

Dinner honors fire chief's memory

By Chris Sykes Staff Writer, Orange Transcript 11/25

Once again, the members of the Orange Fire Department are inviting members of the city community to come to their house for Thanksgiving dinner on Thursday from 11 a. m. to 2 p. m.

Their house, specifically, is the fire station headquarters on Lincoln Avenue across from Central Playground and Orange Middle School. It's a well-known fact that fire houses are firefighters' home away from home throughout the year. This is due to their irregular work schedules, which require them to eat, sleep and cook for themselves on the premises for extended periods of time, in addition to maintaining their equipment and staying ever-ready to respond to emergencies at a moment's notice.

That being the case, the rank and file firefighters of FMBA Local 10 and their superior officers said it just makes sense for them to literally "serve" members of the community a hearty Thanksgiving meal on Thursday in the same building they use to serve them and the rest of the city.

"All are welcome who don't have a place to go on Thanksgiving," said Firefighter Derrick Brown, the department's community relations coordinator. "This is the fourth year we've been doing this and it brings together family and friends to come out and do something good for people who don't have the means or where withal to do it for themselves. We're in our house here at the fire department station/firehouse headquarters on Lincoln Avenue, and we're inviting people from the community to come into our home and share Thanksgiving dinner."

Brown said this year's dinner event will be especially significant and poignant for himself and the other firefighters in Orange, because it will be their first without Chief Marty DeMarzo, who unexpectedly died earlier this year. Even though his physical presence is gone, he said their fallen leader believed in words matching actions and his legacy still lives on. "If people are hungry, we want to feed them; if they need something we can get them, then we're going to try and do that," DeMarzo said last year. "We open the bay doors and serve up a pretty good meal because we also happen to be pretty good cooks. There's a lot about the Fire Department and the people in it that the average Orange citizen doesn't know about, but they are welcome to come over any time and find out."

Brown said, even though everyone's heart will be a little heavier this year because the man who said those words is no longer here on Earth with them, he and the other firemen will do their best to carry on without him because they know that's what he would want them to do.

"This is something we started in 2005, after my brother passed. I needed to do something, and then Deputy Chief Marty DeMarzo allowed me to do it," he said. "We fed 125 families that day and it really brought the Fire Department together. We've grown since we first started doing, this thanks to the help and support from city officials, businessmen like Jeffrey Feld and Manny Munoz, and the rest of the community."

Last year, Brown said the fire fighters served 400 meals, and they expected to do more than that this year.

"Everyone is welcome to come out enjoy a good meal and dessert and good company with us," he said. "We're going to be out here from 11 a. m. to 2 p. m. on Thanksgiving Day., but that doesn't mean we will be neglecting our duties. Last year, we had a car accident right outside headquarters and the guys from Group 1 went out there and did a great job responding to that incident."

Brown said being prepared is part of every fireman's job and, this year, those same members of Group 1, including himself, will be on duty at the firehouse, serving food and ready to do more if they are called upon to do so.

"Anyone who doesn't have any place else to go to this year is more than welcome to come out and share a meal with us," he said. "You name it, we're going to have it. Chief DeMarzo is going to be with us in spirit. He was always a big part of what we did on this day and we won't forget that it's all because of him that we have been able to do this for the last four years."

In the meantime, Brown said the Fire Department is already gearing up for their annual Christmas toy drive. The firefighters will be taking cash and gift donations at the station house from anyone who wants to make one, and he said anyone who wants to can walk or drive up to the Lincoln Avenue station house and drop off whatever it is they want to give, including food or canned goods because hunger doesn't stop just because Thanksgiving has passed. "We're here to help the community every day of the year, not just on the holidays," he said.