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PRESS RELEASE

Shiley Named Fire Chief Emeritus After 53 Years As Volunteer Chief

Middletown, Virginia - At their monthly meeting on December 1, 2016, the members of the Middletown Volunteer Fire & Rescue Company, INC., voted unanimously to grant the status of Fire Chief Emeritus to Henry Shiley. Shiley decided to 'retire' after 53 years as chief of the Company at the end of the year.

At the membership's Company meeting, Assistant Chief Mark Dalton made a motion on behalf of himself and the other officers to grant the title to Shiley for life in honor and recognition of his distinguished career. The motion was as follows,

"The status of "Emeritus" is given by an organization when a person who has retired from an office is honored by being allowed to retain their title. A "Fire Chief Emeritus" is a retired fire chief of extraordinary distinction. It is a rare honor, granted in exceptional circumstances, after many years of outstanding service--and is reserved for a person who has made significant and sustained contributions to the fire service, and in addition, has led in extraordinary service to the community.

When eighteen-year-old Henry Shiley became a member of the Middletown Volunteer Fire and Rescue Company on July 7, 1955, he began a distinguished career in volunteer emergency services. Henry progressed rapidly through the ranks, and was elected in turn Fire Lieutenant and after five years, Fire Captain. When Henry returned from two years of military service in 1963, he was elected Fire Chief--and has served in that office ever since. He is one of only five persons who have served the company as chief since the company's founding in April 1942.

Firefighting and Emergency Medical Services have been revolutionized since Henry joined the company in 1955; and under his leadership, Company 12 has led in the transformation. Emergency Medical Services were basically "transport only" in the early 1950's; not even oxygen was given. Now, extensive training for EMS certification is required, and treatment during transport sometimes includes the use of prescription drugs and defibrillators. Firefighters went from wearing canister masks to very advanced self-contained breathing apparatus. These are just examples of the advancements seen in the fire service over 53 years. What we know about Henry is that he was always open to trying new things and has always had a fervent desire for the Company to have the best apparatus and equipment.

In addition to the Company's high opinion of his leadership, Henry has the esteem and admiration of his peers throughout the fire service, because of his great knowledge of all aspects of firefighting, his strong and steady leadership, his kindness and his humor. A fire company, like any other group, takes its culture from its leader. Middletown Volunteer Fire and Rescue Company has a reputation for excellence and professionalism; basically, with Henry as Fire Chief, it would be hard for us to be anything else.

Whatever has happened around the fire station in Middletown has happened with Chief Shiley's active participation, both behind the scenes, and in the moments of great responsibility and danger. We all know that he is the lynchpin of the effort to earn thousands and thousands of dollars for the fire company through the bingo program, but he has also been involved in almost every work party throughout the years—carnivals and chicken bbq's, scraping paint and wiring radios, selling Christmas trees and packing hose. Henry is famous for his fried oyster cakes over a three-state area, and has supported the Company's Auxiliary in all their efforts.

When a former mayor of Middletown was asked to state why he thought Company 12 had such a good reputation, he looked across the table at Henry and said: "consistency, long-term service, and emphasis on quality". That's Henry and that's why I make this motion."

Shiley will be presented with a special badge and helmet shield at the Company's annual banquet in February.

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For more information about this topic, please contact Megan Bowers.

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