

By ELLY GRIMM

• Leader & Times

“I don’t think we’ve ever had a ‘typical’ day and that’s what I love about it – it’s always different.”

This from Kelly Kirk, fire chief with the Liberal Fire Department after he was asked “What is a typical day in the life of a firefighter?”

On any given day, the fire department is kept busy – the department averages three to five calls and they’re not all fire calls. The department also respond to other situations including downed power lines, hazardous materials, and it also has two trained Emergency Medical Technicians that responds to all medical calls.

The month of March is also known as Fire Prevention Month and Kirk says that the department is preparing to give classes and spread the word about fire safety in the next several weeks. He said he considers the prevention classes a high priority.

“I think it’s the most important part of our job because the way that we’re staffed, if a fire starts and gets to any significant size, the damage done and the potential for injury or harm to citizens is always there,” he said. “The best thing that we can do as a fire department is try to stop a fire before it starts.”

Their prevention efforts were present at the Children’s Healthy Fun Fair on Saturday. They

handed out prevention materials such as coloring books for children and other materials that families will be able to use in their homes.

“We want to inform the public as much as we can about fire safety so anything we can do to help out that’s what we’re trying to do,” said fire inspector Cody Regier.

Kirk said that the department's efforts at prevention education are mostly aimed at local students from USD 480, saying that the department works with the district to coordinate all of them. Their education courses with the students are gradual, starting with kindergarten and first grade-aged children.

The department starts by introducing the younger students to what a firefighter looks like in their gear and Kirk said that with the older students they start to grasp the idea of the dangers of fire and how to create a home escape plan.

“Second and third grade is probably our biggest push of the year, but we try to do it all year-round any chance we get,” Kirk said.

While March is known as Fire Prevention Month, Kirk said the department's efforts on prevention are mainly focused during National Fire Prevention Week in early October, which commemorates the Great Chicago Fire from 1871.

Kirk said with his classes, he always emphasizes how fast a fire can travel, pointing out statistics that say more people die from smoke inhalation than from contact with the fire.

“We have a training video for firefighters called a flashover video and that’s when all the contents in a room burst into flames simultaneously and it’s basically an unsurvivable event,” he said. “What this video demonstrates is they start a small fire in an upholstered couch and let it burn and then somewhere between 3.5 to 4 minutes the room flashes over, that’s how fast fire progresses.”

Kirk says that he wants the community not to see the department as just an emergency response team but also as a customer service agency, saying the department is willing to help citizens with prevention measures if they need it.

“If people have questions about fire safety in the home – it can be anything from if you keep the fire extinguisher in the kitchen to what type of smoke detectors and CO detectors to have in your house, we’d be glad to talk to you and we’ll even come to your house and see if everything’s as it should be if you ask,” he said. “We try to be as much service as we possibly can between the emergency responses.”