What is the biggest change you've witnessed as a Gothenburg Volunteer fire fighter?

Dale Franzen: The amount of time members spend in continuing education classes and drills. When he first joined, there were monthly meetings and drills and "some calls."

Mark Ballmer: Today, members meet once a month for meetings and for drills another day in addition to emergency medical technicians needing 10 hours of continuing education each year and keeping up to date with cardio-pulmonery resuscitation.

Jim Hecox: The increased size of fire trucks and the cost. "I said when I started that I was going to stay until they rotated every truck out. There's still one left so I can't leave yet."

Also, fewer fire calls and more rescue calls.

Ballmer: Improvements in personal gear. "I remember wearing hip boots, terrible gloves and old gray, knee-length coats. There's been a tremendous change."

Wally Trimble: The equipment has changed so much.

"We're one of the best equipped departments around," he said. "I'd put us up against anyone's department except the paid departments in Grand Island, Lincoln and Omaha."

What is the biggest improvement you've seen?

Franzen: The quality of equipment. “We’ve always had dedicated firemen but the quality and size of equipment and the facility has improved.”

Hecox: The equipment has become more sophisticated with more chemicals available to use on certain types of fires.

“We used to just have foam and water wetter.”

Any particular fire or rescue that you remember in particular?

Franzen: The burning down of the Franzen, Inc. warehouse in May of 1974. “We had five Franzens who owned it and they were all on the fire department.”

He also remembers when the Houston Hotel burned and the “fire from hell” in the south hills in August of 2002.

“That lasted 10 days,” he said.

Hecox: “Once you think you’ve seen the worst, there’s always one more.”

He said fire fighters gained a lot of knowledge from the wildfire in the south hills. “But none (fires) are any good, they’re all bad.”

Trimble: The Houston Hotel because he hadn’t been with the department very long and “it was colder than the dickens.”

He recalls pumping water with Norm Geiken on a truck on the south side of the building while other fire fighters blasted their hoses from the north.

“Once you got wet, it froze and you were warm but we also had bunker gear that kept us warm,” Trimble said.

Ballmer: “Anything involving kids.”

Ballmer also mentioned the burning down of the Houston Hotel and the explosion of the All Points grain elevator in November of 2008 as making up “the big three.”