

**Virginia Department of Fire Programs**

1005 Technology Park Drive
Richmond, Virginia 23059-4500

MEDIA ALERT

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Mark L. Buff
Marketing and Communications Manager
Virginia Department of Fire Programs
tel: 804.249.1965 cell: 804.396.0542
e-mail: mark.buff@vdfp.virginia.gov
website: www.vafire.com

Governor's Fire Services Awards presented February 24

Richmond, Virginia: – The 2006 Governor's Fire Services Awards were presented to nine recipients in seven categories during opening ceremonies at the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association's Expo and Symposium on Saturday, February 24 at the Virginia Beach Convention Center.

The Governor Fire Service Awards, designed to acknowledge excellence in Virginia's fire service in both the public and private sector, are carefully reviewed and selected by the Virginia Fire Services Board Executive Committee. All individuals selected by the Committee are forwarded to Governor Kaine through the Secretary of Public Safety for final approval.

Governor Fire Service Awards were presented to the following individuals:

Award: Excellence in Virginia's Fire Service

Recipient: Lt. Keith Allen Higgs, Stanley Volunteer Fire Department

Criteria: This award recognizes an individual who exemplifies an outstanding dedication to helping protect the citizens of Virginia against the devastating effects of fire, not only in their own jurisdictions, but in other areas of the Commonwealth as well.

Lieutenant Keith Allen Higgs was nominated for the Virginia Fire Service Award based on his commitment and dedication to fire and life safety. For over four years, Lt. Higgs and his family have installed more than 6,400 smoke alarms in their Page County community as part of the Virginia Department of Health's Get Alarmed, Virginia! Program. In addition, Lt. Higgs authored fire safety articles for the local newspaper and the Virginia Firefighter Magazine about fire prevention. Other acts of service to the community include, conducting fire safety demonstrations for at risk populations, such as school age children and the elderly, training fire department new hires, and working as a volunteer with the Stanley Volunteer Fire Department for 20-years.

Award: Excellence in Virginia Fire & Life Safety Education

Recipient: Catharine Meredith, Virginia Beach Fire Department

Criteria: This award recognizes an individual who exemplifies outstanding dedication and service for the furtherance of Virginia Public Fire & Life Safety Education not only in their own department, but in other areas of the Commonwealth as well.

Catherine Meridith was recognized as one the Virginia Fire Service Award honorees because of her many contributions to the Virginia Beach Fire Department and the surrounding community. Catherine has worked for the Virginia Beach Fire Department since 1977. She recently retired January 2007. During her career with the Department, Catherine developed, implemented and managed the Virginia Beach Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) where she trained over 400 Virginia Beach citizens. Catherine was also credited with establishing the Tidewater Fire Educator's Network in 1988 and serving as the Chair. In addition, Catherine assisted with the development of Virginia Beach's Fire and Life Safety Coalition. Throughout Catherine's 30-years of service she has mentored life safety educators, and authored several thought provoking articles about fire/life safety for the Fire Chief Magazine and various local publications.

Award: Excellence in Virginia Fire Service Management

Recipient: Chief Charles L. Werner, Ruckersville Volunteer Fire Company

Criteria: This award recognizes any Officer or Fire Department that has demonstrated exceptional dedication to sound management principles and excellence in fire service leadership not only in their own department, but for the greater good of other fire departments within the Commonwealth.

Chief Charles L. Werner received the Virginia Fire Service Award for his high level of commitment to improving interoperable communications for emergency responders. As an active member of the SAFECOM program's executive committee, Chief Werner has worked tirelessly to drive interoperability progress by building partnerships across emergency response disciplines by identifying strategic priorities and providing general oversight and guidance to localities on interoperability standards. He has also worked with the Homeland Security Information Network Fire Service Working group to improve the fire services ability to share information across disciplines. Chief Werner's efforts towards interoperable communications demonstrate the highest level of commitment and dedication to the Commonwealth of Virginia's emergency preparedness and response.

Award: Outstanding Fire Department Response

Recipient: Hanover County Fire-EMS Department

Criteria: This award recognizes any outstanding Fire Department Response made in the last year, which demonstrates mutual aid, integration of multiple system components, interagency interfacing and cooperation, or complex assessment or rescue.

The Hanover County Fire-EMS Department was nominated for the Virginia Fire Service Award based on their extensive pre-planning efforts in developing and implementing mutual aid policies. The development of the mutual aid agreement proved to be invaluable when several of their units were dispatched to a fully involved structure fire in February of 2006. The incident called for extensive man-power and resources to suppress the fire, which was quickly and seamlessly contained and extinguished through the previously developed mutual aid policy. As a result, Hanover County Fire-EMS was able to provide quality service to the citizens of Hanover County, thus saving lives and minimizing property loss.

Award: Excellence in Virginia's Fire Service Training

Recipients: Larry J. Cochran, Virginia Department of Forestry
The Roanoke Fire-EMS Training Division Staff

Criteria: This award recognizes any individual/individuals providing lesson plans, support or delivery of programs within the Commonwealth, which are fire service related.

Mr. Cochran has dedicated his professional life to providing quality wild land firefighting training to the Virginia Department of Forestry and firefighters throughout the Commonwealth. He was selected for the Virginia Fire Service Award based on his basic and advanced training on wildland fire emergency response. One of the few wildland fire training specialists in the Commonwealth, Mr. Cochran has provided well over 75,000 personal hours of training and incident management for the last four years. Cochran has played an instrumental role in the development and continued success in overall Commonwealth wildland fire preparedness and the Interagency Fire Training Academy.

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The Roanoke Fire-EMS Training Division Staff were recognized for the Virginia Fire Service Award based on their efforts to conduct live fire training exercises for the entire Roanoke Fire-EMS Department. In 2006, the Department's training division conducted nine days of practical training, which allowed over 250 Roanoke firefighters to be involved in realistic training evolutions covering search and rescue, ground ladders, ventilation and incident command. The division also provided nine days of practical training that focused on air management for self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA). This training effort afforded 250 firefighters critical, life saving training. In addition to offering training, the training division conducted a 16-week regional fire-EMS recruit academy that included firefighters from Roanoke, Roanoke County, Salem and Lynchburg.

Award: Excellence in Private Sector Virginia Fire Services Support

Recipients: Virginia Propane Gas Association

Drs. Jeff & Nancy Barker, Barker Chiropractic Clinic

Criteria: This award recognizes any private sector or nonprofit entity that has demonstrated exceptional dedication to the success of Virginia Fire Services throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The Virginia Propane Gas Association was recognized for excellence in private sector Virginia fire services support. The Association, charged with promoting the safe use and handling of propane and propane related products in the state of Virginia, has provided countless reading materials and resources to firefighters throughout the Commonwealth. The Association has also provided generous propane donations for educational/skill building-related training for firefighters. The Virginia Propane Gas Association's dedication to increasing awareness among emergency first responders about propane-related emergencies has proven to be invaluable.

Doctors Jeff and Nancy Barker of the Barker Chiropractic Clinic have been amazing champions of fire and life safety outreach programs within Roanoke County. Their demonstrated commitment to the Virginia Fire Service is evident in their \$8,000 donation to Roanoke County Fire and EMS, which has supported thousands of citizens with valuable life saving resources. Their annual Health and Safety Fair provides a positive, entertaining environment for community members to learn about the importance of fire and life safety practices.

Award: Civilian Lifesaving Award

Recipient: Randy Neff, Montpelier, Virginia

Criteria: This award recognizes any civilian, with no fire service affiliation, who exemplifies an outstanding dedication to helping protect the citizens of Virginia against the devastating effects of fire.

Randy Neff received the Virginia Fire Service Award for his heroic rescue of a citizen from a burning vehicle. This was evidenced during an incident on September 9, 2006 where Neff encountered an overturned vehicle close to his residence. He immediately summoned for his wife to call 9-1-1 while he attempted to rescue the occupant of the vehicle who was hanging upside down by her seatbelt. Neff, thinking on his feet, quickly released the tension on the seatbelt, thus allowing the women to escape the burning vehicle. Mr. Neff's selfless, fast response resulted in a life saved.

This year marked the fifth anniversary of the Governor's Virginia Fire Services Awards which were established in 2002 and are presented annually at the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association Expo and Symposium. The Honorable John W. Marshall, Secretary of Public Safety addressed the attendees and guests during opening ceremonies. He was assisted in presenting the 2006 Governor's Fire Services Awards by W.G. "Billy" Shelton Jr., Executive Director of the Virginia Department of Fire Programs, Thomas C. Fuqua, Chairman of the Virginia Fire Services Board, and Willie C. Howlett, President of the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association.

For additional information on the 2006 Governor's Fire Service Awards and this year's recipients, contact Mark L. Buff, Marketing and Communications Manager for the Virginia Department of Fire Programs at 804-249-1965 or mark.buff@vdfp.virginia.gov .

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