

METRO



RIGHT: Lt. Ron Heckle, an 18-year veteran of the Chicago Fire Department, reports from the scene aboard Engine Co. No. 87.

## Engine 87 Fulfills A Burning Desire

### Firefighters Restore Pumper Reminiscent Of Their Childhood

By NEIL STERNBERG  
PHOTO BY KEVIN MAZUR

The market for old, beat-up fire engines is not great. There's the scrap heap. And then there are the handful of people, mostly firefighters, who love old fire engines. One of them is Ron Heckle.

"I happened to be driving past a fire engine dealership in Alsip when I noticed they had a rig outside," said Heckle, an 18-year veteran of the Chicago Fire Department. "We thought we would restore it."

The rig was a 1960 pumper. The "we" were Heckle and a group of his friends: Buddy Kuffala and Dennis Alford, both Maywood firefighters; Lee Madison, who, like Heckle, works in the Chicago Fire Department's fire alarm office; Michael Maloney, a Villa Park firefighter; and Tom Garrison and John Tierney, a lieutenant and the chief, respectively, in the Beavercreek Fire Department.

They decided to band together, forming the Engine 87 Club, and buy the old pumper.

"We all liked the history of the Chicago Fire Department," Garrison said. "We collected memorabilia and always wanted a rig."

It was a big commitment, in both time and money. The seven split the \$2,700 purchase price, then all contributed to the work and the \$11,000 or so it took to restore the truck.

"The wives were real supportive," Heckle said. "That helped a lot."

The biggest problem was not, along with custom work to bring the rig up to Chicago Fire Department specifications.

The men, all in their late 30s or early 40s, wanted a truck from the era when they were growing up and feeling in love with firefighting. The 1960 pumper actually had belonged to the Mackinac Fire Department but was of the same sort used in Chicago.

"We were trying to find something similar to what Chicago used back then, in the 1930s or 1940s, but Chicago rigs are so hard to find, and when you do, they are usually so beat up they're not worth restoring," said Garrison. "Here we found something that is as close as we could get, then we got the original blueprints from Chicago and worked on it until they matched us."

The Engine 87 Club ("87" being a retired engine house number) takes the truck to parades and firefighter meetings, as well as visiting firehouses celebrating their anniversaries.

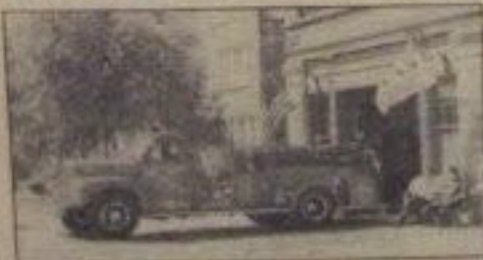
"We try to spread goodwill with this and just back the club to see where the Fire Department has been," said Heckle, who admitted that when driving the truck, which is fully operational and has all the compliments of being the new world's oldest surviving open fire and putting the rig to work, their personal work.

"We're happy," he said.



PHOTO BY KEVIN MAZUR/SUN-TIMES

no. 87, a 1960 pumper, beams after its restoration, which took a year and about \$11,000 to complete.



ABOVE: The restored pumper in the neighborhood on 33rd Place off Ashland Avenue.



RIGHT: Ron Heckle drives firefighters Lee Madison and John Tierney in his tactics. All are members of the Engine 87 Club.