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ALERT TOP STORY

First responder celebrated at appreciation luncheon

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Aug 24, 2023

HARTSVILLE, S.C. — Businesses and organizations from Hartsville and Darlington County came together Wednesday to recognize the men and women who keep their communities safe.

Members of the Hartsville Police Department, the Hartsville Fire Department, the Darlington County Fire District, the Darlington County Sheriff's Office, and Darlington County Emergency Medical Services were treated to a meal catered by Beasley's BBQ Catering and More as part of the First Responders Appreciation Luncheon held at the Butler Academy Auditorium. The event was presented by the Greater Hartsville Chamber of Commerce and Carolina Pines Regional Medical Center.

Following introductory remarks by Murphy Monk, director of the Greater Hartsville Chamber of Commerce, each of the first responder organizations was recognized.

Hartsville Fire Chief Jeff Burr began his presentation by sharing some of the history of the department.

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“The Hartsville Fire Department started April 6, 1908,” said Burr. “They started with 32 volunteers, 500 feet of hose and two handrails to fight fires. Look what we have evolved into today – multi-million dollar fire trucks and equipment that costs hundreds of thousands of dollars. We have 17 full-time firefighters and 14 volunteers. It’s all to protect our citizens and our businesses.”

Burr said the department responded to 1,482 calls in 2022.

He said that aside from responding to fires, the department provides many others services, including emergency medical response, severe weather response, boat fires, transporting burn victims, fire prevention education, smoke detector checks, toy drives, safety at community events, child seat installation and, yes, rescuing cats from trees.

Darlington County Fire Chief Rick Flowers spoke about the professionalism of firefighters.

“Whether they are full-time, volunteer, paid on-call, or fire brigade, they are all professionals who are well trained,” said Flowers. “Most of them do it for very little monetary gain. They just love what they do.”

Flowers said the big takeaway from being a firefighter is being able to help someone who is in need.

“People ask all the time, ‘Why do you do it?’” Flowers said. “We do it because it’s the best job in the world, whether you get paid to do it or not. It’s the best job on earth. Yes, its dangerous and physically and mentally draining, but we get to make a difference in someone’s life.”

Hartsville Interim Police Chief Byron Snellgrove said that in the three months he has been in Hartsville he has quickly discovered it is a wonderful city in which to live.

“This is a very unique place,” Snellgrove said. “I don’t generally find that the police department has a much support from the community and the city as this one does.”

Snellgrove said building a relationship with the community is vital to policing. To cultivate that relationship, the department and its officers have to get out in the community and talk to people and get to know them.

“We want to become part of the community and we want the community to be a part of us,” he said.

Darlington County Sheriff James Hudson spoke about what he called the “Golden Rule” of law enforcement.

“We know have to have the public to help us do our job,” said Hudson. “Without you the public, our job is far more difficult.”

He said it is imperative that the Sheriff’s Office and its deputies serve everyone equally, with no exceptions.

“We preach to our deputies every day about being professional, being courteous, and treating everyone as if it was someone in your family,” said Hudson.

Hudson closed his presentation by announcing that he intends to run for re-election in 2024.

The final speaker was Steve Thompson, the training and compliance officer for Darlington County EMS.

“EMS is far from simply being a ride to the hospital,” Thompson said. “It’s a coordinated response to emergency medical care carried out by highly-trained individuals. They provide critical care in what is often one of a person’s most vulnerable moments.”

He said has seen firsthand many of the advances made in emergency medicine, all of which have made a first responder’s job much easier and, more important, has saved lives.

“Choosing a career as an EMS means coming face-to-face and experiencing tragic events is inevitable,” Thompson said. “It’s simply part of the job.”

He said the EMS profession is incredibly rewarding, but it is not for everyone.

“It takes particular kind of individual who can handle what may be a life-or-death situation without losing their composure,” he said. “It’s not an easy job, but it certainly does have its rewards.”

Sponsors for the event included Darlington Raceway, the S.C. Governor’s School for Science and Mathematics, the McGee Financial Group, SPC Credit Union, Patriot Chevrolet, S.C. Rep. Cody Mitchell, Raceway Chevrolet, North Industrial Machine, CareSouth Carolina, Sonoco Products, Wilson Senior Care, the Butler Heritage Foundation, Coker University, the Darlington County School District, Doc’s Humidor, Cigar, Wine and Jazz Lounge, Dedicated Community Bank, Driggers Law Firm, Duke Energy, Fifth Street Cleaners, Florence-Darlington Technical College, LOL Steam Center, Palmetto Brick, Red Fox Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Standing Pines Campground and RV Resort, and The Citizen’s Bank.