

A Chiefs' Chief: Walkertown's volunteer fire chief honored by his peers, North Carolina organization



Fire Chief Wesley Hutchins at the Walkertown Volunteer Fire Department in Walkertown, where he has served for almost 35 years.

Journal Photo by Bruce Chapman

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WALKERTOWN - Wesley Hutchins has had a passion for firefighting for most of his life. For almost 35 years, he has been a member of the Walkertown Volunteer Fire Department and has been its chief for the past six years.

Hutchins was honored earlier this month by the N.C. Association of Fire Chiefs, which named him Volunteer Fire Chief of the Year.

"It's an honor. I was surprised," he said. "There's a satisfaction that comes from helping the community. We're not in it for the thank-you's or the recognition."

But the people who serve with Hutchins or work with him in various organizations say that the recognition is overdue.

Hutchins started his fire-service career in 1975 as a 15-year-old junior firefighter. Clyde Webster, the department's first chief and an owner of Webster Brothers Hardware, asked him if he had ever thought about joining the fire department.

"I've been here ever since," Hutchins said.

His day job also involves fire service. He has been the dean of the health and emergency programs at Forsyth Technical Community College for 13 years. He is also active in the N.C. State Firefighters Association, the N.C. Association of Fire Chiefs, and the Forsyth County Fire and Rescue Association.

The members of the Walkertown department nominated Hutchins for the award behind his back.

The nominations are reviewed by previous winners, who make the selection.

Kenneth Mullins, the executive director of the N.C. Association of Fire Chiefs, said that seven people were nominated for the award this year.

"Hutchins is good for the fire service; he's a visionary," Mullins said.

Randy Wood, the deputy chief and one of the award conspirators, said that they felt that the award would be a fitting tribute to Hutchins. He has worked hard and is involved in the community.

"He's continued his education, raised a family, has a full-time job and is the fire chief," Wood said. "He spends a lot of time with his family and is active with his son's Boy Scout troop."

Keith Pierce, the assistant chief and another award conspirator, said that Hutchins cares about what he does, the community and the members of the fire department, and does it all for free.

"There aren't many like Wesley left in the world," Pierce said. "He's always been an inspiration to me."

Hutchins is quick to point out that the members of the department also deserve credit. He said that the department has a lot of good people who care about each other and the community.

"In my eyes, we are the best," he said.

Scott Alderman, the chief of the Lewisville Fire Department, said he considers Hutchins to be a mentor.

"He deserves the award," Alderman said. "He's a well-respected leader of fire services in Forsyth County."

It's difficult to find people dedicated enough to do the job, Alderman said.

"He strives to do his best," he said.

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About Wesley Hutchins

- AGE: 51.
- HOMETOWN: Walkertown.
- EDUCATION: Associate's degree in fire science from Forsyth Technical Community College; bachelor's degree from Gardner-Webb University; Executive Fire Officer Program, National Fire Academy; currently working on a master's degree online from Grand Canyon University.
- EXPERIENCE: 35 years of service with the Walkertown Volunteer Fire Department.
- FAMILY: Wife, Mary; daughter, Mallory, 16; son, Reid, 13.