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“30 Years of EMS Certification”



Pictured from left: Norfolk Fire Chief Scott Cordes, Assistant Chief Tim Wragge, Captain Steve Bettendorf and Captain John Reding

When John Reding became a Norfolk firefighter in 1978, he knew how to fight fires and to perform CPR on accident victims. By 1986, however, he had learned the skills to not only save people's lives by dousing fires but by administering life saving medications and learning what an accident victim needed on the scene to survive.

Reding and Steve Bettendorf, both City of Norfolk Fire Captains, were recognized at the Fire Division Wednesday morning for being certified as Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) for 30 years. Bettendorf has been with the Norfolk Fire Division since 1981.

Assistant Chief Tim Wragge credited the two men with “breaking ground in the Emergency Medical Services world.”

“From having only a few paramedics to nearly every one of our firefighters now a certified paramedic, these two men have demonstrated a lifetime commitment to education. The national average tenure of a paramedic in a fire based service is 10.8 years and we are fortunate to have two firefighters each with 30 years. It speaks well of their dedication to helping people,” Wragge said.

Both Bettendorf and Reding gave credit to Dr. G. Tom Surber for getting the EMS program going in Norfolk. Surber has served as Medical Director for the Fire Division since 1976 and started working on the process of certifying more firefighters as paramedics in 1982. He has overseen the EMS education program ever since then.

“People died before we had the certification program that Dr. Surber started,” Bettendorf said.

Whether it be administering sugar to someone in diabetic shock, administering life saving medication to a heart attack victim or delivering a baby, the firefighters/paramedics in Norfolk have learned to make quick decisions and give preliminary treatment rather than wasting precious moments before the victim arrives at the hospital.

“We've increased the success rate of someone whose heart has stopped from 2% chance of survival to 30%,” Surber said.

Bettendorf and Reding were recognized at a ceremony at the fire station with a presentation of a plaque at a ceremony with all the fire personnel.