

CITY OF MUSCATINE



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LONG CAREER IN FIREFIGHTING COMING TO AN END

Assistant Fire Chief stepping down after over 30 years of service to Muscatine



MUSCATINE, Iowa – It was not just a coincidence that Assistant Fire Chief Mike Hartman decided to retire from active duty with the Muscatine Fire Department on April 1, 2025. It was a well-orchestrated plan to not only get the last laugh while heading out the door, but also a jumping off point to his next great adventure.

"I told people that by retiring on April Fool's Day, I can come back a few days later and say 'Just kidding, I want my job back'," Hartman said jokingly. "Probably won't be as funny since everyone knows that I was thinking of doing it."

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A retirement celebration will be held from 12-2 p.m. on Tuesday, April 1, in the firefighter's dayroom upstairs in the Public Safety Building, 312 East 5th Street, Muscatine.

Hartman has spent over 30 years working for the Muscatine Fire Department, and is now looking forward to the next phase of his life as the Camp Director of Camp Loud Thunder, the premier Scout Camp for the Illowa Council.

"One of the proudest moments of my life is when I got the call that I was being hired as a Muscatine Firefighter," Hartman said.

Hartman began his journey with Muscatine on Nov. 21, 1994, promoted to Fire Lieutenant on Dec. 7, 1999, and then to Fire Captain on March 7, 2005. The Assistant Fire Chief position was created during a department reorganization and Hartman assumed that role on Jan. 7, 2013. Before the reorganization, shift commanders performed the duties of assistant chief but it was realized that the position needed a dedicated 40 hour per week staff member instead of relying on the already overworked shift commanders.

"I was fortunate enough to see Mike's talent early on and promoted him to Assistant Fire Chief in 2013," Fire Chief Jerry Ewers, said. "Mike has been our city's Fire Marshal for over 12 years keeping our community safe."

Hartman has always sought to make the department better and the community safer, but has never forgotten where he came from or what he has learned.

"During my career I would always ask myself how can I have a bigger impact as a fire professional," Hartman said. "I never lost sight of where I came from with every promotion I received."

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Hartman also had a love for helping people and for helping to improve the fire department. He was instrumental in the development of the fire investigation program and the training of the fire investigation team that Hartman notes is probably the best investigation team in the state.

He also had a hand in the development of the HAZMAT (Hazardous Material) team in Muscatine, which had its origins in November 1996. Hartman approached and received the green light from then Fire Chief Steve Dalbey to create the team and develop the training program. The Muscatine HAZMAT team is now designated as a Regional HAZMAT team providing services to Muscatine, Louisa, Henry, Washington and Keokuk counties.

"We worked to develop and train in the areas of hazardous material handling, confined space rescue, high angle rope rescue, trench rescue, and clandestine lab clean up," Hartman said.

Ewers added that Hartman's accomplishments for the department and for the community are a source of pride.

"His earlier accomplishments are really tied back to creating our first HazMat team, which now is a designated HaxMat team for Iowa covering five counties in Southeast Iowa," Ewers said.

"This is really something to be proud of along with furthering and elevating our fire investigation program for the department. I wish Mike well in his retirement and want to thank him for his service to our department and our community."

Hartman feels very fortunate to have been able to have the opportunity to help develop the protocols and training of the many skills that current firefighters are able to utilize for the benefit of the Muscatine community.

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He is also a big proponent of fire prevention.

"The fire we prevent is the most effective way to protect ourselves and the citizens from harm," Hartman said.

That was a lesson learned from Mike Kruse, the only Muscatine Firefighter to lose his life while on duty.

"I worked with Mike and he was also a big proponent of fire prevention," Hartman said. "One of the reasons we put such an emphasis on firefighter training and fire prevention education is to honor him."

Hartman also carried a picture of Kruse when he participated in the inaugural stair climb at Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Wis., after the tragedy of Sept. 11, 2001. He also carried a picture of Michael Fiore, a New York firefighter from Rescue 5 who lost his life responding to the terrorist attack on Sept. 11. Hartman visited Rescue 5 while attending the first class of the National Fire Academy after Sept. 11.

"It was amazing to visit and stay at Rescue 5, to see the pictures of those who lost their lives, and the history of the station," Hartman said.

Hartman has a long history of working with the Boy Scouts of America and local scouts, and is looking forward to continuing that passion as Camp Director at Camp Loud Thunder.

"I am truly excited to provide the leadership and mentoring to current scouts similar to what I received since I was a youth," Hartman said. "There is no better organization for strong

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character development in today's youth than the Scouts. I look forward to spending time with these youth and my staff, and to emphasize the principles of scouting."

An Eagle Scout himself, Hartman proudly watched as his youngest daughter entered the inaugural class of female Eagle Scouts.

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