

WHITFIELD FIREFIGHTERS CAP BUSY YEAR WITH 41ST BANQUET

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Lt. Sam Hammontree named Career Firefighter of the Year, while Pay Per Call Firefighter of the Year is Lt. Brett Miller



Capping what has been a busy and productive year, dozens of firefighters received recognition for their accomplishments in 2018 during the Whitfield County Fire Department's 41st annual Firefighter's Appreciation Banquet.

Among those honored during the banquet, held Nov. 6 at the Dalton Golf & Country Club, were Career Firefighter of the Year Lt. Sam Hammontree and Pay Per Call Firefighter of the Year Lt. Brett Miller.

"I've followed this person and worked with him for a long period of time and been able to see him come up through the ranks and see the person he's become," Battalion Chief Nathan Callaway said before presenting the award to Station 1's Hammontree, a 10-year veteran of the department. "Sam is always willing to help, anything that comes up, whether it be the Boot Drive with the Shriners, whether it be Teen Maze, whatever it may be. He's always willing to help, and he's always wanting to push his personnel to the next level and make them better than they were."

Miller, meanwhile, received his award from Battalion Chief Kevin McDermott, who praised him for his "great leadership skills" and for being "steadfast and courageous – a firefighter's firefighter."

"I have nothing but good things to say about him," McDermott said. "He exhibits himself as a professional constantly. It's always good to look at the work schedule and see his name pop up from a battalion chief's standpoint because you know the station's going to be taken real good care of and you know things are going to be done right because that's just the kind of person he is."

Miller has worked for the department for the past 21 years at different stations, filling in as needed.

Also honored during the banquet were 40-year employees Randy Kittle, assistant chief; Vernon Ray, volunteer captain; and Russell Wilson, division chief, who each received a wooden plaque with a fire ax attached.

Other service awards included:

35 Years

Lt. Lewis Barefoot and Battalion Chief Tim Stephens

30 Years

Lt. Allan Kendrick, Pay Per Call Captain J.D. Manly, and Pay Per Call Lt. Jack Townsend

15 Years

Lts. Jesse Bond, Robert Jones, and Mac MacFadden

10 Years

Engineers Brandon Cloer, Kevin Coleman, Blake Cook, Will Mann, and Scotty Tate and Lt. Sam Hammontree

5 Years

Engineer Chandler Rickett, Lt. Ryan Robbs, Engineer Chris Roberson, Pay Per Call Engineer Robbie Townsend, and Lt. Jake Warnix.

Commissioner Harold Brooker praised the firefighters for their efforts during the past year. "All I can say is thank you very much," he said. "The citizens thank you, the board of commissioners thank you, and from the bottom of our hearts, keep it going."

Progress was the name of the game during 2018, according to Chief Ed O'Brien.

"Five years ago, we had 68 personnel, and as of right now, we're at 108," he said. "We've really grown, but the one thing I enjoy and really appreciate is that we're all still together – we still try to have that small-town feel with us. Growth is hard and progress is good, but the one thing we've got to remember is we need to stick together as a group, and I hope we can always do that."

Earlier this year, the department opened Station 11 in Cohutta, which "has actually turned out to be a busy station for us, which showed that it was a deficiency here in the county," O'Brien said. "That investment is really paying off for those citizens up there. Now we are trying to get Station 12 going."

He said they are nearly ready to break ground on the new station in the Riverbend Road area, with completion of construction expected in the second half of 2019. The department also has two new fire engines that are on the assembly line now and should be delivered soon.

The chief said he was most proud of the service that the firefighters do throughout the community, including about two dozen personnel and their family members volunteering as Buddies for the Miracle League baseball players. The department also teamed with the Dalton Shriners to collect more than \$21,000 at the annual Boot Drive on one recent Saturday, with 75 percent of that money going directly to children being treated at the Shriners Hospital in Cincinnati and 25 percent coming back to Whitfield County to fund the department's third annual Santa in Uniform event that will provide gifts for underprivileged youngsters in December.

Chip Hicks, secretary of the Dalton Shriners, praised the fire department for its help with the Boot Drive, saying "it just goes to show you what can happen when two organizations come together."

"This is very personal to me," Hicks said. "My daughter Peyton is 18 years old and had surgery at Shriners Children's Hospital in Greenville a few years ago, so I know firsthand what happens at Shriners and what they do for children. From the bottom of my heart, I just thank you very much."

Noting the tremendous growth of the department, which has helped lower the county's ISO insurance rating to a 3 for a decrease in homeowner's premiums, O'Brien recognized several new hires, including Stephanie Burch, Deric Beaudoin, Phillip Bowling, Cameron Cantrell, Caleb Chastain, Davonte Evans, Andrew Hambright, Brad Horne, Andrew Lanning, Scott Lewis, Drew Massey, Osvaldo Pina, Jeffrey Schmitt, Tim Suits, Frank Torres, Chase West, and Corey Woodard, as well as new pay per call firefighters (formerly known as volunteers) Corey Barefoot, Thomas Lowrance, Tyler Higgins, Kerry Howell, Chris Talent, Stacy Newby, Douglas Brown, Tyler Mitchell, and Cade West.

The chief also noted 28 promotions during the past year, including battalion chiefs Nathan Callaway, Chris Dempsey, Ricky Lloyd, and Tim Stephens; lieutenants Andrew Beavers, Jesse Bond, Randal Boyd, Lee Coker, Darren Burnette, Jordan Brown, Allen Gallman, Garner Hall, Sam Hammontree, Mac MacFadden, Barry Ownby, Austin Ridley, Ryan Robbs, and LaDon West; and engineers Christopher Adams, Stephanie Burch, Austin Busby, Christian Chadwick,

Carter Chance, David Freiberg, Charles Heard, Justin Hutcherson, Jon Wakefield, Brady Walters, and Tyler Warnix.

Station 7's Charles Blair, a 12-year veteran, was named First Responder of the Year during a presentation by Hamilton EMS captain Wendy Saylor, who said her agency is "thankful to have such a great fire department to work with in our area."

Saylor praised Blair for his hard work, noting that he "is always willing to do anything we need him to no matter what the emergency is."

"He has very good enthusiasm - he doesn't hesitate to get in there and jump in and help out doing whatever," she added. "He's very professional. He remains calm on the scene and shows caring and compassion to the patients and their family members."

Saylor singled out one call where Blair helped respond to an ATV accident and actually ended up driving the ATV with a critical patient on board.



The department also recognized administrative assistant Kim Mathis for her service during the past 18 years.

"It's just a token of our appreciation for probably the person I think works about the hardest in this department for all of us each and every day," O'Brien said. "The chief wears five stripes,

and we say Kim's got six. She knows budget and HR items, and she's just a blessing to all of us. If there's something you need, she's going to help you out."