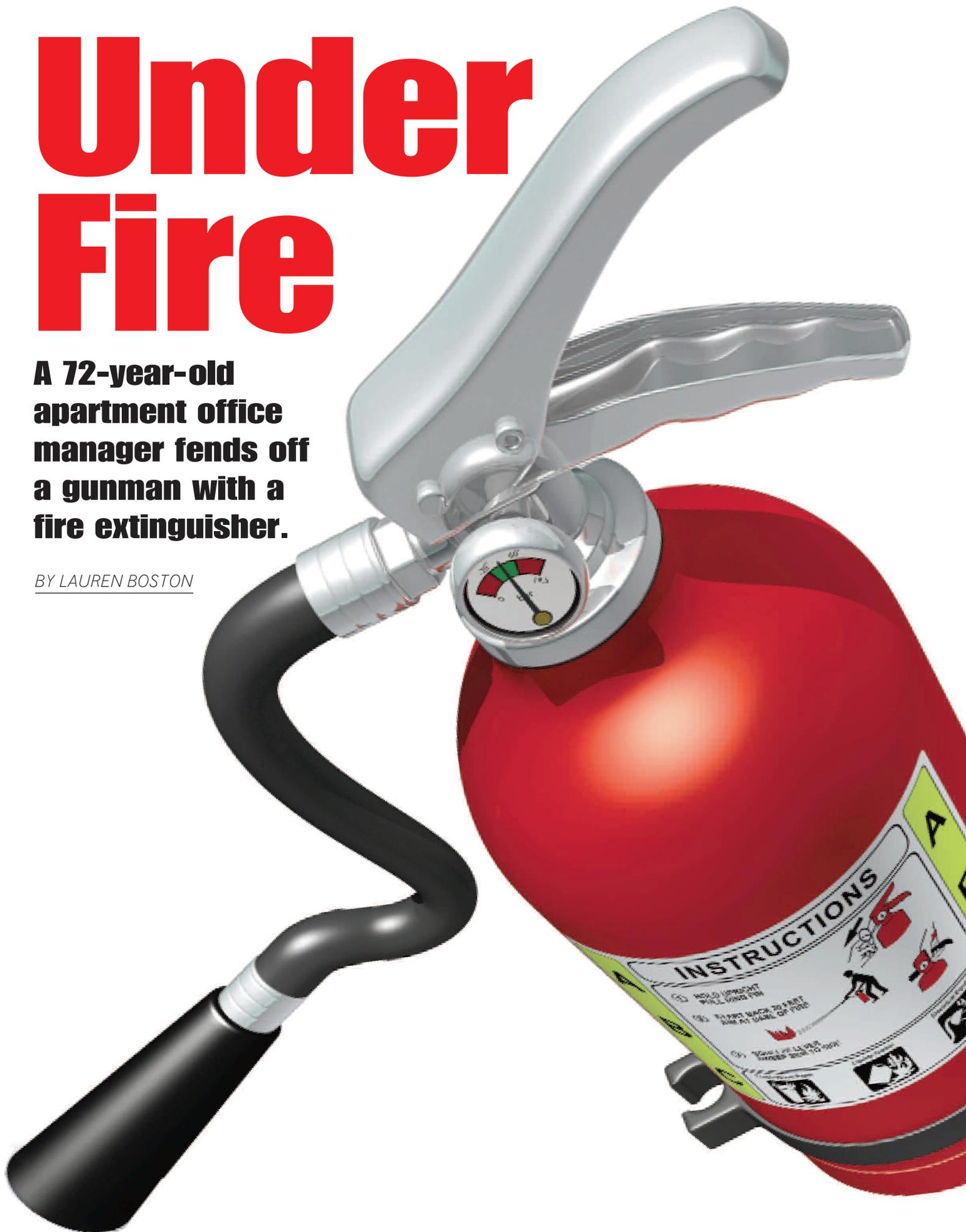


# Under Fire

**A 72-year-old apartment office manager fends off a gunman with a fire extinguisher.**

*BY LAUREN BOSTON*



## **A fire extinguisher could save your life—just not in the way you think.**

**I**t was a gunman—not a fire—that prompted 72-year-old apartment office manager Cheryl Arnold to reach under her desk and spray the intruder with a fire extinguisher. In doing so, she may very well have saved her life.

“It was about 10 a.m. and I was alone in the office when this guy came in the front door with a red bandana on his face, covering up his nose,” says Arnold, who works at Village Vista Apartments, a 99-unit community in a Cincinnati suburb. “He had a gun in his hand and he walked over to me and held it real nasty at my head and said, ‘I want your [expletive] money, [expletive]!’” He said it three times and kept pushing the gun into my head. I said I don’t have any money—it’s all in an offsite safe.”

The gunman wasn’t satisfied. He leaned over Arnold’s desk and opened a drawer to look for the money. But Arnold had other plans.

“Two months ago, a salesman who supplies our fire extinguishers asked me if I owned a gun,” Arnold says. “I told him I don’t like guns and he gave me a fire extinguisher without the clip in it to put by my desk. He said I could use it as an alternative weapon if I ever needed to. It was the first thing I thought of when the intruder came in.

Arnold was alone in the office—her coworker was out of town for the holidays. She wasn’t sure if the gunman was going to kill her but she knew she had one chance to protect herself. That chance came when the intruder turned away from Arnold for a moment and she calmly reached under her desk, grabbed the extinguisher, aimed and sprayed him.

The extinguisher fluid enveloped the office. Everything was covered in a white blanket, making it nearly impossible to see. Arnold says the shocked gunman immediately ran out.

“I would definitely recommend using something like a fire extinguisher if you’re in a similar situation and don’t carry a gun,” says Arnold, a 20-year industry veteran who had never been approached by an intruder in the past. “The gunman didn’t expect it. If you don’t panic—and it’s hard not to—you’ve got a much better chance.”

Jacob Vener, owner of Village Vista Apartments, says he carries a firearm but never thought someone would rob his community.

“I wouldn’t expect a 72-year-old to carry a gun, but fortunately Cheryl was still able to protect herself,” he says.

“I just want her to be safe.”

Police have not caught the intruder, whom several residents saw running through the parking lot covered in fire extinguisher fluid. Arnold says the young gunman, who was shaking and “possibly on drugs,” may have been watching the office that morning.

“Someone had just come in and given me a large amount of cash to pay their rent,” Arnold says.

“I immediately put the money in a safe on the floor but the intruder could have seen them walk in and out.” Vista Village Apartments has since installed security cameras in the community’s main office,

hallways and laundry rooms, as well as a security system for the doors and windows to alert Arnold when someone is coming in.

“I feel comfortable, but still have a leery feeling in the back of my mind that something could happen again,” says Arnold,



Cheryl Arnold and Jacob Vener in her office with a life-saving device.

## **SAFETY FIRST**

**W**hat would you do if an armed intruder walked into your leasing office? What if you were alone?

Every situation and person are different, and no one can say for sure how they would react in that situation until they’re actually in it. However, there are several things apartment professionals can do ahead of time to better prepare themselves in case of an emergency.

**1 Set yourself up for success.** There are many preventive safety measures that can be taken to enhance a community’s design. A front door ringer, locks on interior office doors, open leasing areas and windows free of shades help to make an office safer.

**2 Carry an alternative warning mechanism.** Many apartment management companies do not allow their employees to carry anything that could be turned against them. This often includes mace, pepper spray, knives, guns and sharp key rings. An alternative is a strobe and siren combination that can be attached to keys or carried independently. It has the potential to scare an intruder off and alert others that you are in danger.

**3 Take a self-defense class.** Some management companies will pay for their employees to take self-defense classes, or hire instructors to offer in-house training. Most self-defense instructors say to be careful, try not to be a hero and to avoid putting yourself into tricky situations. — *Susan Weston, CAM, CAPS, NAAEI Faculty*

who called the representative from the fire extinguisher company to thank him afterward.

Vener says he’s proud Arnold had the peace of mind to take action.

“Cheryl’s just a tough woman who had a fire extinguisher.”

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