

Springfield Township fire Chief Ron Henry retiring after 39 years

Lou Whitmire, Mansfield News Journal Published 3:37 p.m. ET May 23, 2019

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Springfield Township fire chief Ron Henry is retiring at the end of May after almost 40 years of service. (Photo: Jason J. Molyet/News Journal)

ONTARIO - Springfield Township fire Chief Ron Henry is retiring on May 30 after 39 years with the fire department.

"Every local firefighter who knows him knows how dedicated and proactive he is," said longtime friend and retired Mansfield fire Chief Mike Bailey.

"We're going to have a big loss; he has a lot of knowledge," Bailey said.

Henry started as a volunteer firefighter with Springfield Township at the age of 18 while a senior at Ontario High School in 1980.

His father Robert was a charter member of the then all-volunteer fire department, joining in 1948. He moved to a new house which was considered outside Ontario and had to leave the job after five years.

But Henry, who was born and raised in Ontario, said his brother Mike is who got him interested in becoming a firefighter. His brother joined the department as a volunteer in the 1970s and stayed 14 years.

"And I hung out with my brother at the station," he said from the fire station on Lexington-Springmill Road Thursday.

Henry also served as a firefighter with the Mansfield Fire Department from 1984 to 1991 at the same time he was a volunteer firefighter with Springfield Township. He left the Mansfield fire department to become chief of the Springfield Fire Department in 1991.

The softspoken and modest Henry has seen a lot of changes over the years, including transitioning a department of volunteers to today's combination of part-time, full-time paid firefighters and volunteer firefighters.

"That started phasing in in 1995," he said. Currently there are 40 firefighters on the Springfield Township Fire Department roster.

"It's been my life, so it's bittersweet," he said of looking ahead to his last official day on the job. Henry may join the Washington Township Fire Department as a volunteer. "I don't plan on giving it up entirely," he said.

Henry said Ontario and Springfield Township have grown over the past 39 years and that has made the job challenging and also exciting.

He recalled going to his first fire on Matthes Drive where he was told to put on an airpack and follow the hose into a smoky residence. Now new firefighters receive so much training before doing something like that.

Henry said he is proud of the employees of Springfield Township Fire Department and the fact that the department began serving its residents with emergency medical services in 2005.

Mansfield Fire Department:: [Holds ceremony for 4 employees \(/story/news/2019/03/05/mansfield-fire-department-recognizes-4-employees/3053517002/\)](https://www.mansfieldfire.com/news/2019/03/05/mansfield-fire-department-recognizes-4-employees/3053517002/)

He said as with most fire departments, EMS runs make up 80 percent of the calls.

"We have good paramedics and good support from the community and it's very satisfying to provide state of the art services. We feel like it's making the community better," he said.

"From Day 1 it was my mission," he said. Springfield Township was one of the last local fire departments to do EMS, he added.

Henry was an advanced EMT and graduated from Columbus State University in 1985 in fire science. He has dedicated his life to fire service and the community.

He was awarded the Ohio Fire Service Valor Award by the Ohio Department of Commerce for crawling on his hands and knees through a burning house on Oct. 6, 1985 in an attempt to save the life of a 4-year-old boy while serving as a Mansfield firefighter.

The Valor Award is presented to firefighters who save or attempt to save the lives of others at the risk of their own life, according to a News Journal archives story.

Henry was one of the firefighters riding on the department's only rescue squad which responded to the Sunday morning fire at 363 Seventh Ave. Henry and another firefighter made a two-foot opening through a door that was blocked by a bookcase, and Henry, crawling on his hands and knees, found the boy near the sofa in the smokey living room.

Bailey, who was with Henry on the devastating, fiery call, said Henry could not see in the smoke-filled interior of the house but was able to find the child because he heard him.

"He went in without a hose line," Bailey said, Bailey, adding that he will never forget that rescue.

Henry pulled the child alive from the burning house and handed the child to Bailey at the door.

"He did a heck of a job that day," Bailey said.

Despite Henry's efforts, the child died from burns over most of his body.

Bailey described Henry as "a very passionate, professional man who never forgot his roots."

Henry's list of accomplishments as fire chief at Springfield Township is extensive:

- Served on the 911 Advisory Committee for 15-plus years, serving as chair for 10 years.
- Was an early advocate of Emergency Medical Dispatch, now a national best practice that all dispatchers in Ohio are medically trained. He proposed and pushed for this as far back as 2010, but Richland County declined the needed funding; it is now in place because it became state mandated in 2018.
- Spearheaded adoption of 10 and 20 minute "benchmarks" (status checks), emergency/evacuation tones.

- Facilitated, along with township trustees, the construction of two new fire stations that were models for the area when built.
- As then chairman of the Richland County Fire Chiefs Association, spearheaded and mostly personally developed the county's MABAS (Mutual Aid Box Alarm System) program in 2010 in which there are predetermined responses, if needed, from neighboring departments.

Henry also is a member of the Tri-County Critical Incident Stress Debriefing team, which responds to EMS and fire agencies whose personnel have experienced a particularly traumatic call.

Henry said one of the things on his personal bucket list is to stand on Abbey Road in London, England, and get a photo of himself. The famous crosswalk, featured on The Beatles "Abbey Road" album cover, is a popular place for a photo for any Beatles fan.

"I like music but I don't play," the chief said.

He and his wife Angie Hoptry Henry reside in Washington Township.

Henry said his wife is a paramedic instructor and a licensed counselor.

In retirement, he plans to catch up on a lot of things that need to be done and to spend time with his wife. He also loves to travel.

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