

# Honoring a Hero: Tearful Fire Chief Remembers Fallen Firefighter

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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## **SEE VIDEO:**

**GODFREY** – A press conference was held regarding the death of 37-year-old Captain Jacob Ringering of the Godfrey Fire Protection District Wednesday afternoon.

Ringering was killed after a brick wall of a home fully engulfed in flames collapsed in the 4600 block of Culp Lane in Bethalto. A fellow firefighter, Luke Warner, also of the Godfrey Fire Protection District, was injured in the fire and his injuries caused him to be airlifted to a St. Louis hospital in stable condition. Two other firefighters from the

Bethalto Fire Department were also reported to be injured by a volunteer with that department. Those two



departments were among many other area firefighters responding to that blaze Tuesday evening for mutual aid. He was pronounced dead at Alton Memorial Hospital surrounded by his fellow first responders

Godfrey Fire Protection District Chief Erik Kambarian described Ringering as “gold,” saying everyone wanted to train with him and be on duty with him, so they could learn from him. He said Ringering's efforts often attracted people to the Godfrey Fire Protection District due to his dedication and professionalism. He asked for dignity and respect for Ringering's wife and three small children during this time of grieving. He also asked for support from the community for his department, saying they were definitely in need.

“It doesn't have to be cookies or brownies,” a tearful Kambarian said. “It can be a thank you – just a simple thank you. We appreciate that just a simple thank you.”



As for Warner, Kambarian said he was recovering from surgery after being transported to a St. Louis area hospital via chopper. He said Warner suffered two broken legs as well as other non-life-threatening injuries. He said Warner would have a long recovery time but hoped he could return to the department in healthy shape to return to duty in the future.

Arrangements for Ringering's funeral services as a first responder fallen in the line of duty are being discussed by his family as well as the Illinois Association of Fire Chiefs and the Associated Firefighters of Illinois.

Kambarian thanked the neighboring departments for assisting the Godfrey Fire Protection District during their time of need, especially thanking Edwardsville Fire Chief Rick Welle and Alton Fire Chief Bernie Sebold.

“As firefighters, we know the dangers of the job, but we never expect to lose somebody,” Kambarian said during the press conference.

The nature of the fire and the wall collapse incident are currently under investigation by the Madison County Sheriff's Office as well as the Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal. Kambarian could not comment to the safety of the family involved in the blaze, nor could he comment on the fire's origin. Reporters on the scene said the family was able to escape, but pets may have been stuck in the burning structure. More details will be released as they become available.



Ringering wanted to be a firefighter since he was a small child, Madison County Scanner Page Administrator, and Riverbender.com correspondent Chris Rhodes said. This was verified by several comments on social media following Ringering's death. His father even served as the East Alton Fire Chief.

East Alton Mayor Joe Silkwood attended the press conference Wednesday. He said Ringering was an East Alton resident before joining with the Godfrey Fire Protection District in 2010. He was promoted to the rank of Captain in 2014, and has been instrumental in training several members of the Godfrey Fire Protection District ever since.

Not only was Capt. Ringering's father, Larry Ringering, the East Alton Fire Chief, he was also the head of Madison County's Emergency Management Services. Silkwood said Capt. Ringering's grandfather was also a firefighter.

“He was one of the best,” Silkwood said.

During his emotional speech to the press and public, Kambarian said a “Jake” was often a slang term in the firefighting community as a “good firefighter.” In the case of Capt. Ringering, his first name being Jake was not a coincidence, Kambarian assured. He said Capt. Ringering was the perfect example of who a firefighter should strive to be.

He leaves behind a wife and three young children, according to a release from BackStoppers, Inc., an organization which provides ongoing as well as immediate support to the families of first responders who fall in the line of duty. They serve the needs of approximately 80 families with as many as 65 dependents through fundraising and community donations. Families of first responders killed in the line of duty are given \$10,000 to use for whatever they need through the organization upon news of that death.

Many fellow first responders in the area joined in a final salute procession for Capt. Ringering Tuesday night on Godfrey Road. Godfrey Mayor Mike McCormick described Ringering as a “well-respected professional,” saying he left behind “hard boots to fill.”

When asked what future tributes to Ringering could be done by the village, McCormick said it was too soon to comment on ideas, but promised “something would happen” to honor the village's fallen hero.

