

Janesville gives old fire station a proper send-off

The Janesville Fire Department went full regalia to say goodbye to the old Central Fire Station on Friday.

By [Elliot Hughes](#)

JANESVILLE—In recent weeks, members of the Janesville Fire Department have expressed so much excitement for their new Central Fire Station that they've had little sentiment leftover for the 59-year-old building they left behind.

But on Friday, the department went full regalia to say goodbye, with well over 100 people present.

“It's bittersweet,” said firefighter Chad Hansen, who has spent 12 years working in the 13,000-square-foot station. “There's rich history here.”

And delve into that history they did. Friday afternoon featured speeches from current and past fire chiefs, the oldest living department retiree and House Speaker Paul Ryan. There were tributes to the department's four employees who died in the line of duty, a Veterans of Foreign Wars honor guard and a bagpiper bellowing “God Bless America.”

The building is on the hook for demolition sometime this summer. Its new counterpart, at \$9 million and 31,500 square feet, became fully operational a week ago.

Former Fire Chief Larry Grorud—who claimed his 31-year tenure at the station was the longest—said more than 350 people probably have worked at the station. Hansen said they collectively responded to more than 260,000 emergency calls.

Save for the party going on inside the vehicle bay, the building was an empty shell Friday. Once the ceremonies and speeches finished, kids were seen running around in the upstairs dormitory area.

The remarks Friday focused little on the building itself and more on the firefighters who served there and from other Janesville stations.

Many of them praised the heroic efforts of first responders over the years. The department formally honored Edward Lichtfus, William Finnane, Merlin Boicourt and Sidney Krueger, who all died in the line of duty between 1925 and 1986. Children of Finnane and Krueger also spoke at the event.

“You are all heroes,” Krueger's son, Mike, said to the department's current and past employees.

Gordy Rassmussen, the oldest living department retiree at 87, joined the crew in 1951, six years before the old station was built. Having been stationed there for the building's first 26 years of existence, he had few complaints about it.

“It was state of the art when I moved in,” he said.

And he, too, when asked what he has missed the most about the building, said it was the people he worked with.

Ryan also spoke about his relationship with the station, which he first visited on a school field trip in 1977,

around the age of 7.

He recalled the day his father died of a heart attack at their home several blocks away when he was a teenager. He said the ambulance that arrived came from the Central Fire Station, and he has not forgotten the face of the helpful and generous paramedic who tended to him.

“I can't tell you how much we as citizens of this town are so thankful for you,” Ryan said.