

Wakefield honored at firefighters memorial

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People in and around Crescent City came to know that former Crescent City Fire & Rescue chief Steve Wakefield represented all things good.

First on the scene with a volunteer force with a long history of tradition dating back to 1900 where it was established as the Crescent City Volunteer Fire Department. He was instrumental in the merger of the Crescent City Volunteers Fire Department and Crescent Fire Department into Crescent City Fire and Rescue in 2015.

It wasn't all that odd to see his fire truck parked at a high school football game so he could watch his sons play, still ready to answer the call of the need arise.

He was on the front line of fire protection for 43 years with the department, the past 20 as the chief, starting back in 1995. Tragically Chief Wakefield gave the ultimate sacrifice suffering a massive stroke in 2018 while serving as chief and passed away in 2019.

On Oct. 14, Wakefield was honored at the 21st Anniversary California Firefighters Memorial Ceremony in Sacramento. The California Firefighters Memorial is a unique and stunning tribute to the more than 1,500 firefighters who have died in the line of duty since California became a state in 1850.

The California Firefighters Memorial was unveiled on April 6, 2002, and is a lasting tribute to the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice to protect their fellow Californians.

“Steve followed his father Bob into the fire service. He was especially proud that his three sons chose the same path,” Debra Wakefield said. “Marc and Matt are volunteer firefighters with Crescent City Fire and Rescue, and Ryan, his oldest, is the Fire Chief at Pelican Bay State Prison.

“Three generations of Wakefield Fire Chiefs is quite a legacy and now he will have his name on the wall with all the others that served their communities.”

The Crescent City Fire and Rescue, along with friends and family, will make the trip to the capitol to honor one of their own. Some 25-to-30 people are expected to join the Annual California Firefighters Memorial Ceremony.

“This state memorial is really a testament to his level of dedication, heroism and commitment to the community. It’s going to be memorialized and he’ll be up on that wall as long as it stands,” current Chief Kevin Carey said. “It’s not just recognition for 40-plus years of service, it’s a tribute to his commitment and his level of connection with the community.

“It really honors him and his family. I think it’s going to be an amazing, emotional ceremony. But it’s also closure and a good feeling out of it.”

The centerpiece of the California Firefighters Memorial is the brushed limestone Memorial Wall that carries the names of more than 1,500 California fallen firefighters who died in the line of duty.

The wall is framed by two bronze statues depicting firefighters in action. Placement on the wall is officially determined by a death that occurred either on duty or as a result of illness or injury directly related to the job.

Assistant Fire Chief Richard Wier came up through the ranks with Wakefield, some 40-plus years of holding the line and protecting the community. In a sense, they grew up together, literally and figuratively, as men and firefighters.

“His dedication was very, very sincere. Even though he was chief and was respected, he was always remained one of the guys,” Wier recalled. “When his kids played high school sports he was always there in his fire truck so he could watch.

“I knew him from the volunteer force, so this is a big deal recognizing the sacrifices that he made to serve the community as the fire chief, the numerous times he had to get out in the middle of the night, then go be fire chief the next day were tremendous. Back then, he also ran a successful business.”

Crescent City City Manager Eric Wier gave the eulogy at Wakefield's funeral and remembers his fire chief very well as both a manger and a citizen in the community he protected.

"I attended a training in which the speaker stated a quote from Gandhi, "Be the change you want to see in this world," Wier told the congregation that day back in 2019. "Be the Change – Not Wish for Change, Not hope someone else implements change ... be the change.

"When I think back on Chief Wakefield, he was just that. He led by example, always giving service above self, and empowering others to enact positive change. Without a doubt Chief Wakefield will be missed, but he will definitely not be forgotten. As a little piece of his dedication to this community and his relentless humble force will live on in each of us who were fortunate enough to know him."

The California Firefighters Memorial Ceremony will honor the man, the father, one of the men on the front line protecting the community for decades.

It will engrave his name on the wall with all of his fallen brothers, a lasting tribute to all that is good in this world.