

August 14, 2015

Sally Ellertson  
Public Information Officer  
141 West Renfro  
Burleson, Texas 76028-4261  
817-426-9622  
F: 817-426-9390  
[sellertson@burlesontx.com](mailto:sellertson@burlesontx.com)  
[www.burlesontx.com](http://www.burlesontx.com)

After more than 17 years as Burleson's first full-time paid fire chief, Gary Wisdom is turning off the fire radio, turning off the weather radar, and turning in his keys. The chief announced his retirement Aug. 11. He will work through the end of this year.

"I am thankful for the opportunities that have been provided to me here at the City of Burleson," Wisdom said in his retirement letter. "This City has provided me opportunities that most fire chiefs only get to dream about. The City is a fantastic organization to work for and together we have developed one of the best fire departments in the state of Texas. I have the utmost respect for our city management and for all of the city councils I have worked with over the years. Their dedication to the development of this city has made Burleson one of the best cities in the Dallas-Fort Worth area."

Wisdom attended East Texas State University in 1979, the National Fire Academy in 1991, achieved his associates degree in fire science from Collin County Community College in 1992, and a bachelor's degree in business administration from Dallas Baptist University in 1997. In 1999 he graduated from the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Wisdom has served as not only Burleson's fire chief but as the emergency management coordinator, since 2009, in a city that was home to just under 20,000 residents when he was hired in 1998 to a city that now boasts more than 41,280. He is a member of the Texas Fire Chief's Association and the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

The fire service is in the Wisdom family's blood. The chief's father, Allen Wisdom, retired, as a captain, after 32 years with the Garland Fire Department, and his son, Brad, is a firefighter/paramedic with the Grapevine Fire Department. Chief Wisdom has served in the firefighting field since 1981 when he started his career with the McKinney Fire Department as an entry-level firefighter. He was also a volunteer member of the Farmersville Volunteer Fire Department, 1983-1998. Wisdom served as Farmersville's fire chief for two years, 1997-1998.

Wisdom promoted to lieutenant with McKinney in June 1984, then captain in December 1984. In 1998, Wisdom was hired by then-city manager Kay Godbey as Burleson's first full-time career fire chief.

In 1998, Wisdom's staff included Tom Foster (current deputy chief over operations/hired fulltime in 1997 as operations commander), the department's first four career firefighters, and volunteer firefighters. Today, the Burleson Fire Department has 37 career firefighters, including the chief and his two deputy chiefs. Two more firefighters will come on board in this next fiscal year.

Fire Station #2 opened at 650 Memorial Plaza in 1995. In 1998, Fire Station #1 was still at the corner of Eldred and Bransom streets.

The new Fire Station #1 opened at 828 S.W. Alsbury Blvd. in March 2003. Fire Station #2 was remodeled in 2004 to including living quarters for career firefighters, and Fire Station #3 opened at 245 Lakewood Dr. in September 2009. The City will likely open a fourth fire station in the next five years.

A fire department can't operate without equipment. Throughout the past 17-plus years, ladder trucks, engines, and a heavy rescue truck have been added.

Since 1998, firefighters moved from basic medical certification to the intermediate level so that they can intubate and start IVs on scene. An EMS squad may also be added in this next fiscal year.

Burleson's firefighters are now certified in hazardous materials, swift water rescue, confined space rescue, and high angle rescue. That training paid off in August 2011 when a team of firefighters rescued a 25-year-old worker who was trapped on a cell phone tower more than 700 feet in the air. The temperature was 105 degrees and the winds on the tower - which is higher than the Statue of Liberty, the Space Needle and Reunion Tower - were blowing 35-40 miles an hour. The worker had climbed up to approximately 760 feet, took his harness off, and climbed out on to a platform that was six feet away from the center of the tower. The platform was the equivalent in size to a coffee table.

"That rescue was one of the most memorable highlights that I have in the Fire Service," Wisdom said of the tower rescue. "It was very satisfying to see how the firefighters used their training and equipment to make that rescue. I received emails and calls about that incident from all over the country, from other fire departments. It was also very satisfying to see the firefighters involved recognized by our mayor and city council as well as receiving the Award for Valor from the Texas Fire Chief's Association."

The City's ISO (Insurance Service Office) rating has improved from a 5/9 in 1998 to what is expected to be a 2/2Y in 2016 (the scale is 1-10 with 1 being the best). ISO ratings are based on a City's fire stations, personnel, water supply system, code enforcement, fire prevention, and communications (radio system/alarm system), so this achievement is a team effort that encompasses several departments.

After almost 35 years, Wisdom will now enjoy spending time with his family, which includes wife Rhonda who works for the Burleson Independent School District, as well as his son Brad and his wife Stacey, and their two sons, 10-year-old Caden (the chief's best buddy) and 7-week-old Nathan. The private pilot will also have more time to fly.

"It is very difficult to leave a service in which I have been so entrenched in over the past 34-1/2 years, however I truly believe that it's time for me to depart, spend time with family and seek other endeavors," Chief Wisdom said.

The City is currently seeking applications for the next fire chief.