



## Retiring chief maintains firefighting passion while passing torch to son

BY KATE WARD Northwest Arkansas Times

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After serving as Round Mountain's volunteer fire chief for 20 years, Ron Wood is passing the torch down to his son, Shane

" Ever since I retired from the Fayetteville Fire Department in 2002, I just felt like I wasn't keeping up, " Wood said. " When it comes to firefighting, things are always changing. "

Ron said his son's career with the Fayetteville Fire Department — coupled with his experience as a volunteer firefighter — made him a perfect match for the position.

" He's been working here since the time he could walk, " Wood said of his son's volunteer firefighting career.

Despite his decision to step down as chief, Wood hasn't hung up his boots for good. From now on, he will serve as Round Mountain's deputy fire chief in addition to working as the facilities manager for Washington County.

Though nearly two decades have passed since his tenure as chief began, the 56-year-old said he still remembers the department's meager beginnings.

" Back then, there were a lot of brush fires going on, and fire coverage in our area was shared between Fayetteville and Goshen, " he said. " At that point and time, we mainly had farmers living in the area, so we started having church meetings to start a volunteer fire department. "

As the meetings continued, Ron said, more and more area residents began to show up. Donations from area residents helped make the fire department a reality. It was officially established in 1983.

" We started out with a ' 40 s model pumper truck that we kept in a shed on top of the mountain, " he said.

Shane said the community also helped pay for the firefighters' equipment.

" One time, one of the firefighter's house caught on fire, " he said. " We were able to put the fire out, but we didn't have any air packs at that time. As we were leaving the house, a neighbor saw all of us hacking and gasping for air. He showed up at our next pot luck dinner with about \$ 1, 000 to help us buy air packs. "

Since it's inception, the Round Mountain Fire Department has more than doubled in size.

" For a while, it was hard to find people to volunteer, " Shane said, " but now we have more volunteers than ever. "

The number of volunteer firefighters, he said, recently jumped from 15 to 26 between June and November. The department responds to an average of 140 calls per year.

" Since I work at the Fayetteville Fire Department, my schedule is 24 hours on and 48 hours off, " he said. " I'm almost always here on my days off. My brother is a firefighter, too, and we work different schedules. So at least one of us is almost always here. "

Though being a volunteer firefighter offers almost no monetary benefits, Shane said the experience has its rewards.

" The biggest incentive is just being able to help people and the excitement, " he said. " We're more like a club. A lot of us are good buddies, and we meet three times a month. "

In addition to state funding, Shane said the Round Mountain Fire Department is supported by membership fees from area residents. Fees start at \$ 120 for the first year and cost \$ 60 annually for each following year. Currently, he said, only 40 percent of area residents pay their annual membership fees.

" We respond to all fires no matter what, " he said. " The state fire dues are the turnback money from the insurance companies. "

Shane said membership dues may become a requirement as the area continues to grow.

" It will take a lot more time, dedication and people, " he said.

For the Wood family, firefighting is a passion that runs in the family.

" I've had a dad, brother, wife, grandpa, uncle and at least two cousins that have worked at this department, " he said. " Right now, there are seven Woods that work here. It's something we all grew up with. "

For more information on the Round Mountain Fire Department or to become a member, visit [www. roundmtn. org](http://www.roundmtn.org) or call (479 ) 442-5700.

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