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CITY OF MUSCATINE PRESS RELEASE

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MUSCATINE FIRE FIGHTERS, PUBLIC PAUSE TO REMEMBER

The only line of duty firefighter death in Muscatine history occurred 17 years ago

MUSCATINE, Iowa – Michael Kruse was remembered with the laying of a wreath at the Firefighters Memorial Saturday (Sept. 14) during a special service commemorating the 17th anniversary of his death.

Kruse was 53-years-old and a 27-year veteran of the Muscatine Fire Department when he lost his life while fighting a house fire on the night of September 14, 2002. He was the first and only Muscatine firefighter to die in the line of duty, the only Iowa fire fighter to lose their life while on duty in 2002 and the 131st in the state of Iowa since records began in 1890. A total of 147 fire fighters have fallen in the line of duty since 1890.

Muscatine Fire Chief Jerry Ewers was just named a fire lieutenant when he first met Kruse as part of his team at Station 2.

“I remember that night very well,” Ewers said.

Muscatine Fire Department’s Green Shift responded to a structure fire at 10:30 p.m. on that Saturday night (Sept. 14, 2002) finding a wooden three-story multi-family home at the



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intersection of Orange and East 6th streets engulfed in flames. Kruse was one of two firefighters who were working on the structure's roof when Kruse fell through and into the structure below.

When Ewers arrived at the scene he issued an all-call to bring in other shifts and relieve Green Shift in containing the fire.

"The tragedy suffered by Green Shift was felt by all those who came to the scene," Ewers said. "But it was best to relieve that shift and allow them to grieve. We still had a job to do but it was a very emotional night."

Kruse's dedication to job safety and protecting Muscatine residents is a lesson that can be taught to firefighters of today and those of the future. His sacrifice and loss of life while on active duty, the emotional toll it took on his family, co-workers, and Muscatine residents, and the hope that Muscatine will never experience a tragedy such as this ever again are all part of the message presented during each memorial service.

"Mike was one of the most safety conscious firefighter's on the department," Ewers said during a speech in 2012 commemorating the 10th anniversary of Kruse's death. "Mike always looked out for other firefighters to make sure they were doing the job safely and that they had their full protective equipment on at all times."

Ewers first met Kruse in the 1990's as a newly appointed Fire Lieutenant assigned to Station 2. Kruse and firefighter June Anne Gaeta were his crew.

Ewers admits that as a very young, very green fire lieutenant he was book smart but lacked the fire ground command and exposure to structure fires.

"Mike was a true teacher and mentor to me," Ewers said. "His experience in fighting real fires, his expertise with the equipment, and his knowledge of the city helped this young lieutenant grow."

Kruse joined the department in 1975 and was one of the first members to obtain his fire science degree at MCC.



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"He was a true firefighter dedicated to protecting property and saving lives," Ewers said. "He was very detail oriented, liked everything clean and in its place, and took his job very seriously."

Ewers spoke of the difference between commemoration and celebration during his 2012 speech. Commemorating an event, he said, is done to honor the memory of that event. Celebration is a time or rejoicing, a time to feel good about something that has happened.

"Commemorations often remind us of what we have lost," Ewers said. "Commemorations are important, not because of the words spoken, but because of honor, courage, and sacrifice that were displayed during the time of the event itself."

"We all know in our hearts that firefighting is a dangerous profession," Ewers said. "Mike knew this when he was hired in 1975. Not every firefighter who responds to the sound of an alarm is guaranteed a safe return to quarters. Some will be mentally scarred for life with what we see and encounter at emergency scenes, some will be seriously injured, and some will pay the ultimate price."

"So it was with Mike Kruse on September 14, 2002 while battling a house fire at 6th and Orange just a few blocks from here," Ewers said. "We have gathered here to commemorate that tragic event that took one of our own and left behind a painful gap in our ranks. We will continue to do this as long as the Muscatine Fire Department is in existence."

Muscatine's Firefighters Memorial is located at the intersection of Cedar and 5th Streets.

PHOTO GALLERY

NATIONAL FALLEN FIREFIGHTERS MEMORIAL - Kruse is among the fallen firefighters to be honored with inclusion on the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial. In his memorial, his children wrote:

"Mike was a 'True American Hero.' He never wanted to be recognized for all the wonderful things he did. Mike always stood up for what he believed in. He was always honest, even



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though the other person did not want to hear what he had to say. Mike always followed the rules, unless someone gave him a direct order to do otherwise.

Mike always put others before himself. He always talked about his family which he was so proud of. Mike stood by them through thick and thin. He gave his children unconditional love. He taught them to respect other people for who they are. Mike explained to them to love life because life is short. He became their best friend. He loved them for who they are. He was so excited about his little grandson, who bore his name. He took time out of his busy life to spend lots of loving moments with him.

Mike always went the extra mile at home and at work. He kept track of every run he had ever been on. He stopped by some of the houses while he was out for his morning jog and checked on patients to make sure they were doing all right. He never passed up the opportunity to play in the yearly basketball game with the Special Olympics. Mike always enjoyed carrying the boot and receiving donations for MDA.

Mike was a veteran at the fire department for twenty-seven years. He was still able to keep up with some of the younger guys. He was able to give the younger firemen the knowledge he had learned over the years. He was very respected for that.

Mike was taken from us at a moment in time when his family and friends were so proud of who he was. He will always remain alive in our hearts as a ‘True American Hero.’”

IOWA FIRE FIGHTER LINE OF DUTY MEMORIAL

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation