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Firefighter banquet recognizes many

Three receive Act of Compassion for life-saving efforts

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SAUK RAPIDS — Along with dinner, a keynote speaker, annual service awards and the announcement of firefighter of the year, the Sauk Rapids Fire Department Annual Banquet included a group of people Jan. 20 that wouldn't normally attend.

Family members of Stan Welle, of Watkins, gathered to share their gratitude for the men who saved the life of their husband, father and grandfather. Firefighters Jason Adamski, Neil Bueckers and Rob Calhoun (along with other rescue personnel) came to Welle's aid Aug. 28, 2016 when he collapsed in the parking lot at the Sacred Heart Parish Festival. They were recognized with Act of Compassion plaques at the banquet held at Coyote Moon Grille Friday evening.

Adamski, Bueckers and Calhoun were preparing to work a food stand at the event



PHOTOS BY NATASHA BARBER

Sauk Rapids Firefighters Jason Adamski (from left), Rob Calhoun and Neil Bueckers (right) received "Act of Compassion" plaques at the SRFD Annual Banquet Jan. 20 for their life-saving efforts when Stan Welle (second from right) collapsed Aug. 28.

when an usher ran to Neil asking for help because a man was down in the parking lot. Bueckers grabbed Adamski and Calhoun from inside the church hall.

"When we got to Stan, he was lying on his back, blue," Bueckers said. "I instructed Rob to grab the AED [Automated External Defibrillator], and Jason said he was going to start compressions. I did the assessment, and as you all know, there was no pulse."

Calhoun returned with the AED, and the team shocked and continued CPR until medical assistance arrived and took over.

"We did what we were trained to do," Bueckers said. "I feel we all stayed pretty calm and we worked as a group. We're happy to be able to do what we did and happy you [Stan] are with us here today."

While presenting the men with their plaques, Welle, who doesn't remember anything from the day, thanked them and shows his appreciation with a group hug.

"Thanks for breaking my ribs," Welle, said with a chuckle. "Thank you very much. Keep up the good training."

Earlier in the evening, Tom delPino addressed the group.

The retired New York City firefighter, who was working the day of Sept. 11, 2001 told his story of the towers falling, but also reminded the 30 volunteers of the Sauk Rapids Fire Department to be proud of their service.

"As I travel around the country now, I meet a lot of firefighters and the one thing that bothers me the most is when they say, 'I'm only a volunteer,'" delPino said. "Your fires are as hot as my fires were. I had a job. I went to work every day. I fought fires. I went home and watched fire trucks pass my house and waved to them. You guys don't. You guys get on that fire truck and wave goodbye to your families. I find that amazing. You are all working a job, running businesses, and you still find time to go out and serve."

The evening commenced with the 2016 Firefighter of the Year award which is determined through the number of calls an individual makes it to throughout the year. The fire department responded to 171 incidents in 2016, and Chief Jason Fleming earned the award for his 92.98 percent response rate.