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Lifesaving couple honored with award



Honoring Mandi Medlin (front, center in pink) and joining Division Chief Darian Brown and the County Commission members – Chairman Ronnie Edmonds, and commissioners Gene Higginbotham, Jody Robson, Jason Holifield and W.C. Mills, on Thursday were Dixie County District 71 (Town of Suwannee) District Chief Russ McCallister, and paid and volunteer firefighters Ira Hayes, Mandy Lemmermen, John Albury and Tony Reid. Clerk of the Court Dana Johnson also is seen here paying tribute to the hero. Dennis Medlin, the other lifesaver, was unable to attend the presentation because he was at work.

Story and Photos By Jeff M. Hardison © Aug. 4, 2016 @ 10:47 p.m.

CROSS CITY -- A husband and wife team ran up burning wooden stairs on Memorial Day (May 30) in the Town of Suwannee to help save a neighbor.

Dixie County Emergency Services Division Chief of Fire Operations Darian Brown presented the woman with an award at the regular Dixie County Commission meeting on Thursday morning (Aug. 4). Her husband was at work, but she accepted it on behalf of the family,

including their children who she brought with her to the meeting.



Chief Darian Brown tells the County Commission about the brave action taken by this couple in the Town of Suwannee.

All of the children were well-behaved as their mother accepted the award, and they followed her single-file out of the room after that part of the meeting.

Dennis Medlin and Mandi Medlin are the civilian heroes who were recognized on Thursday in Cross City.

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Mandi Medlin accepts the award on behalf of herself and her husband Dennis.

Chief Brown said firefighters found there were seven homes either involved or threatened by the fire when they arrived, after being paged out to the fire late that afternoon in Suwannee on Southeast 221st Street.

One abandoned home was damaged but it was saved, Brown said in a previous statement. Four more structures were threatened and saved, Brown said.

One firefighter suffered an injury to his eye when a gauge exploded in his face. He was transported for medical treatment and was then released, Chief Brown said.

In addition to the Suwannee firefighters who were called when the fire was reported, other units from the Dixie County Fire Services arrived at the scene on Memorial Day and those firefighters found a structure on stilts that was fully involved with fire and there were other structures threatened.

The whole incident started after an explosion under one of the houses in the neighborhood, Chief Brown told the County Commission on Thursday.

“While that occurred,” Chief Brown said, “there were people present.”

The chief reminded the commissioners that Dixie County Fire Services has issued a call for help from volunteer firefighters, and for people to show and do what they can.

The Medlin couple took it upon themselves to do what they could to help, Chief Brown said.

“They went up a set of burning stairs,” he said. “They pulled the lady that was in the home out. She was not aware that her house was on fire.

“As soon as that was over,” he continued, “they went to the house next door as it was catching

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(fire). They told the four people in that home that their home was on fire, and got them out of the house.”



Mandi Medlin tells the County Commission that she admires the firefighters for their brave actions every day.

The chief let listeners know that this was the second time that Mandi Medlin had taken immediate action to help people in distress. There was a vehicular accident, Brown said, and people were trapped in a burning vehicle.

She pulled them out of the burning vehicle, he said, adding that he has asked her to join Dixie County Fire Services numerous times. She has declined those invitations.

The Bravery Award, with the DCFS logo on it, was presented to Mandi Medlin and Dennis Medlin for heroic efforts on May 30, resulting in saving five residents during a residential fire in the Town of Suwannee, Chief Brown said. It is given in appreciation from Dixie County Fire Service, he said.

Mandi Medlin said she respects the members of Dixie County Fire Services who perform this type of action every day. She appreciates their services.

“That fire was hot,” Medlin continued. “I’m sure that what I received – like a minor first degree burn on my back –was nothing compared to what they receive on a day-to-day basis. And I give my appreciation (to them) immediately whenever they arrive.

“In seeing what they had to go into, she continued, “I went to praying for them. And I am just

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thankful that none of them were seriously injured.”

Joining Chief Brown and the County Commission members – Chairman Ronnie Edmonds, and commissioners Gene Higginbotham, Jody Robson, Jason Holifield and W.C. Mills, on Thursday were Dixie County District 71 (Town of Suwannee) District Chief Russ McCallister, and paid and volunteer firefighters Ira Hayes, Mandy Lemmermen, John Albury and Tony Reid.

Other firefighters at the scene in Suwannee on Memorial Day, were Mike Sprawling, Dwayne Zeller, Zack Thompson, Dennis McCullers Sr., Dennis McCullers Jr., Richard Klinsmith, Ed Downing, Jimmy McCall, Kay McCallister, Tiffany Rankin, Jennifer Kolner, Scotty McLean, Roy Spain, Scott Garner, and (cadet) Will Garner.

Chief Brown was the officer in charge at the fires in Suwannee, according to records.

Other agencies and individuals participating in that event were Fire Inv. Jimmy Golden, Cross City Fire Department, Rescue 1, Rescue 3, and EMS 1.

The hero accepting the award on Thursday -- Mandi Medlin -- is among the candidates seeking to be elected to the Dixie County School Board.



Firefighters sitting in the back row of the County Commission meeting room in Cross City on Thursday are (from left) District Chief Russ McCallister, Ira Hayes, Mandy Lemmermen, John Albury and Tony Reid.

SMOKE DETECTORS AND MORE

Chief Brown continued speaking with the County Commission Thursday morning after the presentation of the Bravery Award.

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The DCFS is short-staffed, he said.

It takes people like the Medlin couple to assist before the volunteers arrive.

The chief said the department is doing the best it can with what it has available.

Of the people injured this year to the point of needing transport for medical help, he said, are three civilians and one firefighter.

There were several close calls, he added, including four people almost trapped in their burning homes. There were four other firefighter injuries, including one man who was hit by burning palettes that were being move by a forklift in a firefighting response.

“Luckily,” Chief Brown said, “he was not entrapped underneath the burning pile of rubble.”

Four firefighters were exhausted at the scene of a motor home fire after being there 45 minutes fighting the fire, Chief Brown said. When he arrived, he saw some fire remaining and it was getting near to a propane tank.

“The water he was spraying was three feet from the fire,” Brown said. “And I said, ‘What about the fire?’ And he said ‘The fire’s out.’ And I said ‘The fire’s not out.’”

They were so tired, the chief said, that they could not even get up and walk around to see that hazard. This is an example of the danger from spreading resources too thin, where firefighters are completely sapped of their strength.

“Luckily there was about a 15 mile-per-hour wind and we did not lose three or four firefighters that day,” the chief said.

The department does not have the manpower it needs, he said.

There are resources beyond the county’s, though, and there is implementation of fire prevention to a degree.

The America Red Cross saw the situation in the Town of Suwannee and offered smoke detectors, the chief said, without cost to the county.

District Chief McCallister has noted this on the website for that fire district, Division Chief Brown said.

Brown wants the County Commission to know that if there are calls made to them about fire trucks riding down the street, it is because the firefighters are distributing and installing smoke detectors to increase the odds of saving lives.

The chief said that while the Town of Suwannee is the first to see this smoke detector offer, he is planning to work the program through the month of October – which is Fire Prevention Month – so that other parts of the county will have more protection.

On the manpower front, the chief had some positive news.

The Firefighter I class started with 15 members. Now there are 14, he said. A couple of those students are from other adjoining counties that Dixie County offered to help, he said.

He anticipates seeing seven or eight qualified volunteers from this group.

Beyond the boots on the ground, an upcoming event will show boots being held in the air at a big intersection.

The final thing Chief Brown told the County Commission about was the Muscular Dystrophy Association collection. This is the only time the DCFS is seeking donations.

It will from daylight until dark on the Friday before Labor Day (which is Sept. 2) when they will be at the traffic light in Old Town on U.S. Highway 19. The chief reminded listeners that many of the people out there collecting are volunteer firefighters.

Last year, was another banner year as they collected \$8,000.

The goal MDA organizers have set for the DCFS is \$10,000 this year.

“That’s a lot of money,” Brown said.

He reminded everyone that every single penny of these funds goes to MDA. The children who are helped are from this area, he said.

One little girl with MDA has visited the firefighters a few times, and they have gone to see her in a hospital in Jacksonville.

Chief Brown just wants people to know that is what they are doing on that day at that

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intersection, and people can give as they want or they can choose against donating to help children with Muscular Dystrophy.

Dixie County Manager Timothy Alexander took a moment to speak to the County Commission about Chief Brown.

Chief Brown is currently eligible to retire, Alexander said, but he chooses every day instead to continue serving the residents and visitors of Dixie County.

“He could be replaced like any of us,” Alexander said, “but I think you would be hard pressed to replace him with anyone with the kind of knowledge, and certainly anyone with the amount of dedication that he’s got.”

Alexander said goals of the five-year plan include some that are being achieved, and some that are not. He wants the county’s leaders to know, nonetheless, that things are going to change in the next five years.

The Dixie County manager let the County Commission know that the firefighters who serve Dixie County are often courted by bigger counties that can provide more in salary, and a likelier potential for growth in their profession.

And yet, the Dixie County firefighters stay in their home county because of their dedication to the people here, Alexander said, and he believes this deserves recognition by the county’s leaders.

Alexander said that with the equipment, manpower and pay offered, he sees the men and women of Dixie County Fire Services as being at the top if they were to compete with any other department in the same situation.

“I don’t know that you’d find any better if you paid them half again as much,” Alexander said. “But what I do know is that things are going to change over the next five or six years. And I want y’all to keep in mind that you heard me say it before. Emergency equipment is only good when there is an emergency, and most people don’t even think about it until it is their emergency.”

Alexander wrapped up his statements by asking the County Commission for its continued support for Dixie County Emergency Services. He told Chief Brown that he appreciates what he is still doing, and that he is thankful for the work by the paid and volunteer staff members of Dixie County Fire Services.