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HFD Chief Bennett to step away for national nonprofit position

HARRISONBURG, Va. – Chief Ian Bennett is stepping away from the Harrisonburg Fire Department. But don't think that means he's done playing an active role in a community he has come to love.

Bennett, who has served as HFD's chief since 2016, announced this week that he would be leaving the department April 1, 2020, for "the only job I'd ever consider leaving for" – a position with the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation. In his capacity, Bennett will assist families and fire departments across the nation to help them heal and recover following the death of a firefighter in the line of duty.

It's a great honor for someone who has dedicated his life to fire service, as his work will send Bennett around the country as a compassionate voice in a time of need. But that doesn't mean the end of him giving back to a community he's served for so long. You'll still see him taking part in events like the Free Pizza-Free Smoke Alarm night, or in the stands at a JMU game.

"I am very pleased that I will be able to remain in the area and continuing being part of this great community," Bennett, who will work from his Shenandoah Valley home when not traveling, said. "Harrisonburg is a supportive, caring city, and our interactions with citizens are continuously outstanding. I will always appreciate how they have embraced all of us at the fire department and have made this an incredible journey for me personally."

While Bennett's announcement was met with sadness by City officials this week, Harrisonburg City Manager Eric D. Campbell knows many will benefit from someone who gave so much to our community.

"I appreciate everything Chief Bennett has brought to the position of fire chief, especially the professionalism and enthusiasm he brings to work every day," Campbell said. "His dedication to our citizens and their safety is unparalleled, and he will leave behind some very big boots to fill. He is a fire chief who has always done whatever is needed to support his department and his team – whether that means picking up a hose or spending hours in a budget meeting. While I will miss his impact on all that we do, I am proud he is continuing his public service supporting the families of fallen firefighters."

Bennett first joined HFD in 1987 as a firefighter before gaining experience in a handful of departments across the country. He returned in 2008 as deputy chief at HFD and was promoted to chief eight years later. In that time, Bennett has seen his



HFD Chief Ian Bennett (above) will leave the department in April to join the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation and assist families and departments across the nation.

city and department grow, and he's proud of all HFD has done to ensure Harrisonburg residents receive the best fire service possible. Bennett has focused closely on pushing for advanced life support tools, adding more paramedic-trained firefighters than the City has ever had, increased training for personnel, the most up-to-date apparatus and safety equipment available, and utilizing technology to enhance operations.

Bennett also has brought community engagement to the forefront of his 100-person department, working with his team to develop new outreach to residents and strengthening that bond between firefighter and neighbor. The department holds a number of community events throughout the year and has increased the amount of education opportunities staff takes part in at local schools.

It's all made possible by a dedicated group that Bennett will have a hard time saying goodbye to.

"I'm proud of the individuals that make up the Harrisonburg Fire Department – we have some of the best trained, most competent and abled firefighters I have ever worked with," Bennett said. "We just have some great people who work here and do an outstanding job of serving the city every single day. I can't say enough about them."

And for the next person who fills his shoes, Bennett knows that person will be inheriting an incredible team.

"You will have an outstanding group of individuals dedicated to the safety of this community," Bennett said. "Embrace the culture they have created here, because this core culture is outstanding."

City officials will begin a nation-wide search for a new HFD director in the new year. More information on that search will be available in the coming weeks.

The City of Harrisonburg is centrally located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It is home to approximately 54,000 people. More information about the City of Harrisonburg is available online at www.HarrisonburgVA.gov.



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