

Edgewater blows horn on New Year's Eve to end its 97 years of service

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By Joey Bunch
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At 6 p.m. sharp, the firehouse intercom blared through the cold New Year's Eve in Edgewater, the tiny town on Sloan's Lake on Denver's western edge.

"This is the final dispatch for Edgewater Fire Department," a dispatcher broadcast to about 200 shivering people on Gray Street between the fire hall and police station, as the city's agency signed off after 97 years.

A siren rose from a whine to a wail signaling the end of one era and beginning of a new one, as Edgewater is merging with the Wheat Ridge Fire Protection District.



"I wanted to be here to see the history, to see it closed out," said city resident Jim Gardner. "Communities used to really rally around things like their volunteer fire departments. Now it's hard to get people to volunteer."

Residents in November voted nearly 2-to-1 to merge fire services for the city of 5,170 with the Wheat Ridge Fire Protection District.

Residents approved a 7.5-mill property tax to pay Wheat Ridge for professional fire service and to do away with the 5.03-mill assessment the city had collected — a difference of about \$38 a year on a \$200,000 home.

The move allows Edgewater to bring its facilities up to date, shorten response time and provide more reliable 24-hour service.

Volunteers had dwindled from a high of 38 in 1980 to just 10 within the city today, proponents of the measure said before the vote.

The city hired its first full-time chief in 2009.

The department began on Dec. 20, 1915, with the meeting of 20 volunteers, who became the Edgewater Fire and Hose Co.

They were chartered by the Colorado State Firemen's Association on Feb. 21, 1917, as the state's 13th department.

Firefighters continued to wear the number 13 on their badges to commemorate their place in state history.

One of the city's prized historical items is the 1926 Graham Brothers Dodge, the fire department's first motorized truck, which firefighters paid for with community dances and "card parties."

Edgewater is one of the Denver area's most historic neighborhoods, created after the well that farmer Thomas Sloan dug in 1861 quickly spread to the surface to form a 200-acre lake.

Sloan began packing ice from the lake in the winter. Other businesses and, soon, the town — Edgewater — formed on the lake's western shore. The city incorporated in 1904.

Monday evening, the final siren lasted three full minutes, after 95-year-old former Fire Chief Al Coven pulled the switch.

The fire station will live on as a Wheat Ridge Fire Protection District station.

When the siren's blare ended, Edgewater Mayor Bonnie McNulty told the dispatcher, "Put Station 73 formally on the air."