

LVFPD chief restores traditions to department

By Kathryn Reed

Tradition is in large part what the fire service was built upon. It is those rituals that help bind the men and women who put the uniform on each day.

Lake Valley Fire Protection District, though, has been lacking those ceremonial rites. That's all about to change.

Tim Alameda, who became chief last year, immediately knew he wanted to create an honor guard and reward his staff with commendations. These are some of the traditions he is introducing to the department even though they are the norm so many other places.

"This will probably be one of the most important things I will do in my career here," Alameda said of creating the honor guard. "It's a beautiful, gorgeous tradition. I'm just tickled to think I could bring that home."

It is considered an honor to be chosen to be in this guard. The U.S., California and Lake Valley Fire flags are part of the ensemble. Another person gives the orders. They present the colors at official events, including funerals.

This summer the crew will be sent to a special training in Carson City to learn what to do in a full honor guard ceremony, which will include a mock funeral.

Another job of the honor guard is to make sure everyone's uniform is correct.

The chief didn't have his full dress uniform yet when it was time to attend Zach McAllister's services at Sierra-at-Tahoe last month. He was going to wear a white shirt and tie. Honor

guard members wouldn't let him leave the station until they pieced together the uniform.

"They insisted their fire chief be in the right uniform to pay tribute to this young man," Alameda told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The other team Alameda has assembled is the commendation group.

"What that means is if someone does something out of the ordinary, really special, then any firefighter in the organization can nominate them for a commendation," Alameda explained.

The chief, though, is not involved in who gets what. That is entirely up to the select group, which is made up various ranks within the department as well as a board member.

The first award ceremony will be in the first quarter of this year. Mostly it will be from events in 2016, though it's possible if something significant happened in 2015 that it may be included.

Most of the awards are a ribbon that then goes on the individual's dress uniform.

The awards include:

Valor – This is going beyond the call of duty; where the risk is beyond the normal scope of the person's job. "We don't just hand that out," Alameda said.

Lifesaver medal – Where someone's life was saved because the employee either did something dangerous, technical or extraordinary. This goes beyond the routine lifesaving firefighters/paramedics do every day. "It's when you get the patient to the hospital and the doctor says if you didn't do what you did, the patient would have died."

Merit – This can be awarded to employees and the public. It is

the highest level award a civilian can receive. It's about hard work. It can be hard to get the pin. Sometimes a letter of recognition is given instead of the ribbon.

Fire chiefs commendation – A plaque is given to the individual by the chief officers for doing something special, something that changed the dynamics of a situation.

Field save – This deals with CPR specifically. “You get the person to the hospital and that person then walks out of the hospital,” Alameda said.

Campaign ribbon – This is for significant events like last fall's Emerald Fire. The first responders will receive a green and white ribbon to wear. This summer for the 10-year anniversary of the Angora Fire the department will be awarding ribbons for that fire to those who were involved in the initial attack.

“These rich traditions are so important,” Alameda said.