

By JESSICA CRAWFORD

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Though a bottle of champagne wasn't used, the city presented a unique system of "christening" its newest piece of firefighting equipment Monday night.

Nearly a year ago today, the Liberal City Commission approved the purchase of a Rosenbauer Central States 1,250 gallon per minute pumper on a 2010 Freightliner chassis for the Liberal Fire Department at a cost of \$280,000. The apparatus was officially introduced to the community and put into service during a "Wet Down Ceremony" Monday evening.

Liberal Fire Chief Kelly Kirk felt such a ceremony was not only important to the department, but the community as well.

"We could have just as easily brought this truck in here and parked it, put the equipment on it and put it into service without any fanfare and just let it start its career with the Liberal Fire Department," he said. "But, I personally feel like it is important that we do a ceremony like this and give it some formality in order to acknowledge a couple of things.

"First of all, to acknowledge the commitment of the community and the commission to fire protection here in the city," he continued. "This truck sitting outside here that we are putting into service is a \$280,000 piece of equipment. It is a quarter of a million dollar investment in fire protection for the City of Liberal and I am proud to say that the day we brought it back to Liberal the truck was paid for. That is because, in large part, the foresight and commitment of the current city commission and previous city commissions to place funds into a special fire equipment line item and not just have to do a mill increase or budget this all at once. In essence, we saved up for a lot of years to buy this fire truck and when it showed up here we paid for it and it is ours, and it should serve the community for 20 to 25 years to come.

"The second reason I think this is important is that there are a lot of big ticket items in the city's inventory, but to me, a fire truck holds a special place," he added. "The fire truck is not just another piece of equipment to (the firefighters), it is going to be an important part of their lives and something they take with them."

Kirk was proud to give a bit of history on Engines 18 and 19 that were both purchased in 1991. Although they are aging, he and his department have felt a connection to the units that have been in service for nearly two decades.

"These trucks are now nearing their 20th birthday," he said. "They look really good on the outside, but I think the guys that are working here today can tell you, they have got some wear on them.

"It is kind of like watching your kids grow," he explained. "They change so gradually, all of the sudden you don't realize it and they are teenagers. Over the years, sure, they have lost a little performance, but they are still good firefighting equipment, and we will continue on with them for a little ways."

After a bit of research, Kirk felt the Wet Down Ceremony would be an appropriate way to enter such an important piece of equipment into service for the City of Liberal.

“I wanted to do a little christening ceremony,” Kirk said. “I did some Internet searches and found out on the East Coast they do what they call a ‘Wet Down Ceremony’ where the apparatus that is going out of service or a neighboring department will bring their apparatus and come in and wet down the truck then back it back into the department while it is still dripping.

“We will dry the truck, park it in here and as soon as it is dry,” he added, “We will get on the radio and officially put the truck in service to start its career with the fire department. It is going to be Engine 17.”

Not only was Mayor Joe Denoyer on hand to aid Kirk in introducing the apparatus, he was also asked to wet down the new truck to symbolically begin its career with the city.

“It a special occasion,” Denoyer said. “We have a beautiful piece of equipment out there – on behalf of the city, wow. I believe we have the cream of the crop of firefighters in the entire state. We know that Liberal can sleep easy tonight knowing you guys are on watch. We would just like to thank you for your dedication, your service and your unprecedented diligence.

“We don’t entrust a quarter of a million dollar piece of equipment to just anybody,” he concluded. “With a fire crew like we have here, it is easy to make that decision.”