

2011 Harold Rea Award

Written by Craig

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Fire Chief Jim Stands in Front Of Halstead's New Fire Station

Harold Rea Award Recipient Jim VanSchaick (aka) Fire Chief Jim

The Harold Rea Award is presented annually to a person from Halstead that does an outstanding job being an ambassador and disseminating the reflection of what makes Halstead a unique place to live. "The Harold Rea Award was created at the time of his death, because a big fish in a small pond was really what he prized. And in that esteemed position, he felt that bringing commerce to the city of Halstead was the lifeblood of keeping Halstead, Kansas as a township strong and financially healthy." explained daughter Amy Rea.

Those of us that have worked with Chief VanSchaick, learned fast that this man was delivered to us by a higher power. His ability to lead and work with people is biblical, right out of the good

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book itself.

In April of 2005, Jim and his wife Anita began a new journey in life by moving to Halstead. This life changing event was a big deal for Jim, Anita and their daughter. " I was born and raised in Waverly, Kansas (population 600). I spent all 40 years of my life there, until I moved out here. I went to Waverly High School, the Bull Dogs. I love that community, my mom still lives there. Waverly is home, but Halstead is home now. I just wanted to experience living in another larger community and I was given that opportunity in Halstead," explained Jim. "My daughter Hillary still had two years left of high school. I asked her if she would mind spending her last two years of high school somewhere else. She approved," he stated.

Jim's determination and hard work started at a young age. "I started out working as a utility guy at the Wolf Creek nuclear power plant. It's a great facility and my sister still works there. It is the main place of employment in Coffee County. Part of my job was running a fire brigade. That is how I got interested in fire fighting. I also worked for my uncle, farming part time," Jim said.

"We knew Jim worked for the City of Waverly as one of two maintenance staff. That experience helped us, knowing that he knew how other departments in the city were run and their responsibilities. Jim had been involved with purchasing new equipment for Waverly, building a new station, and increasing their volunteer staff. When I called his former Chief for a reference, he called me bad names because he knew we were going to hire Jim away from him. Chief Bill Walker and I have become friends since that time, and he still cusses me. Jim moving to Halstead was a great loss to them and a great gain for us," said J.R.Hatfield, City Administrator of Halstead.

Since moving from eastern Kansas Jim has really liked the size of Halstead. He said that our city is big enough that you don't have to travel out of town to live here. Yes, he added, we are close to larger cities, but it is great that Halstead has most everything you need in our business district, food, hardware and banking. The Kansas Learning Center for Health is a wonderful draw to Halstead and the schools in Halstead are outstanding. Halstead is unique in the number of volunteers in our Fire and EMS departments. For a town this size, that is tremendous, he added.

In the six years Jim has been in Halstead he has let no grass grow under his heels. After Jim took over the Halstead Fire Department in 2005, he increased the volunteer staff, completed the First Responders Class as well as the EMT Class. We could see he was a tireless worker for

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the city and his department, said J.R Hatfield.

The city council and J.R. allowed me the latitude to go out and get funding and grants to build a well equipped Fire and EMS Department. Our latest improvement is the new Fire and EMS Station currently being built. If anyone walked in the current facility you can see a building created in 1970 with much simpler needs. It is so crowded that it may take moving three things to get to what you need. Not a good situation in an emergency, Jim added. In 2011 we have a whole set of new rules to play by and everything is a lot different today.

Since Jim has been with us he has received almost \$1,000,000 in grants for the City of Halstead. He has improved the firefighting equipment the city now has. In addition, Jim has been instrumental in helping surrounding departments be successful with their grant applications. Jim has been a big part of training in Halstead as well as Harvey County and surrounding counties. Jim is currently assisting with the planning of the new Fire/EMS building that is under construction, said J.R Hatfield.

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Many may not know that Jim is part of the Harvey County Emergency Services Association. This association ties all of Harvey County together so men and equipment are coordinated in case of a large scale emergency. "We meet every month to review what each community has in the way of man power and equipment and capabilities. We also review upcoming events and discuss ways of working together to help one another. There are times when a community may have a fire truck or ambulance down and another community can cover in case the need arises. We do a lot of networking over the Internet and we all benefit by working together," Jim stated

Since Fire Chief Jim joined the Halstead Fire and EMS, new apparatus has been purchased with mostly grant money. "When I got here our average age of apparatus was 24 years old. As of today it is 6 years old. Technology is important. We had a thermal imaging unit when I got here. I think Thomas Edison invented it. We now have two new ones that work very well. Most all of the equipment is less than 5 years old now. We now have a back up generator which really helps getting the large garage doors open during a power outage. Last year we had a grant for a 12 lead defibrillator, an advanced cardiac care that allows our paramedics to transfer the data to the hospital for advanced diagnostics of the emergency. All of this helps promote good staff. Hutchinson Community College will be able to allow students to stay at the new station and get hands on training for EMS and Fire," he said proudly.

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Fire Chief Jim took on the roll of managing Old Settlers two years ago. "We actually co- chair Old Settlers because it is such a intensive amount of work for one person. Old Settlers is an important event. It is important for people to come out, it's our opportunity for citizens and visitors to get to know each other. There are so many quality events, The Grand Parade, the Boy Scout meal, the Great Race, the Fireworks, the many shows in Riverside Park, the Rod Run, the Bull Ride and many others. If you just attend two events, the Old Settlers Button at \$5 is a bargain, this button shows your support for the many events that make up Old Settlers. We ask patrons to proudly wear their Old Settlers Button. This means, YES... I support our annual community event. We have great sponsors that help make Old Settlers possible and I want to thank each of them for the support. Without the sponsors, we just could not have this type of celebration," he added

"I just want everybody to know that Halstead is my home. I do a lot of things, so if you see me on the run, it's because I am running between jobs. I do a lot of football officiating, it gives me the ability to see a lot of schools and communities. I really love that. My first 20 years was spent seeing eastern Kansas football. Now I get to see central Kansas, and sometimes western Kansas teams. That has been fun to do. I get to teach for KU about Fire and EMS and I get to build friendships when I am on the football field," Jim said.

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"All in all, Halstead is a great place to live. I have been offered opportunities to work for other communities. Coffee County has been bugging me about moving back. We weigh the options and, yes, my family is there, but we have made Halstead home and plan to stay here as long as you will have us!" declared Fire Chief Jim.

Jim is one of the people that I can "brain-storm" with and can always depend on him for sound advice. He is willing to do anything that is asked of him and to go the "extra mile". As said previously, Jim has been involved in all aspects of city business throughout his career. He has knowledge of other department responsibilities which allows him to jump in and help whenever needed. Jim is not just the Fire Chief, he is also the Assistant EMS Director. In addition, he has assisted with the Chamber of Commerce and the Old Settlers celebration. He is one we can

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always depend on to help wherever needed, J. R. Hatfield stated.