



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Hazelwood City Council Recognizes Fire Chief for 25 Years of Service

Hazelwood, Mo., (July 1, 2010) – After a friend talked him into being a fire department volunteer and then testing as the #1 recruit for full-time employment right out of the U.S. Air Force, Jim Matthies' career took a progressive path towards the top over a 42-year period. Twenty-five of those years were spent working for the City of Hazelwood, including 17 years as Fire Chief of the Hazelwood Fire Department. The City Council honored him recently for his 25 years of dedicated service to the City of Hazelwood.

Chief Matthies began his fire fighting career in Harvey, Ill., as a paramedic and then earned a promotion three years later to the position of lieutenant. His background includes being an arson investigator and working in the Harvey detective bureau on his off days. In 1980, he accepted a position in Blue Springs, Mo., as Deputy Fire Chief of the Central Jackson County Fire Protection District. He also served as the Emergency Management Director and developed the first non-county, multi-city, emergency management agency in the state. In 1985, Chief Matthies accepted the position as Hazelwood's Assistant Fire Chief and assumed the responsibility of Emergency Management Director. Eight years later, he was promoted to the position of Fire Chief.

Throughout his career, Chief Matthies has been a strong advocate for education. In the 1970s, he began taking part-time classes and earned an Associate degree and later a Bachelor degree in Fire Technology and Fire Administration. From there, he went on to earn a Masters degree in management. In the late 1980s, he spent eight weeks completing the Executive Fire Officers classes at the National Fire Academy based in Emmetsburg, Md. In 1990, Chief Matthies was certified as one of only two Level Four Fire Service instructors in the state of Missouri at that time. Plus, he has served as an adjunct instructor at St. Louis Community College – Florissant Valley and the St. Louis County Fire Academy.

Chief Matthies' advice to young people interested in pursuing a career as a firefighter is to stay in school and work hard to earn good grades. "In today's world, most fire departments are looking for candidates who are qualified to be both a firefighter and paramedic. Since it takes about two years to become a paramedic, they might as well get an Associates degree in emergency medicine while waiting to be admitted into the Fire Academy, which may take more than a year," said Chief Matthies.

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City Council Recognizes Fire Chief for 25 Years of Service, Add One

Chief Matthies goes on to say that the department has a Hazelwood Fire Explorers Post 9341, which is a division of the Boy Scouts of America that gives youth, ages 14 to 20, an opportunity to “try out” a career in fire service without actually having to go through the educational and hiring process.

According to Chief Matthies, “Members first go through a Basic Training course to help familiarize them with the tools and operations utilized by firefighter/paramedics on a daily basis. Once completed, they earn the privilege of riding on the fire trucks with our professional firefighters to answer emergency 911 calls. While the firefighters take care of the emergency situation, our Explorers observe and play a more supportive role at the scene.”

Regular meetings of the Hazelwood Fire Explorers Post 9341 occur each Tuesday night from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Hazelwood’s Fire Station #2, located at 6800 Howdershell Road. For more information on this Explorers Program, contact Battalion Chief Randy Getz at (314) 731-3424.

As Hazelwood’s Emergency Management Director, Chief Matthies realizes the importance of training citizen volunteers to be prepared to help their neighbors after a major disaster, which explains why the department is developing a Community Emergency Response Team, (C.E.R.T.), program.

“In the event of a catastrophic disaster such as an earthquake or tornado, my role as EM director will be to coordinate a community-wide effort to help residents recover from the devastation and return to a normal way of life,” said Chief Matthies. “Depending on the severity of the damage, it may take some time for first responders and other disaster relief assistance to reach our area because of impassable roads and lost communications. Having citizen volunteers well versed in disaster survival and rescue training will improve our ability to cope with the situation until more help arrives.”

Those interested in becoming a C.E.R.T. member, or just want more information on the program, are urged to contact the Hazelwood Fire Department at (314) 731-3424 and ask for Deputy Fire Marshal John Otte.

Under Chief Matthies’ watch, the Hazelwood Fire Department has made several innovative changes to establish itself as one of the best in the St. Louis region. After the City of St. Louis, Hazelwood was one of the first to purchase quint fire trucks. This means all the trucks have aerial ladders and pumper apparatus, which saves the City money. In addition, the department was recently awarded a Fire Insurance Rating of Class 3. “Only three other fire departments in the metro area can display this rating and just a handful throughout the state,” Chief Matthies noted.

As for the department’s ambulance service, Hazelwood’s Emergency Medical Services (EMS) division was the first in North St. Louis County to install and bring online heart monitors and defibrillators capable of transmitting 12-lead EKGs to cath labs at SSM DePaul Health Center and other medical facilities for heart attack victims. Also, the EMS division is one of only 14 ambulance services in the St. Louis area and one of 47 statewide to earn EMSC state certification, which means Hazelwood’s EMS firefighter/paramedics are fully capable of treating child trauma and injuries.

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City Council Recognizes Fire Chief for 25 Years of Service, Add Two

“What makes the Hazelwood Fire Department stand out from all the others is the commitment of our firefighter/paramedics. The welfare and safety of our residents, as well as the task at hand, are always their prime directives. This is reflected in the quality of fire protection and medical emergency services they provide for our citizens. I can’t say enough about our medics on the front line. The City has given them the resources and they get the job done, they are second to none,” said Chief Matthies.

When asked what he considers his most impressive accomplishment, Chief Matthies responded by stating that any success he can claim is due to the effective teamwork of his firefighter/-paramedics, professional staff and administrative assistants. “No achievement is possible without the input from a lot of people. I’d like to think I contributed a good idea or two and even endorsed some new technology, but in the end it’s a ‘we’ thing. That said, I’m most proud of the quality of our ambulance service, equipment status and safety record,” stated Chief Matthies.

Chief Matthies has lived in the City of Hazelwood for the past 25 years. His wife, Debbie, is a current Hazelwood resident and has lived in North St. Louis County for many years. They have four children and five grandchildren.

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Pictured right to left: Mayor Matthew Robinson of Hazelwood (right) congratulates Fire Chief Jim Matthies (left) for 25 years of dedicated service as a City employee. Matthies has spent 17 of those years as the Fire Chief of the Hazelwood Fire Department.