Walter M. Summerville

Kernersville Fire Rescue Department – North Carolina

Career Chief
Date of Death: November 7, 2012
Age: 55

Walter M. Summerville III was the fire chief for the Kernersville Fire Rescue Department. He joined the department in 1987 as a captain. During his tenure, Walt was promoted through the ranks, serving as district commander, battalion chief, and assistant chief. In February 2008, he was promoted to fire chief. Walt believed it was his duty as a senior officer to be the best firefighter possible, not only for himself but for the department. In an effort to set a good example for the staff and to promote further education, he obtained the designation of Certified Fire Officer (CFO) in March 2010 and Executive Fire Officer (EFO) in April 2012. He was a dedicated community leader who felt it was his responsibility to ensure the safety of its residents.

Walt was born August 2, 1957, to Walter M. Summerville, Jr. and Tucker Summerville. He was a graduate of Admiral Farragut Academy, Class of 1975, and graduated from Appalachian State University in 1979. Walt found his passion for the fire service while he was a photojournalist in Boone, North Carolina, and was asked to take photographs of a live burn. The instructor proceeded to build a large fire to enhance the photo opportunity, when suddenly the front door blew open and Walt was thrown 15 feet off the front porch. Once he stood up and made sure his cameras weren't broken, he thought it was the coolest thing he had ever seen. He said most people would run away from that situation, but he found his new calling. Shortly after this incident, he became a part-time firefighter for the Boone Fire Department.

Walt will always be known for his sarcastic sense of humor and warm, devilish smile that could brighten any room. No one loved his family more than he loved his wife, Cheryl, and his daughters, Jennifer and Emily. He was a true gem and will be missed more than words can express. His legacy of honor, duty, and compassion will live forever in the lives that he touched.