



Alton firefighter Capt. Grabner retires after 25 years from his 'second family'

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - Capt. Walt Grabner has been an Alton resident all his life and for 25 years, he served the Alton Fire Department. On Thursday morning, he worked his last hour as a firefighter and has retired.

“I was born and raised right here in Alton and lived in Upper Alton across the street from Firehouse No. 4,” he said. “I got to know some of those guys being across the street. I took the test to be a firefighter at age 30 and didn’t get hired until I was 32 and I have been here ever since.”

Grabner said he considers the Alton Fire Department team members as “a second family.” Battalion Chief Brad Sweetman and Grabner have worked the same shift for 10 years and Sweetman agrees that the firefighters are a “tight-knit group.”

“He has always been my station captain at the other station and anything I have ever needed over time it was always done right,” Sweetman said. “He made my life easier on the other side of town. He is a good man. He has had a good career and we are all happy he is healthy and able to go on to the next chapter in life.”

Walt’s brother, Kenneth, was also an Alton firefighter, who retired five years ago. Walt Grabner started his professional career after college graduation in the banking field for about six years, then he took the firefighter’s test and ultimately became part of the team.

Walt Grabner said his time as an Alton firefighter has gone fast and it hard to believe it is now 25 years since he started.

“I know I had a goal of when I was going to retire and now that it has gotten closer it is hard to believe it is here,” he said. “I am glad I am still healthy and I will be able to do things with my wife and kids that I enjoy. Firefighters miss a lot of events with out family.

“We often have to work on Christmas, Thanksgiving and my kids were active and my wife had a lot of the responsibility of taking them to practices and games. I am looking forward to spending a lot of time with my family.”

Walt and his wife, Debbie, have been married for 32 years and he describes her as “the love of my life.”

“We met when I was a senior in college,” he said. “We dated while she was in college and after she became a nurse we were married. She has made a lot of sacrifices for me.”

Grabner has been part of the Alton firefighters who battled some of the worst blazes in city history and always realized next to him were fellow team members who would always look out for him in those difficult times. The devastating Williams Office fire was one of the most difficult fires he remembers fighting over the years.

Grabner said there was never a morning he didn’t want to come to work over the years.

“I always enjoyed being a firefighter,” he said on his last day in uniform.