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GOOD HART

Firefighting community remembers chief Don Horn as a leader, teacher, friend

Firefighting community mourns death of Redmond-Friendship-Cross Village Fire Chief Don Horn

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News Review file photoRedmond-Friendship-Cross Village Fire Chief Don Horn talks to other firefighters about smoke and fire behavior during a live fire training exercise near Alanson in 2015.



VIDEO: Live-fire firefighter training
Steve Zucker/News-Review
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GOOD HART — Many in the Northern Michigan fire service community are mourning the loss earlier this week of a well-known area fire chief who has helped train hundreds of firefighters over the years.

Don Horn, 58, who had served on the Redmond-Friendship-Cross Village Fire Department for about 35 years, and since 2007 as its chief, died unexpectedly at his home on Monday.

Horn was being remembered Tuesday by members of his fire service family as a strong leader, gifted and knowledgeable teacher, and trusted friend who had a passion for firefighting.

Bob Kruzel, who retired from his role as the department's assistant chief last year, joined the department around the same time Horn did in the early 1980s — just a few years after the department formed. Kruzel said the extent of the respect and admiration the region's

firefighting community had for Horn became quickly evident Monday evening as word of his death began to spread. Kruzel said condolences and tributes soon began to show up in phone calls and emails and on social media. He said a number of firefighters even traveled from as far away as St. Ignace, Charlevoix and Kalkaska to stop by the fire station to join in the gathering of firefighters there.

Kruzel said getting together with fellow firefighters in a time like this would be just what Horn would have had them do. He said it was a common practice for him to get the crew together to talk things over after a particularly difficult event.

"When we'd have (a serious incident), we'd get together. You go over it. You have to talk it out," Kruzel said. "Don was always for that. He always told people, 'I'm here if you need to talk.'

"He was a leader. That was one of the biggest things we talked about. If he was on a scene, you knew it and you knew he'd be on top of things... He was a chief to respect. He was in there doing the stuff anyone would be doing, like rolling up fire hose."

Chris Krupa, the department's current assistant chief, got to know Horn through his friendship with Horn's son, Mike; and then on another level when he and Mike joined the department together. Krupa also noted the outreach that the department has had from other departments in the wake of Horn's death.

"He was a great soul. He wanted to do the best he could for everybody. Firefighting was his passion. We are going to miss him a lot," Krupa said.

Krupa said it wasn't just Horn's expertise in firefighting and teaching that made him special.

"We talk a lot about the (firefighting) 'brotherhood,' but in some ways he was more than a brother. In some ways he was like a father to some of the firefighters ... he was more than a chief," Krupa said.

Krupa added: "I remember calling him one day to pull me out of the ditch, and he said, 'No problem, I'll be right there.' He was that type of guy. He wouldn't hold a grudge. You could yell at him one day and hug him the next. There aren't too many people like that."

"I had a lot of great times with him and a lot of serious times with him, and I'm glad for all of them."

Perhaps the one the one person in the fire service who knew Horn as well as his the firefighters in his department is Jesse Silva, Horn's fire academy instructing partner for the past 15 years.

Silva, who is also a firefighter with the Charlevoix Township Fire Department, said he met Horn through their mutual employment as truck drivers with the food service supply company Sysco. Silva said Horn was his commercial driver's license training instructor.

"We got to talking and pretty soon it became clear that we were cut from the same cloth," Silva said.

"Don was a great guy. He will really be missed," he said.

Silva said he's had more than 100 people contact him to express their condolences since word of Horn's death began to spread.

He said he and Horn have spent countless hours together teaching a wide array of firefighting classes all over the state. In fact, they are in the middle of teaching a fire officer class in Central Lake.

"We've spent hundreds of hours together. It's a great loss for me, personally. When we are team-teaching, we ping-pong off each other. It's hard to find someone you can work that well with."

Silva, noted that he and Horn not only had to learn to adapt to the changing times, with the evolution to computers, but he also was diverse in the types and methods of training they used.

He pointed to 2008 when Horn was a major part of an effort that led to the first-ever state-approved training session over video conference for firefighters on Beaver Island.

Horn, along with Silva, was a major advocate for live-fire training exercises. The Readmond Friendship Cross Village Fire Department has hosted many of them over the years and often invites firefighters from other departments to participate.

In fact, Silva said he and Horn have overseen 38 live fire training exercises together over the past 15 years all over Northern Michigan and beyond. He said it's training that's invaluable for firefighters, but not easy to pull off.

"You need a good partner to do that," Silva said. You have to have a good rein on it."

"Don was a natural-born teacher. With his presentation, and the way people received him, he was just made for that," Silva said. "We will all miss him."

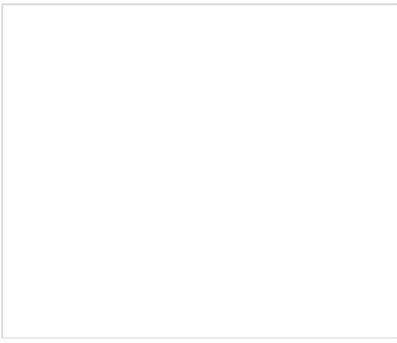
As of today, Wednesday, plans for a memorial service in Horn's honor had not yet been made.

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[Click here to see a video created in March of 2015 during a live burn training exercise near Alanson that Horn helped lead.](#)

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