

Civilian hero honored by Fire Department

By Hank Dudding (Contact), Memphis Commercial Appeal
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A year after helping save three people during a boating accident that killed two children, Leo Brown again found himself surrounded by firefighters.

This time was a happier occasion.

The Memphis Fire Department presented Brown with its Civilian Award Wednesday during its annual firefighter recognition and memorial service.

"I'm proud to be here, and I'm honored to be here with them," said Brown, 56, who swam into Robco Lake on the Fourth of July 2007 and then used his own boat to aid the search for victims.



Mike Brown/The Commercial Appeal

Memphis firefighter Richard Bryan, with Truck 12 at Engine House 30, rolls up a massive flag draped from the ladder of the truck outside the Fire Museum awards service. This year, 25 firefighters were recognized for outstanding service, bravery, life-saving and heroism, and citizen Leo Brown was honored for his efforts during a rescue at Robco Lake.

The operator of the capsized john boat was placed on diversion after he was charged with vehicular homicide (a charge that also applies to boating), reckless homicide and reckless endangerment.

Firefighters honored for their efforts that day included Ryan Jones, John Stephens, Jeremy Simmons, John Bondurant and William Ford.

"When it was over, all we talked about was all the things he did," said Jones, 35.

The highlight of the ceremony at the Fire Museum Downtown was a booming oration by Rev. Keith Norman, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Binghamton, that rose to a crescendo and drew applause before he was even finished.



Emcee Terrance Bates of WPTY-Channel 24 followed Norman by jokingly urging pretend ushers to pass collection plates.

Memphis Mayor Willie Herenton and county Mayor A C Wharton made brief appearances before departing for other commitments.

Afterward, firefighters Brown hadn't seen in a year slapped him

Mike Brown/The Commercial Appeal

Leo Brown gets a good look at the Civilian Award presented to him Wednesday by the Memphis Fire Department at its annual awards service at the Fire Museum Downtown.

on the back before posing for pictures with him as his proud daughter reflected on what he'd done.

"It blew my mind to see how he responded, said Kesia Sanders, 36.

"I'm really proud to know the things he's done for me, he's done for other people," she said. "He's been my hero as long as I can remember."

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Awards day

Those receiving honors Wednesday were: Medal of merit: Mark Heaston, Richard Keith, Elvy Rorie III, James Lynn Thompson, James Logan, Thomas Randle, Thomas Mathenia, Deborah Johnson.

Civilian Award: Leo Brown Medal of Bravery: Jeremy Simmons, Ryan Jones, John Stephens.
Lifesaving Medal: Matthew Giannini, Christopher Robinson, Rome Gregory, Kevin Looney, Matthew Tomek, Rodger Mathis, Ryan Humphreys, Steven Decker, David Gann Jr., Jason Roberson.
Medal of Heroism: John Bondurant, William Ford, Timothy Clark.
Company of the year: William Ledford, Rodger Mathis, Ryan Humphreys, Steven Decker.

Firefighters to the rescue: Boy, 5, saved from blaze

Memphis firefighters rescued a 5-year-old boy from a burning house in North Memphis late Tuesday.

The first call about the blaze came in at 10:41 p.m., saying a single-story house at 826 Orphanage was on fire. Firefighters arrived four minutes later.

Lt. Todd Grant, 39, and firefighter Bryce Gilbert, 32, went into the house through a window and pulled the boy from a bedroom. He wasn't breathing, but rescue workers resuscitated him at the scene.

The child was taken to Le Bonheur Children's Medical Center in critical condition suffering from smoke inhalation. His condition on Wednesday was upgraded to stable.

The fire started in the living room, but the cause had not been determined on Wednesday, fire department officials said.

-- Hank Dudding