Play him out: Alton Deputy Fire Chief retires after 27 years of service, was gifted guitar from department

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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Mark R. Harris
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ALTON – The Alton Fire Department wished one of its best a fond retirement last Friday.

Deputy Chief Mark Harris served his last day of duty Friday before embarking on retirement. Harris has achieved every rank in the department short of chief, and current Alton Fire Chief Bernie Sebold said Harris has been involved in every facet of the department during his 27 years of service. He said Harris worked as a paramedic, firefighter, engineer, captain, battalion chief and ended his career in Alton at the highly-respected rank of deputy chief.

"Personally, I'm very grateful for his dedication to our profession, but also the friendship he gave me over the 23 years we worked together," Sebold said.

That friendship was something Harris expanded through the entire department, Sebold said. Early in his career, Harris became involved with the Firefighters Local #1255 Union. In that role, he worked with his fellow firefighters, management and the city to negotiate contracts as well as build and strengthen bonds between labor and management.

As a deputy chief, however, Harris entered those negotiations on the side of management, where Sebold said he still continued his missions and purpose of fair deals and building bridges and bonds between the union and the city.

"He was very passionate about the fire service and family atmosphere," he said. "Having everyone feel welcome in the firehouse was certainly a goal in his career. The positive atmosphere he had on the fire department will be missed."

Sebold said Harris is a private individual and said he did not know how he would be enjoying his retirement. He did say Harris was looking forward to spending more time with his grandson and learning how to play guitar. Instead of a plaque for his retirement, many of his fellow firefighters funded a guitar for his retirement, so he would have a way to learn to play.