

Federal Fire Wardens Retire At Hot Springs

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Warden program began early in the century due to extensive fires, poor transportation and communications and small forest service staffing. Local people signed up to be wardens and recruited crews to suppress fires in their local area, many times taking independent action and controlling the fires before the forest service could get to the site.

In his presentation Friday night, Wallace pointed out that in the early years most of the French Broad ranger district was in young reproduction since much of the land had been cut over prior to forest service acquisition. Fires destroyed many of these young stands and growth began only after fire occurrence began declining in the 1920s and '30s. "This ex-

plains why about 78 per cent of the timber on the district is between 30 and 60 years old and only about 20 per cent is older than 60."

"The fire warden system has contributed significantly to the outstanding present condition of our timber, wildlife, watershed, and recreation resources in the area," Wallace continued, "in many instances warden crews were virtually the only defense for protecting public as well as private lands."

Though modern radio communications, highways, 4-wheel drive vehicles, reconnaissance aircraft, bombers loaded with retardants, and helicopter attack

forces have decreased our reliance on warden crews, there are still many areas where they can attack a fire before or as fast as other forces can reach the scene.

"Immediate attack is essential in the mountains," Wallace said, "because if you don't catch a fire before it gets rolling it will always get large and go out the top of the ridge."

Today forest fires are located by observed planes or lookouts which cover the French Broad district almost constantly during high fire danger. When a fire is seen observers then advise fire dispatchers as to location, rate of spread and best access

routes and if the fire is in rough terrain or long travel distances are involved, a retardant drop is ordered to hold the fire in check until crews arrive. Bombers from Asheville or Knoxville drop hundreds of gallons of chemicals which help cool the fire and reduce spread. Water where available, is used extensively but after the modern methods of control stop the fire it is still the handtool crew which does the dirty, tiring job of mopping up, putting out burning debris which could rekindle the fire.

The wardens and handtool

crews are the infantrymen of the war waged against wildfires.

In Service

Harry W. Walker, whose wife, Maxine, lives in Mars Hill, recently was promoted to Army sergeant while serving as a radio teletype operator with the 37th Armor in Katterbach, Germany.

Sgt. Walker entered the Army in February, 1975.

He attended Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond.



NEAL and Samuel Barnett look on as Joe Wallace presents a certificate of appreciation to Fred

Barnett (second from left) who retired after 30 years as a cooperative forest fire warden.

at
YULETIDE

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May you enjoy every blessing of this holy season.

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GRADY GAHAGAN, left, and Joe Wallace inspect Gahagan's fire tool box which is kept by fire wardens for emergency forest fire fighting.

Hot Springs Centers

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the damage. Among the volunteers were parents, senior citizens, local students, staff from the local day care centers, a minister, Forest Service personnel, firemen, concerned citizens and 10 Mars Hill College students who took on the terrible job of hauling debris from the basement. The center missed only three days of operation as a result of the flood. The center then reopened in temporary quarters at the Hot Springs Elementary School. However, the coordinated efforts of volunteers and county personnel allowed the

center to reopen at the regular site after only two weeks of cleanup operations.

Now the center has fresh paint on the walls, new linoleum, a repaired furnace and a new freezer on the way. Some new toys have been donated by individuals and church groups. The center is still involved in the process of trying to recover its losses. Funds from the Disaster Relief Program will be used to replace many of the items lost.

Despite the destruction of a flood, the Hot Springs Day Care Center remains a vital part of the local community. The people of this community support their center because they know that the center provides an opportunity for a child to learn some important facts about the world and themselves in a pleasant and creative environment.



GREETINGS

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