

Supporting first responders crucial to WACF

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This week's installment of '40 Stories for 40 years' focuses on support of area first responders with emphasis on the Watertown Police Department and Watertown Fire Rescue.)

By Julianne Endres

Watertown Area Community Foundation

While superheroes continue to break box office records with their heroism on the big screen, the Watertown Area Community Foundation takes this opportunity to honor some of our real local heroes.

In its 40 years, WACF has awarded more than \$200,000 in grants to first responders such as the Watertown Fire Department, Watertown Police Department, Codington County Sheriff Department, Codington County Search & Rescue and the Red Cross.

Those grants have supported



Courtesy photo

A firefighter crawls under smoke at a Watertown training facility that benefitted from a \$25,000 Watertown Area Community Foundation grant.

anything from training and equipment to support for the WPD Explorers program, new dogs for the K9 unit, and even glow sticks for trick-or-treaters on

Halloween.

The impact of those dollars ultimately supports the safety and well-being of the greater Watertown area as our first responders

get the call and jump into action to provide assistance at the scene of an emergency. Many times their actions mean saving a life, a building or quite literally, the day.

In 2018, Watertown police officers responded to more than 22,100 calls for service, an average of more than 60 calls every day of the year. Arrests were up from 2017 and were primarily related to drugs and alcohol. There are 37 sworn officers who work 12-hour shifts 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. for 24/7 coverage.

Community support makes their job a little easier, said Chief Lee McPeck. Programs such as the Explorers, Camp Chance and D.A.R.E. all have a part, too.

"Without the overwhelming community support that we receive these programs would not be possible," he said. "This is a very caring community, and we

all want the best for our kids and all community members.”

Like many WACF grants, those to Watertown Fire Rescue from the foundation are still benefiting Watertown today. In 2006, an \$18,750 grant helped begin the Public Access Defibrillators (PAD) program. The goal was to get defibrillators into the community where needed at an affordable price, said Fire Chief Doug Kranz

In 2013, a \$25,000 grant assisted with the start-up of the Watertown Fire Rescue Regional Training Center. The funds were directly used for the first project of the training center. The center is mostly used by

local firefighters and students in the med/fire rescue program at Lake Area Technical Institute. In addition, four or five training sessions are held each year for area firefighters who come from 60-70 miles away.

Jan DeBerg, WACF executive director, said first-response organizations have always appreciated support from the WACF.

“Regardless of the monetary support, I don’t think we can ever say ‘thank you’ to them enough for their selfless service,” she said. “They are our neighbors, friends and family, but much like a superhero, they are out there saving our little corner of the world every day.”

