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# The Death of the American Fire House

When Does Bigger, Better, Nicer Become a Bad Thing?



Like the dismantling of the historic MLB stadiums of the early 20th Century, I fear we are on a path to losing what made the old fire houses so special. Yes, there are a few great ballparks left clinging to survival; Fenway Park and Wrigley Field definitely sit atop that list. But that list is few and far between.

Similarly, there are still old fire stations still being used. The problem is that each time one of these old fire houses gets replaced it comes with a cost; and that cost is the character that a true fire house possesses.

Now days the new fire stations come with all the amenities that you would find in a fancy office building or doctor's office. The dorms are all separated, the officer's quarters are at the complete opposite end of the building away from anything else, and the day room is so sterile you almost feel like you're not supposed to be in there. Everything is high tech and top of the line; and from administrations standpoint, they symbolize the future of the fire service. Yes, everything is super nice but has anyone really stopped to ask firefighters if "really nice" is what they would put at the top of their list? These buildings that house firefighters and life saving equipment look more like artwork than fire houses.



Maybe some places do ask and I truly hope that's the case because those are the men and women that live in these buildings. Every single day of every single year there is a crew, big or small, living in that building (career departments at least). The part of all of this that really confuses me is that from the majority of what I have heard when having these discussions with other firefighters is that there could have been money saved if they just asked what we wanted because a lot of this extra fluff that is adding the cost of things we don't even care about. It seems that everyone wants to complain about Millennials ruining the fire service and I am so tired of people using them as a scape goat. I would be as bold to say that these new corporate office inspired fire houses are much more of a problem. What makes my crew so tight is that we spend the entire day together, from 0700 when we come on shift till midnight or later sometimes we're hanging out. We don't do that because I demand it as the officer, we do it because we

have fun together and enjoy each other's company, we are a family away from our families. I almost feel like the way fire stations are being built now impedes that camaraderie with all its separation.

At my department, we very recently opened up a new station. The station is huge, and beautiful, and very top of the line. It had a big room for training, a huge bay that looked capable of storing aircraft, and huge offices for the Captain and Lieutenant. But there was something missing, something that was so obvious to me but apparently not to anyone else; Fire House Character. As I stood there during the ribbon cutting I overheard a citizen comment that "I bet all the firefighters that work at other stations are jealous"; but to be honest all I could think about is how much I hated it. No I didn't hate everything about it; the weight room was a very big improvement, the kitchen was large which is very nice when you have several people working on cooking at the same time. There was an extractor for cleaning your gear without running across town and a washer and dryer set to clean duty clothes so you don't have to bring them home. But those things to me pail in relation to how important character is.

I believe that some of my best and most fun memories revolve around being in an open dorm. Pranking each other or joking around after we all went to bed; and yes we do act like a bunch of kids like that but that is one of the reasons that I have enjoyed my job so much. That is part of the bonding process, and no I am not talking about hazing



and pranks that go too far. I am talking about harmless jokes and friendly harassment that occurs on a constant basis in the fire house (at least in the ones that are fun to be at). The more you take away from community areas the more of that is lost. I

do get that administrations have to be more cognizant of how stations are laid out to allow more privacy for female members but I think we have swung so far on the “safe side” that it has gone too far.

In the recent past there seems to be more of a balance that is sought after when building major league stadiums and fields. Of course they are super nice and as high tech as humanly possible but they have aspects that give them character. I truly hope that the fire service can find that balance as well so that we can stop building fire stations that store apparatus, equipment, and firefighters; to building fire houses where not only firefighters reside but where house pride is fostered.

