

My Fallen Heroes

—Brandi Plunkett, Ph.D.
ESTI Program Director

Each year since 1930, the Brayton Fire Training School has hosted thousands of students and guest instructors for three hot weeks in July. These schools are so large that they could not be taught without the selfless and committed volunteer guest instructors. Many of these men and women have been volunteering a week of their time for more than 30 years. They are veteran firefighters, officers, and chiefs from around the U.S. and other countries; they not only teach, but also develop curriculum, help with student issues, and support outside events during the week. They are the heart and soul of TEEX's busiest three weeks of the year and the Annual Schools could not run without them.

In honor of these special men and women, a memorial wall was designed and built at the front of Brayton Fire Training Field so that it would be the first thing visible upon arrival. The names of instructors who have given ten or more years of volunteer service to the fire school since 1929 are inscribed on the wall as a lasting memorial to their commitment to the education and training of firefighters from around the world. Built out of Texas granite, the memorial wall was completed in 2000 and expanded in 2012 to 17 sections to provide space for future names.

The Fallen Hero Statue was added in 2013. It is a place of reverence, where hats are to be removed and silence is observed. It is not uncommon to see a family member or friend standing at the wall in silent contemplation or to see someone tracing a name onto a piece of paper. All construction and upkeep of the Memorial Wall area is solely dependent upon the generous donations and gifts from guest instructors, firefighters, families,

citizens, companies, and associations.

Each year during each of the three schools, a memorial service is held to honor those guest instructors whose names have been added during the past year. Family members and friends come to College Station to stand in honor of their lost family member and witness the somber entrance of the Honor Guard, the posting of the colors, the lowering of the flag, the lone trumpet playing, and the "555" ringing of the bell. As the bagpipes begin to play, one bagpiper slowly walks away and the music fades in the distance. There is silence among the hundreds of witnesses as each thinks about the risks and dangers of the job they hold and the sacrifices made by so many who went before them.

Last year, Mr. Tony Beckwith, one of our special friends and a supporter who has been with the Annual Schools program for many years,

offered up a poem he wrote which paid homage to those whose names filled the walls of the memorial. Upon reading it, Chief Robert Moore knew it was special and insisted that it be added to the memorial space, which was done this spring. We thank you, Mr. Beckwith, for sharing your gift of writing and for your love of the school. Your words represent what so many of us feel; now cast in bronze and permanently placed in front of the wall to be shared by all.

