

Twelve Amazing Female Firefighters

“You Can Be One Too”

Female firefighters have been putting out flames for almost 200 years, while continuing to burn down boundaries of gender discrimination, harassment and negative criticisms from their male counterparts. While firefighting remains a predominately male profession, female firefighters make sure that their efforts are noticed and their voices are heard, so they can keep doing what they do best – fight fires. Here are 10 amazing female firefighters who’ve changed the face of the profession:

Molly Williams

Known as the first female firefighter, Molly Williams was a slave in New York City and a member of the Oceanus Engine Company No. 11 in 1815. She was remembered for pulling the pumper to fires through heavy snow during a blizzard in 1818. Williams wore a calico dress and checked apron when fighting fires, but she was known to be just as hardworking as the male firefighters. There is very little known about her personal life, but her firefighting efforts remain an important part of women’s history and paving the way for female firefighters.

Marina Betts

Marina Betts made history as a volunteer firefighter in Pittsburgh in 1820. Known for her unwavering dedication, Betts was said to have never missed an alarm during her 10 years of service, and was remembered for pouring buckets of water over male bystanders who refused to help put out fires.

Lillie Hitchcock Coit

Lillie Hitchcock Coit is also considered to be one of the first female firefighters in America. Dating back to 1859, Coit became an honorary member of San Francisco’s Knickerbocker Engine Company No. 5 as a teenager, when she helped the company haul the engine to a fire on Telegraph Hill.

Emma Vernell

Emma Vernell was known as the first recognized female firefighter in the state of New Jersey. After her firefighter husband died in the line of duty, Vernell became a firefighter herself at Westside Hose Company No. 1 in 1920, at the age of 50. She is regarded for her firefighting contributions, as well as her courageous move into the profession late in her life.

Rosemary Roberts Cloud

Rosemary Roberts Cloud is Fire Chief for the City of East Point, Georgia, and the first **African American Female Fire Chief in the United States**. In her position, she is responsible for managing four fire stations and 100 employees, in a city with 40,000 residents.

Cloud’s Career

Chief Cloud began her career in the fire service 24 years ago with the City of Atlanta Fire Department and worked her way up the ranks, from Firefighter to Chief Officer. Her last assignment with the Atlanta Fire Department was as Assistant Chief of Hartsfield International Airport Fire Operations.

Major Studies & Training

Chief Cloud has a BS Degree in Applied Behavioral Science from National-Louis University. She received additional training from Harvard University School of Government, Dillard University and the National



Fire Academy. Chief Cloud's professional affiliations include the Georgia Association of Fire Chiefs, Southeastern Association of Fire Chiefs, International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), Women in the Fire Service, Women Chief Fire Officers, the International Association of Black Professional Fire Fighters, National Association of Black Public Administrators, and the National Fire Protection Association.

Community Programs

Chief Cloud is actively involved in programs that promote community service and public education. She currently mentors young people through leadership programs with local schools and youth organizations. She has created and implemented more than ten community service public safety programs in the City of East Point.

Personal Awards

Chief Cloud is featured in Who's Who in Black Atlanta, she was honored in the Hall of Fame for exemplary service to mankind; she received the prestigious Millennium Pacesetter Award from the Atlanta Business League; and the Pinnacle Leadership Award from Delta Sigma Theta. Chief Cloud serves on the IAFC Constitution and By-Laws Committee and she is also a board member for the National-Louis University.



The youngest of 14 children, Chief Cloud was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, and has one daughter and one granddaughter.

Judith Livers Brewer

Judith Livers is known as the first paid firefighter. Livers was hired in 1974 by the Arlington County, Virginia, Fire Department. Livers became interested in firefighting when her husband was studying for his fire science classes in order to be a firefighter. Motivated by the idea of saving lives and preventing damage caused by

fires, Livers became a firefighter herself. Judith Livers retired from Arlington County in 1999 at the high ranking position of battalion chief.

Toni McIntosh

Toni McIntosh is known as one of the first black female career firefighters. McIntosh was hired in 1976 by the Pittsburgh Fire Department and served more than 11 years at the station. She is regarded as one of the first black female firefighters to be paid for her fire fighting services, as well as the most tenured female firefighter in the U.S.

Bessie Hudson

Bessie Hudson is making history for being named the first black female battalion chief of Orange County Fire Recue in Orlando, Florida. During her nearly 20 years of firefighting, Hudson has overcome some serious obstacles of racism and cultural differences, but always ended up on top. In 2004, Hudson was promoted to lieutenant, and now she has been promoted to battalion chief.



Bonnie Beers

Seattle's first female firefighter may have retired in 2008, but this brave woman's legacy lives on and continues to inspire women firefighters. Beers joined the Seattle Fire Department in 1978 to some dismay. She faced gender discrimination, harassment, bullying and other negative reactions from the all male fire department. Holding her ground, Beers forged through the criticisms, did her job well and became a role model to other female firefighters throughout her 30 years of service.

Brenda Berkman

Brenda Berkman is known as the first female firefighter of the New York City Fire Department. Although this heroic firefighter retired in 2006, her contributions to the profession continue to make a difference for female firefighters today. Berkman is widely known among New York firefighters for her 1982 lawsuit against the city for its discrimination against women in physical exams, arguing that some of the requirements were unnecessary for the position. Berkman won the lawsuit and became a New York City firefighter, but not without years of harassment and abuse from male firefighters. However, Berkman stuck to her job, became lieutenant and was one of the first rescue workers to report to Ground Zero on Sept. 11.



Dany Cotton

Dany Cotton continues to make headway as the deputy assistant commissioner of the London Fire Brigade. With 22 years of service under her, Cotton is the highest ranking operational woman in the United Kingdom's fire and rescue service, and the first female firefighter

in the UK to receive the Queen's Fire Service Medal. Even at a managerial position, Cotton still attends emergencies and handles crisis management, while promoting the field of firefighting to women.



Renee Muhammad



This is the face of the extreme budget cuts taking place nationwide in our departments, our school systems and our public health facilities. Renee Muhammad, pictured here, used to be a fire fighter in Camden, New Jersey before she had to turn in her gear recently, emotionally surrendering a career in which she undoubtedly saved many lives. Muhammad is one less person in Camden who will be on the ground should an emergency arise. She is

also one less person who will be paying into the tax base that supports her community. As a country, we had better be prepared to lose more people in public service like her in the name of the popular call for government budget cuts that is sweeping the nation, with the new Obama budget cuts poised to be enacted.