

Firefighters Memorial Being Established

Liz Engel, Herald-Citizen Staff

Saturday, Aug 30, 2008

BAXTER -- Ed Stallings once said he loved his job serving as the fire chief in Carthage.

A funeral home director by trade, he had been a member of the volunteer department since 1957 and its chief since 1992. But while battling a church fire in April of 2004, Stallings suffered serious injuries which claimed his life just months later.

Each year, an average of two firefighters die in the line of duty. A memorial to honor those like Stallings is currently being planned for Tennessee. The Upper Cumberland Regional Council of Fire Chiefs and the Baxter volunteer Fire Department are just two local groups supporting the memorial, currently under the direction of the Tennessee's Fallen Firefighter's Memorial committee. Both groups are raising funds starting tomorrow to get the project off the ground.

The site of the memorial is planned for northern Bedford County and will include a brick walkway that will lead to a circle of honor. "This is just for Tennessee," said Baxter Fire Chief Chris Holmes. "This has been going on for some time. All they have now is a flag pole, but they want to start building with what money they do have and they have asked us to raise as much money as we can."

The memorial will be a "monument to the spirit, commitment and the sacrifice of those firefighters who gave their lives in the line of duty," said a letter issued by Holmes. "It will give the citizens of Tennessee a place to honor these firefighters and inspire young men and women to follow in their brave footsteps." Holmes said he wasn't aware of any fatalities ever suffered in the Baxter department, but the list of Tennessee fallen firefighters includes 19 men and women -- one other Upper Cumberland firefighter was listed on the Tennessee's Fallen Firefighter's Memorial Web site -- Thomas Girdley with the Crossville Fire Department, who died in 1983.

Donations will be accepted starting tomorrow and collections will run through the end of the month. Holmes is hoping the Upper Cumberland area can raise around \$13,000. For a donation of \$100, a brick can be sponsored. The Carthage Fire Department has already donated a brick in honor of Stallings.

For more information about the memorial, visit the TFFM Web site at www.tnffmemorial.com, or contact the Baxter volunteer Fire Department at 858-2621. Donations can be mailed to P.O. Box 335, Baxter, TN 38544.