



Peter Zuzga, FREEMAN STAFF

Lt. Jon Hauboldt of the town of Brookfield Fire Department credits his departing chief for giving him the training and tools to do his job. The family of Aurelia Sharping considers Hauboldt a hero for his efforts to save the 95-year-old woman during a March 13 fire.

Rule forces fire chief to quit

Personnel policy causes Firnröhr's departure

By Kay Murphy Nolan
Special to the Freeman

TOWN OF BROOKFIELD — A firefighter whose dedication amazed the family of a woman who perished in a house fire credits his chief for providing both inspiration and manpower when it was needed that day.

But as of Monday, Chief Ron Firnröhr no longer works for the town of Brookfield Fire Department.

Firnröhr is a full-time firefighter for the city of Milwaukee, which recently ruled that its personnel cannot volunteer for other departments.

Firnröhr, 29, said the decision was made so that firefighters wouldn't file disability claims for heart and lung injuries suffered while fighting fires in other communities.

But as chief, he said his duties in the town of Brookfield were strictly administrative, and he hates to leave. He takes comfort in having brought ideas to the town department. For one thing, he enacted a minimum six-person staffing policy.

It was needed on March 13. When the early afternoon call

came in that the Ken Sharping home on Harmony Circle was engulfed in flames, the town of Brookfield Fire Department had just responded to a car fire and an auto accident, tying up three firefighters and one fire engine.

"Previous to November when I became chief, there's a good possibility the entire shift would have been at Waukesha Memorial Hospital," said Firnröhr.

But Lt. Jon Hauboldt, who was in charge that day, and two partners raced to the fire. They searched for occupants, feeling along the floors and walls in the black smoke.

Driven back twice, Hauboldt ordered a hole cut in the roof to allow heat to escape. He went back inside, trying to reach a back room where the flames were concentrated. The heat — estimated at more than 1,000 degrees — melted Hauboldt's face mask and burned through his gloves. He was sent to the hospital with second-degree burns on his cheek and hands.

He later learned that Sharping's 95-year-old mother, Aurelia Sharping, had been found dead in the back room.



T.J. VanHaag photo

Ron Firnröhr has resigned as fire chief of the town of Brookfield Fire Department. Firnröhr was forced to resign because he also is a firefighter in Milwaukee.

When Hauboldt returned to the fire station the next day, he was greeted by cheers from fellow firefighters and flowers

from the Sharping family. But he didn't feel like a hero.

Hauboldt, 20, went back to the scene and quietly joined a group of firefighters helping the family salvage items.

"I didn't say anything at first," said Hauboldt. "I was real hesitant. This family had sustained two major losses: their home and a family member. I thought they might be pretty angry."

To his surprise, the Sharping family praised him.

"We were very touched that he came back the next day to help us," said Laura Grenier of New Berlin, Aurelia Sharping's granddaughter.

"I think Hauboldt went beyond the call of duty," said Ken Sharping. "Whatever he did, it's certainly appreciated."

Firnröhr said Hauboldt "really stuck his neck out to save life and property."

Hauboldt said Firnröhr's supportive management style encouraged the teamwork that came together during the fire.

Now Firnröhr and his management style are gone.