

Nominee: Ronald D. Blackwell

Fire Department/Agency: Wichita Fire Department

State: Kansas

Explanation: See attached.

Name of person submitting nomination: Billy Wenzel

Fire Department / Agency: Wichita Fire Department

2010 Outstanding Leadership Award-

Fire Chief Ronald Blackwell returned to the Wichita Fire Department in October 2007. From his first day he outlined his priorities:

- Firefighter Safety
- Doing more with existing resources
- Community outreach

Chief Blackwell did more than provide “lip service” he provided leadership. In that first year in his Christmas greeting to the troops included tenants that should guide our actions. He introduced the “Fire Loss Awareness for Safer Homes” program (FLASH). This program is designed to make citizens aware of fires occurring in their neighborhoods and to provide fire prevention information that will keep them safe and secure and protect them from our common enemy, fire. In January of 2008, Wichita was honored to host Chief Blackwell’s friend Chief Ronald Siarnicki, the Director of the National Fallen Firefighter Foundation. Chief Siarnicki addressed key members of the Wichita and Sedgwick County Fire Departments. The topic was the 16 Life Safety Initiatives and their regional implementation. As a committee we discussed our Departments and attempted to identify what is preventing us from having a “safety first” attitude. Soon into the discussion we came to a realization our culture and attitude needed to be addresses. Chief Blackwell did not stop there. Over the next year we adopted the 16 Life Safety Initiatives, Recreated and signed a Safety Pledge- that includes the National seat belt pledge. All members attended the Courage to be Safe program by the NFFF. Chief Blackwell introduced the meaning of risk analysis to all members and adopted the Rules of Engagement for Structural Firefighting. Early in 2009, Chief Blackwell again asked a friend to share his experiences. J Gordon Routley, committee chair, spent a morning sharing his experience with the Charleston tragedy. The entire region, over 200 participants, benefited from Chief Blackwell’s vision and leadership. The challenge of changing the Fire Service to a “safety first” culture has been more difficult than many anticipated. Chief Blackwell through his leadership and experience has started Wichita down that path. In one year attitudes have changed and the difference is being felt.

Improved Policies

- Chief Blackwell initiated a complete rewrite of Operational Standard Operating Procedures.
- Adopted and trained in the NFA Mayday procedures.
- Adopted an Air Management policy.
- Doubled the Safety Officer availability on all major alarms.
- Fostered a team work attitude with all regional agencies.
- The 2009 Battalion Chief Assessment included the review the Charleston Phase 2 report and its application to Wichita.
- Introduced Truck Companies and the application of vertical ventilation

Summation

All of these initiatives have been complete and are ongoing as a direct result of Chief Blackwell’s leadership. His commitment to safety is obvious and sincere. From day one he shared his vision. Today we are beginning to see the tangible results, a change in culture. Chief Blackwell has created a roadmap for the Nation to follow. The associated costs are small. The real cost is determination and leadership. Chief Ronald Blackwell has used his experiences and applied them on what is most important, making sure everyone goes home. He deserves recognition for this effort.