

City honors fire chiefs, civilian rescuers and others

December 11, 2019



The legacy of former Fire Chief Steve Wakefield was honored during a ceremony prior to the Crescent City Council meeting Monday.

The city had declared Dec. 3, 2018 as Steve Wakefield Day and now utilizes that date as a way to honor others who exemplify Wakefield's motto of "Service Above Self."

Six Crescent City Fire and Rescue chiefs and two civilians were honored Monday for their actions.

Interim Fire Chief Gillespie presented the first Service Above Self Proclamation to department chiefs who volunteered to step in to replace Wakefield after he suffered a stroke in 2018.

Honored were battalion chiefs Darrin Short, Ray Rook, James Weiland and Joe Gregorio; division chief Ryan Wakefield, and assistant chief Richard Wier.

Gillespie said that looking back, this small group logged more than 6,000 hours of combined duty coverage.

He said that filling the void left by Wakefield, who served the community for more than 42 years - 23 as fire chief - was a difficult job. Wakefield retired in early 2018 and died on April 26, 2019.

"I think the first stint someone covered was seven days straight. Then, (they) worked into a coverage cycle. From that period of time until I came into town in April, they were covering seven days a week in addition to working full-time jobs, with family obligations and everything that goes with it.

"Since I came in as interim fire chief, they still cover 3½ days every single week," Gillespie said. That means every call is answered and 911 can say help is on its way, he said.

"Just last week with the storm system, from 12:30 noon to 11 that night, they responded to 43 calls for service. Over the weekend, there were in excess of 30 calls," Gillespie said.

"They respond day and night, whether they have duty coverage or not. And for that, they truly do epitomize duty above self, and the legacy Chief Wakefield instilled in this department and on this community."

Mayor Blake Inscore also provided a copy of the proclamation to Steve Wakefield's wife, "Fire Mom" Debra Wakefield. "The award wouldn't be there if not for you and Steve," Inscore told her.

Next, Crescent City Police Chief Richard Griffin honored civilians Ty Batson and Doyle Larkin, Sr., for their "service above self" for rescuing the occupants of an overturned vehicle.

Griffin recounted events from Nov. 4, when he was the first to the scene of an overturned vehicle on Pebble Beach near 9th Street and was surprised by what he found.

"There was a mother with a couple of children standing outside the vehicle. As I ran around the side of the vehicle, I saw a guy who was panicked sitting on the ground. I thought he was the victim of the car crash. I was very shocked to learn he wasn't.

"He was a bystander who ran to that overturned vehicle. He utilized his roommate's knife. Both of them were able to extricate the victims from the vehicle rollover, get them out of there and to safety," Griffin said.

He said a nearby concrete barrier was the only thing that saved the car from going down into the ocean.

Such a rescue is not something an everyday citizen will do and it needed recognition, said Griffin.

"I just want to thank you guys for being what citizens should be. You put yourself in danger for someone you didn't know. You're definitely deserving of this," Griffin told them.

In addition, Griffin took the opportunity to say farewell to Crescent City Police Officer James Wright, who is leaving the department to return home to Federal Heights, Colorado. "He as 32 years of total service, 12 for the Crescent City Police Department.

"He's been a K9 supervisor, in charge of the Crime Free Multi-Housing Program, a corporal for four and a half years, a mentor and good friend to a lot of people.

"You will always be a part of our family who's welcome back, and you better well visit," finished Griffin.

