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## Fanning Springs volunteer firefighters honored at banquet

### Actual Brothers

Ronnie McQueen (left) and Tommy McQueen are actual brothers. While firefighters are all brothers and sisters of that fraternal organization, this banquet was a time where these two brothers enjoyed the opportunity to dine together. Another member of the family present for the banquet was Chief (Ron) McQueen's wife, the lovely and talented Carol McQueen, a former mayor of Fanning Springs. The banquet and awards ceremony was held on private property on the Dixie County side of the Suwannee

River, just east of U.S. Highway 19.

**Story and Photos By Jeff M. Hardison © July 30, 2015 @ 9:57 p.m.**

**FANNING SPRINGS** -- The Fanning Springs Fire Rescue Annual Awards Banquet on Friday evening (July 29) went a bit differently than last year.

As has been the case in the past, there was still a full day of fun, and one spat of a heavy downpour of rain did not extinguish the joy in the hearts of firefighters and their families as they enjoyed all of the earlier part of Friday.

**Fanning Springs Firefighters Fanning Springs firefighters at the awards banquet Saturday night are Chief Ron McQueen, Deputy Chief Elania Spain, and firefighters Chris Anderson, Brett Boyce, Aaron Cryer, Roy Spain, Quinn Leshar, Chella Decker, Steven Edgell and Mike MacKenzie. Not pictured -- Firefighter Chris Carlson and Firefighter Will May.**



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The evening included an amazing banquet of steak that was so tender it could be cut with a plastic knife. There were fresh green beans too. Fried shrimp, baked potatoes, two kinds of salads, and a few different kinds of cake were all part of the Friday evening feast.

The presentation of awards was once again epic as well, although this time there was a bit less spoofing than at least the past 10 years of banquets.

This celebration of the community-oriented volunteer fire department marked its 36th year on Friday -- since the annual event first started in 1980.

Synchronizing schedules of volunteers who work many different shifts as regular firefighters and in other lines of work was a key factor in timing the yearly festivity again this year.



**Firefighter Roy Spain (left) watches as Deputy Chief Elania Spain seasons the steaks prior to Chief Ron McQueen cooking them.**

Fanning Springs City Council members Tommy Darus, Jane Nogaki and Ron Queen, and their spouses and some friends, attended the event this year. Fanning Springs resident Dana Sheffield was able to come to the event this year too.

Sheffield is very active in watching local government. He has also provided excellent machinist work for the fire department (and perhaps Santa Claus), and he always goes beyond what is asked of him.

The Suwannee River provided a backdrop for the event, as usual. On this particular day, the river level was not as high as it was at this time last year.

Fanning Springs Fire Chief Ron McQueen said the theme for the night was “Christmas In July.”

Usually at the fire station, he said, everyone has their own stocking at Christmastime.

“The stockings were a little bare this year,” McQueen said. “There has been a lot going on. It’s been an interesting year – to say the least.”

So far in 2016, there have been multiple months when the Fanning Springs Fire Rescue was called for help more than 100 times in one month, he said. Last month, for instance, there were 107 calls to which the firefighters responded.

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“Just a year ago,” he said, “60 (calls a month) seemed like a big number. And now we’re up to 100.”

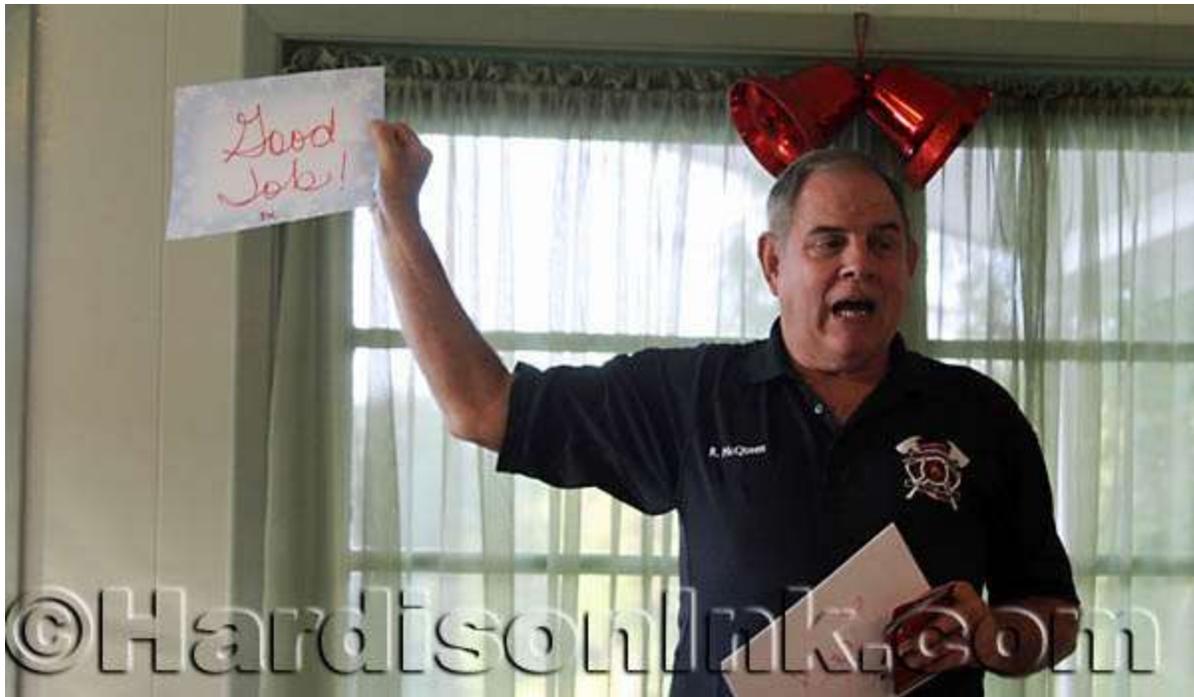
McQueen then said that he had seen a report where anytime a volunteer fire department runs 250 to 300 calls a year, it creates problems with the volunteers.

For many years, the Fanning Springs volunteers have responded to 500 to 600 calls a year, he continued. This year the range is looking closer to 900 calls, he said.

Usually during the summer banquet, McQueen said, there are spoof awards presented – leading up to the announcement of the Fanning Springs Firefighter of the Year. That was not on the menu for this banquet.

“Everybody has picked up the slack,” he said. “They have done everything they could do in covering those 100 calls every month. And it’s hard. It’s getting harder. We are not going to do a Firefighter of the Year.”

Instead, each firefighter received a gift card and a paper snowflake with “Good Job” printed on it.



**Chief Ron McQueen holds up the snowflake for Deputy Chief Elania Spain.**

The first firefighter to receive a snowflake was Deputy Chief Elania Spain. Chief McQueen presented her snowflake first, so that she could assist him by passing out stocking stuffer gift cards to the other firefighters.

Deputy Chief Spain is the acting chief officially, because Fanning Springs Mayor Howell E. “Trip” Lancaster III removed Chief McQueen as the chief, but allowed him to serve as a volunteer.

The mayor interpreted a relatively new law that he felt showed that he must do that. Chief McQueen challenged that action. There has been a hearing on the issue. The City Council will vote in the relatively near future after hearing a recommendation from the hearing officer.

Chief McQueen spoke about each firefighter as he presented the snowflake to them.

Without Deputy Chief Spain, he said, the department would not have everything as right as it is, “because she is a stickler to get everything right.”

Deputy Chief Spain strives for excellence in the department, he said. She listens to every call

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all night long, and whether she is in Fanning Springs or somewhere else, she calls the volunteers to make sure they are responding, McQueen said.

The chief mentioned, as he does every year just so everyone knows, the fundraising account is what covers the expense of this annual banquet. Those funds are raised by firefighters.

Aaron Cryer is the newest member of the volunteer fire department. He works full-time as well as taking the Firefighter I program. Chief McQueen mentioned that often the city must fund this expense, but thanks to the close working relationship with Dixie County Fire Services, Cryer is taking the course offered through that group.

McQueen said he is thankful to Dixie County Fire Services for the help they are giving here. The chief said he appreciates the hard work being put in by Cryer, who is now tagged with the "Proby" nickname as the newest member of the team.



**Firefighter Chella Decker hugs Deputy Chief Elania Spain after receiving her snowflake.**



**Firefighter Chella Decker shakes hands with Chief Ron McQueen after receiving her snowflake.**

Firefighter-EMT Chella Decker was the "Proby" last year. She is working full-time as an EMT

in Citrus County now, McQueen said, as well as volunteering in Fanning Springs. Decker was the

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third snowflake recipient after Deputy Chief (EMT) Spain and Cryer.



**Firefighter Mike MacKenzie holds his 'Good Job' paper snowflake and accepts the gift card.**

Firefighter Mike MacKenzie was the next snowflake recipient. Chief McQueen said MacKenzie is going to be called “professor” because he is teaching a class now related to food and beverages.



**Firefighter Quinn Leshar shakes hands with Deputy Chief Elania Spain.**

Firefighter II-EMT Quinn Leshar has a gung-ho attitude, McQueen said. The step from EMT to paramedic, McQueen said, is a big step. Leshar starts the paramedic class in August, having completed his Associate of Science Degree leading up to that.

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**Firefighter Brett Boyce shakes hands with Chief Ron McQueen.**

Firefighter Brett Boyce is a man who has great enthusiasm, and will do what he says he will do, McQueen said. "We appreciate all of his work," McQueen added.



**Firefighter Steven Edgell relaxes after accepting his snowflake.**

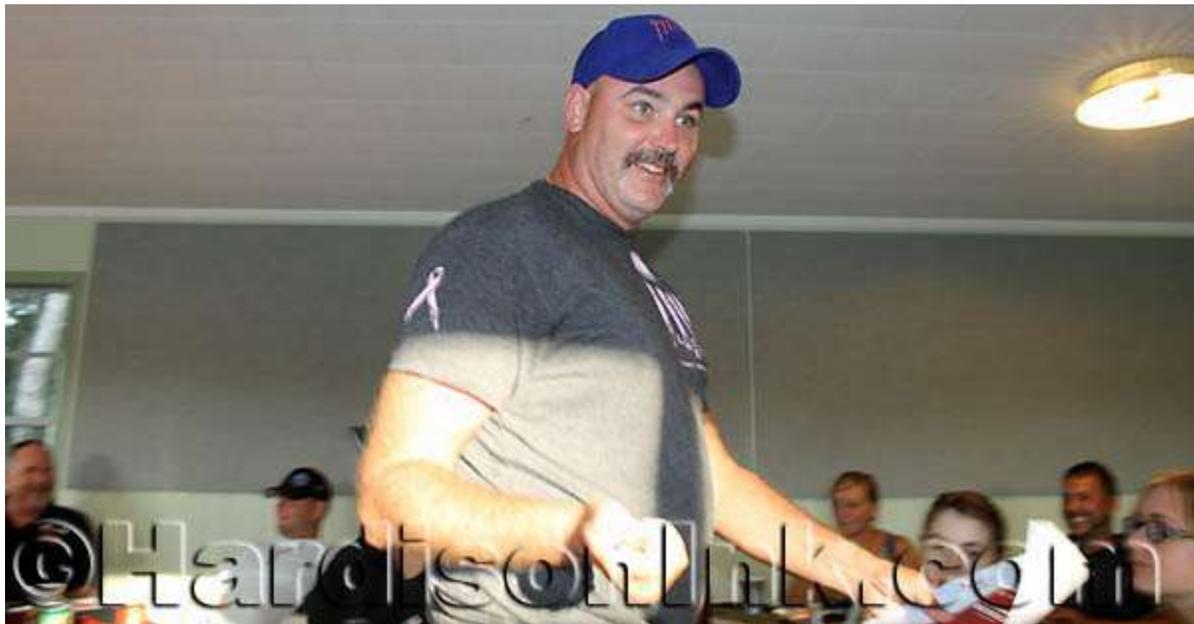
Firefighter-EMT Steven Edgell has lost 65 pounds since last year's banquet, McQueen said as he prepared to present that firefighter with his snowflake. Edgell works in Citrus County as an EMT.

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**Firefighter Chris Anderson (left) prepares to accept his snowflake.**

Firefighter II-EMT Chris Anderson is a hard worker, McQueen said. Anderson serves with Chiefland Fire Rescue and Gilchrist County Fire Rescue as well.



**Firefighter Roy Spain returns to his seat with his snowflake in hand.**

Firefighter II Roy Spain works full-time with Dixie County Fire Services as well as volunteers with Fanning Springs, McQueen said. He is also a paramedic. Deputy Chief Spain is his wife.

Like some other members of the team, Firefighter Spain was noted by McQueen to be “a constant.”

Missing from the event were Firefighter Chris Carlson and Firefighter Will May.

Carlson was at his full-time job in Florida State Prison at Raiford at the time of the banquet.

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He will be awarded his paper snowflake and gift card later.

May, who was the director of public safety at Alachua County, was in charge of fire and EMS for that larger county to the east of Gilchrist County.

McQueen mentioned that May has been the president of the Florida State Fire Chiefs Association, and has sat on several committees.

“He (May) is one of about 12 people nationwide who’s on the National Wildfire Coordinating Council,” McQueen said.

May is taken by jet to Idaho once a month for a weeklong meeting, McQueen said, as part of his duty in that regard.

“Will’s a great guy and a good friend,” McQueen said, “and he keeps us up-to-date on information.”

May will receive his snowflake and gift card later.



**Firefighter Ron McQueen (left) prepares to accept his snowflake from Acting Chief Elania Spain.**



**The two chiefs of Fanning Springs (Volunteer) Fire Rescue shake hands as Chief McQueen accept his snowflake from Deputy Chief Spain.**

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Deputy Chief (or Acting Chief) Spain presented the final snowflake and gift card.

That went to “the firefighter formerly known as ‘Chief,’” Spain said.

That nickname comes from the current situation created by Mayor Lancaster, and it is in reference to the singer formerly known as “Prince.”

“Once a chief,” Chief Spain said, “always a chief.”

She said it is like some people when they have been a mayor.

(The same is true with a President or with a sheriff in some cases.)

“He’s our chief,” she said. “He will always be our chief – rain or shine. He’s earned that title. And he will always be known as ‘Chief’ to us.

“Of all people,” she continued, “I think he’s earned his little award for the year. He’s been through a lot. And we’ve all stood together, and stood with him. So, we’re proud. We’re thankful.”

Chief Spain mentioned that Chief McQueen had mentioned her husband was the first to earn the Firefighter II designation in Fanning Springs Fire Rescue as far as the group now.

As far as the history of the fire department, she continued, McQueen has led so many firefighters to earn Firefighter II designations that she can’t count them all. Countless firefighters started in Fanning Springs and continued their profession in other places.

“We are all thankful for his leadership,” Spain said.

And so, “the firefighter formerly known as Chief Ron McQueen,” actually remained known as Chief McQueen.

And this was especially true in this completely social awards banquet night that is funded entirely, as it is every year, by private donations – NOT by tax dollars, NOR is it paid for by special fire assessment revenue.

This volunteer fire department responds to calls in Levy and Gilchrist counties, and has a mutual aid agreement with Dixie County to help when needed. The team of volunteers has learned to rely on each other, Fire Chief McQueen has said. This is something that is vital in fire service.