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MUSCATINE FIREFIGHTERS STEP UP TO THE CHALLENGE

Memorial service held at Public Service Building on 19th Anniversary of 9/11

MUSCATINE, Iowa – Two Muscatine firefighters took up the Memorial Stair Climb challenge Friday to honor the fallen 9/11 first responders on the 19th Anniversary of one of the deadliest terror attack in American history.

Firefighters Travis Edwards and Andrew (Drew) McSorley took up the challenge to climb the stairs in the training tower at the Public Safety Building with a total of 25 and a half round trips. The effort is equivalent to 2,200 steps or 110 stories that was the highest point firefighters reached on that day before the first tower collapsed.

Edwards has been practicing for the climb and was expecting to do the challenge solo until McSorley stepped in to join him in the effort. Both carried badges identifying firefighters who lost their life trying to save others on that tragic day 19 years ago.

Edwards carried badges for five fallen firefighters from Ladder 118 including Scott Matthew Davidson, Peter Anthony Vega, Vernon Paul Cherry, Joseph Agnello, and Leon Smith, Jr.

McSorley carried badges for “Ten House”, the only station in the Towers District and located across from the Towers. Among those on Engine 10 and Tower 10 were Captain (Ret.) James J. Corrigan, Lieutenant’s Gregg A. Atlas and Stephen G. Harrell, and Firefighters Paul Pansini, Sean P. Tallon, and Jeffrey J. Olsen.

Edwards also had a special badge with him, one that Assistant Fire Chief Mike Hartman carried with him when he took the challenge at Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Wis., several years ago. That badge honored Michael Kruse, the only Muscatine firefighter to lose his life while on active duty. Kruse died while battling a house fire on Sept. 14, 2002, just a year and three days after the 9/11 attacks.

Edwards and McSorely began their climb at 7:46 a.m. Friday when Captain June Anne Gaeta had the station sound the alarm similar to what was heard in stations throughout New York City 19 years ago. With the encouragement of fellow firefighters, city officials, family, and friends, the two began the climb with full gear and air packs, similar to what the firefighters climbing the stairs of the Towers had on.

“It was difficult between the 15th and 19th round trips,” McSorely said after the climb. “After that it seemed to get easier.”

Edwards and McSorley not only fed off the encouragement of the people watching from the ground, they also supported each other especially as the number of round trips increased. Reminding each other of what those first responders faced and how the support from each kept them climbing higher into the tower.

At the end, Edwards rang the bell five times, the bell code for back in quarters.

Hartman was an interested spectator this time but has not ruled out returning to Lambeau Field for another Memorial Stair Climb.

“I think it would be great to put together a team from Muscatine and go up there for this challenge next year,” Edwards said.

The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation sponsors the National Stair Climb. The 6th annual event has become a virtual event this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Visit the [2020 National Stair Climb for Fallen Firefighters](#) page for information on how you can support this effort to honor and remember the sacrifice of a firefighter. Funds raised from the event are used to assist surviving families and co-workers in rebuilding their lives after losing their loved one.

“Lambeau Field has been the place for this challenge for several years but this year it has become virtual,” Hartman said. “I hope that they can host this event again next year.”

Hartman took the challenge in 2018 at Lambeau Field where firefighters from across the nation came and completed the challenge in waves.

“Each wave had 343 challengers,” Hartman said, “that represented each of the 343 firefighters who lost their life on Sept. 11.”

The virtual memorial stair climb will continue through the end of the year so that any firefighter who wants to take up the challenge can do so, and anyone who would like to donate to the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation can do so.

The day began with a Moment of Silence ceremony at the Firefighters Memorial on the corner of 5th and Cedar. Despite the steady drizzle members of the Muscatine Fire Department, Muscatine Police Department, city officials, and area residents ventured out for the service.