



Awards Banquet 2008

By Assistant Chief Bill Colwell

Master of Ceremonies [Blaine Cowan](#) started the evening by introducing members of the Board of Trustees, Missoula Rural Fire District Staff, Volunteer Association Officers, and Officers of Local 2457 of the IAFF. A moment of silence was observed honoring the life and career of retired Battalion Chief [Tom Goheen](#) [who] retired from MRFD in 2002 after serving twenty-five years as a career firefighter and five years as a volunteer firefighter. Tom died of natural causes December 18, 2007; he will be missed. An invocation and prayer for our guests and firefighters and a blessing was asked for our meal by [Jonn Miller](#). District Fire Chief [Curt Belts](#) welcomed everyone to the banquet: "This night blends the past and the present of MRFD. Those that came before us have a chance to see what we have become and those that are here now have a chance to meet and greet the people that helped grow the organization. Without the dedicated men and women of the past there would not be a night like this to honor the present."

We were honored with the presence of three charter members of Missoula Rural Fire District: [George Geesey](#) and his wife Phyllis, [Otto Benson](#) and his wife Ann, and past District Chief [Bill Reed](#) and his wife Maria. **Thirty six retired members of the MRFD family were present at the awards banquet** and enjoyed meeting the new members and reminiscing how it was "back when." [George Geesey](#), [Otto Benson](#), [Bill Reed](#), and [John Nelson](#), who was unable to attend, were honored by Chief Belts, and presented crystal awards, for the courage they showed helping charter the Fire District on March 1, 1961. A PowerPoint presentation of MRFD 2007 was presented for our enjoyment. [Pete Giardino](#) presented five years of service awards to [Jake Fuller](#), [Doug Swain](#), and [Cory Davey](#). Ten years of service awards were given to [Paul Finlay](#) and [J.R. Carlson](#). Awards for fifteen years of service were given to [Jay Willingham](#) and [Phil Martinsen](#), and a twenty years of service award was given to [Gordon Gieser](#). [Rick Paulsen](#) received an award for thirty years of service and [Tim Sayles](#) was honored with a thirty-five year award.

Assistant Chief [Bill Colwell](#) presented the Top Resident Firefighter Responder Award to [Zack Thoeny](#) for 194 calls, and the Top Volunteer Responder Award to [Ron Jacobson](#) for 51 calls. Deputy Chief [Brent Christopherson](#) presented the Training Hour Achievement Awards to [Marvin Hess](#) with 189 hours, [Casey Porte](#) with 375 hours, and [Toby Ballard](#) with 423 hours. The Station Coverage Award was presented to [David Gordon](#) by [Captain Brownlee](#). David worked in the stations for a cumulative 168 hours. Local 2457 President [Paul Finlay](#) presented the Volunteer Firefighter of the Year Award to [Marvin Hess](#). The Resident Firefighter of the Year Award was presented to [Devon Hagen](#) by [Paul Finlay](#). Devon was not able to attend because he just started a new career with Great Falls Fire and Rescue; congratulations Devon! The Jim Lofftus Award for Excellence in service to MRFD was awarded by Chief Belts to Board of Trustee members [Cheryl Hanson](#) and [Larry Hanson](#). We were honored with the presence of [Jim and Tillie Lofftus](#), and Jim stood and received applause for his dedication and service to MRFD.

Certificates of Excellence were awarded by [Blaine Cowan](#) to the 2007 Combat Challenge Team. Members of the team were [Doug Swain](#), [Kory Burgess](#), [Hilary Benbenek](#) and [Jason Dufner](#).

Board of Trustees Chairperson [Larry Hanson](#) presented the Board of Trustees Award to District Fire Chief [Curt Belts](#). Volunteer Association President [David Gordon](#) presented the Career Firefighter of the Year Award to [Paul Finlay](#). [Ron Lubke](#) was presented the Outstanding Personal Achievement Award by Assistant Chief Colwell.

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Chief Belts recognized MRFD members for significant accomplishments during 2007. These members were asked to stand:

Casey Porte for his excellent customer service and documentation as a mitigation crew supervisor.

Paul Muir, Forest Brown, Jake Fuller and Chris Newman for the work they did on light duty promoting annexation of properties into the Fire District.

Our Combat Challenge Team for their training dedication and the inspiration they are to all of MRFD.

Resource Manger Gordon Gieser was recognized for his tireless work on the transition to the new radio system and congratulated for making MRFD the first agency to put the new system on line.

Captain Tom Zeigler was recognized for his dedicated and tireless effort organizing, monitoring and teaching the EMT-I 99 classes.

Our Scott **Firefighter Stair Climb Team** consisting of Kory Burgess, Doug Swain, Hilary Benbenek, Garrett Koppes, Casey Porte, Toby Ballard, Blaine Cowan, Ken Morris, Devon Hagen, Jake Fuller, Ron Lubke, Nick Tsuber, and Meredith Ruland received a standing ovation for their second place finish in the nation at the Seattle Stair Climb.

The final award of the evening, the **Chief's Award**, was presented by Chief Belts and awarded by Chiefs Christopherson and Colwell to Battalion Chiefs Paul Muir, Dale Walker and Phil Martinsen. The Battalion Chiefs were recognized for their team efforts and seamless management of the day-to-day operation of MRFD. Each BC received a plaque and a black leather uniform coat that signifies a recipient of the Chief's Award.

The evening concluded with good conversation and music for dancing provided by First Line Entertainment. The Awards Banquet was well organized, entertaining, and the food was excellent. A special thank you goes to Amanda Whimple for organizing and arranging the banquet and banquet facility. Mike Bowman did an exceptional job of building a PowerPoint presentation that shows what we do and how professionally we get it done. Master of Ceremonies Blaine Cowan orchestrated the presentations and did an exceptional job as M.C. Thanks for all the hard work and a great awards banquet.