefighters or people in the public safety sector, from law enforcement to firefighting to the media. All of those things, because those exercises that I had to develop encompassed all of those things. For instance, you had a significant thing. You had a terrorist incident inside of Andrews Air Force Base. Well, everything out, those people outside of the fence are going to be impacted, too. Resources are going to have to come in. So I knew how to deal with the fire service outside of the Defense Department's fences, and that's where that's an impact. That's what another that helped me by having been a member of the D.C. Fire Department and plus the fire service. And once you've done it, it's always there. There's always that impact. It's like they say, the old fire horses, you know, when they heard the bell,

they automatically got into the stall. And so we old firefighters We are like that and that's the impact.

But I was all over, and I say this and I don't take it lightly. All of those of those of us who went through the DC Fire Department, we have always felt that that was the greatest fire department in the world, and the impact that it has had on us is life-long. It's something that we will always have, you know, certain friendships. It's like the military. You meet people from all walks of life. Some go on down the road, others you never forget. And that's what you know. There are people there. I've always felt that I could. There's no fire station in DC I can't go in and sit down and have a cup of coffee.

00:49:23 **AMY MAURO**

Yeah, that's a special thing. So the other one. For people who will be coming onto our website next month – deadline's coming. What's the one thing that you would like them to know about the DC Fire Department? Or. It doesn't have to be one thing. What do you what do you think is important for them to know?

00:49:49 **DONALD EDWARDS**

That it's an organization that's main purpose is to serve the people. And like any other organization, it's comprised of people. And they're going to be good things and they're going to be bad things. But don't let the bad things, all the negative things impact your view of that agency. It's there, it's been there. It's stable. And like any other organization, there are problems because people run it. And people have problems and mistakes are going to be made. But the positive things outweigh those mistakes. You mentioned the survivability rate, dealing with the CPR cases. That's a positive. You know, look at what's the death rate, fire death rate, in DC now compared to a comparable city. You know, those are the positives you look at.

You know like today, you know we're hearing a lot about the call taking issues in the media. You know that's something that's going to be worked out, and for the number of calls that that center answers annually, the problematic rate is very small, I think. But people I think that when they view your website, they should factor in the historical nature of it, how it has evolved over the years from a mixture of volunteer companies to a very professional, career-oriented search, public service, public safety agency, the diversity within the organization, how that diversity began, how it has evolved. Also, there are a number of those positive things that the general public should take away from your website. You know, it's not that they're going to be, as I said, things that are not so pleasant. But I do think that the positives far outweigh the negatives. And if you guys, when you put it together, you know, emphasize the positive, but don't leave out the negatives.

00:52:44 **AMY MAURO**

Don't overlook the negatives.

00:52:45 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Don't overlook the negatives. You know, just make sure that you cover it, and these interviews, photos, one of the things that I - and I don't know whether this is a part of the

answer. But I used to, when we would have a fire. The public, the media always looked at what was lost. But very rarely do they say what was saved unless it was a life. But property, in particular, if we contain a fire to a room and content, the rest of that property may have damage, but it's negligible damage, and it turns out to be a win.

00:53:45 **AMY MAURO**

Also saving the adjoining property.

00:53:48 **DONALD EDWARDS**

The adjoining properties. Right? Yeah. That's also right.

00:53:51 **AMY MAURO**

And I think the website can help demonstrate that. And sort of draw that out because yeah, people see a fire and they have a pretty limited understanding of what's going on.

00:54:04 **DONALD EDWARDS**

Right. It's a one of the things that needs to be made known as the training aspect of that is required for the agency to meet its mission. Yeah. You know, it's constant training, keeping up with changes and things, changes in technology, changes in building construction, for example with the building construction, we have all this lightweight construction today. And that is something that the fire personnel, ... we have to know. We know about fires burn faster and hotter today than they did before, so there's so many positive things that a website such as yours can view the agency from not only from a historical standpoint where it came from to where it is now, and how it got to where it is now. That's very important to show, to demonstrate to the public. Having that public education, that public affairs type background you got, you ladies will do well putting that thing together.

00:55:40 **AMY MAURO**

Well, thank you. Is there anything else you want to want to share?

00:55:42 **DONALD EDWARDS**

No, other than I just want to let people know that I had a job for 31 years that I loved, and I still love it. And if I could do it over, I would do it again. I might change some things, but I would do it again.

00:56:04 **AMY MAURO**

Well, that's a great place to end. Thank you very much for your time.

00:56:07 **DONALD EDWARDS**

No, my pleasure.