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# Life & Leisure

## Hoke is safer because of firefighters

By PAT ALLEN WILSON  
Editor

**F**irefighting is recognized as the most dangerous job in this country. On September 11, 2001, 343 firefighters died in the twin tower holocaust in New York City. This year, to date, 78 have died in the United States.

Last Thursday night, the Raeford-Hoke Chamber of Commerce recognized the dangers of firefighting and the responsibilities of local volunteer firefighters and rescue personnel at an appreciation banquet in their honor.

The chamber also chose Noah Pierce, of the Puppy Creek Volunteer Fire Dept., as Firefighter of the Year.

Just days earlier, Pierce spoke with youngsters of Brownie Troop 354, as a part of their Career Day activities. About firefighting, he said, "I love it. It's a good feeling when you get to help people. It's an awesome feeling."

Accepting his honor Thursday night, Pierce said it made him "very proud."

Pride in what they do is a factor in firefighters' dedication. Lt. Leon

McMillan, with the Tylertown Volunteer Fire Dept., has been a firefighter since 1989. "I will be a firefighter till I die. It's in my blood; once you get it, you can't quit."

McMillan, who spent 10 years as a firefighter in the Navy, added, "When you see it, you have nightmares."

"I just like helping people," McMillan added.

"To help out my community," is the reason Chuck Brice, 64, has spent the last years as a firefighter. "It's a thankless job. Most people don't want to do it because it's not a paying job. Somebody has to do it."

Brice, a South Antioch firefighter, said one fire in particular taught him how much firefighters are needed. It was a barn fire. When the flames were extinguished, firefighters found the charred remains of man sitting in a chair inside the barn. It was his chief's uncle. "When I see something like that it makes me want to get involved and get others involved."

"9/11, it might have been us," Brice said. He thinks of those safety personnel who gave their lives all the time, he added.

Firefighting is a family tradition, said Matt Carter, 23, a Rockfish fireman. His grandparents, father and uncles were firefighters. Daughter Brianna, who is four, said she wants to be a firefighter, too.

Carter's wife, Rita, said, "I'm proud of him. It's a lot of stress because you worry, but for the most part I am proud of him."

Mike Parkins, 21, was a junior firefighter, beginning at age 16. "It started out as something to do for the summer," he said. Then he went to the fire academy at Fayetteville Technical Community College.

Parkins, who volunteers with Rockfish and Lake Rim in Cumberland County, hopes to continue as a firefighter. He would like to work fulltime, he said.

Creston Rowland, 17, a junior at Hoke High, is currently Rockfish's only junior firefighter. His grandfather was a firefighter and his mom and sister are emergency medical technicians as well as firefighters.

There are limits to what junior firefighters can do, Rowland said. He can't ride out first and he can't run mutual aid. On school nights there is a 10 p.m. curfew.

Once he turns 18, Rowland said, he can become a "regular" firefighter. That is, if the other firefighters vote to accept him. "That's who I'll be working with. If they don't trust me, well..."

An annual event  
The chamber annually honors its firefighters and rescue squad with a banquet. Members want to make naming a

Firefighter of the Year a yearly event. Chamber member Rick Sandy said Thursday night safety personnel are "very unselfish" people.

We can't thank you enough for getting out of bed in the middle of the night," Sandy said. "Sometimes it's just to put out a fire in a garbage can and sometimes you save lives."

Said Hoke County Commissioner Chairman Bobby Wright, "Ya'll make Hoke County a safer place and a better place to live."

Firefighter of the Year



Noah Pierce, shown here with Girl Scout Brownie Katherine Bishop, daughter of Daniel and Melody Bishop, was named Firefighter of the Year by the Raeford-Hoke Chamber of Commerce.

## Hoke served by 10 departments

Hoke County is served by 10 fire departments with two out-of-county departments overlapping into Hoke.

The county's fire marshal is Major Freddy Johnson of the Hoke Sheriff's Office. Johnny Baker, chief of North Raeford (Station 4), serves at the Hoke County Firefighters Association president.

Hoke County Rescue Base commander is Jimmy Stewart, and North Carolina Forestry's top ranger is Larry Moser.

Crestline (Station 72), located in Moore County, serves western Hoke. Chief there is Adrian Allred.

Wagram-North Scotland (Station 2), located in Scotland County, serves an area in southern Hoke that borders Scotland.

The chief there is Dan Shaw.

Other Hoke stations and fire chiefs are Hillcrest (Station 1), Bobby Allen; Rockfish (Station 2), Todd Wood; Puppy Creek (Station 3), David Willis; West Hoke (Station 5), Richard Wood; Stonewall (Station 6), Keith Phillips; Pine Hill (Station 7), Billie Williams; South Antioch (Station 8), Jimmy Carthens; Tylertown (Station 9), Hervon McCollum; and Raeford (Station 10), Dickie Lippard.



Clockwise from right: Matt Carter, left, and Mike Parkins; Charles Brice; Creston Rowland; Leon McMillan

