

## Volunteer Firefighter Killed On Way to Call

By Tim Keith, Ft. Collins Coloradoan  
February 24, 2008

PIERCE – A flag flying half-staff stood guard over an empty firefighter's hat and rose-filled boots. Hundreds of candles lit up the night. All were stark reminders of this small town's tragedy.

Shane Stewart, an Ault-Pierce Fire District volunteer firefighter, died Saturday morning when he lost control of the fire truck he was driving to a medical call and rolled the truck south of Pierce.

Stewart is the first Ault-Pierce firefighter to die in the line of duty.



Shane Stewart, an Ault-Pierce Fire District volunteer firefighter was killed Saturday when he lost control of the fire truck he was driving and the vehicle rolled. (Fort Collins Coloradoan)

Relatives, friends, police, EMTs and firefighters from several nearby stations gathered Saturday night outside the Ault-Pierce Firehouse in Pierce for a candle light vigil to remember Stewart.

"We lost a great man today," Ault-Pierce Fire Chief Scott Wagner said. "We are all better for knowing Shane."

Stewart lived and died to serve others, said Erik Karas, a pastor and volunteer fighter.

"He went out this morning to take care of a stranger," Karas said. "He gave himself for the other. Shane was Christ this morning going to that call."

Stewart was a good family man, his aunt Mary Ellen Rathbun said.

"It's hard to see a child cry," she said of Stewart's children. "The ones who are left behind are the ones that suffer."

Stewart, 33, of Pierce, was ejected from the truck and pronounced dead at the scene, near the intersection of Weld County roads 33 and 88. Stewart had been a volunteer firefighter since August 2004.

No one else was in the truck, which was carrying a 2,000-pound load of water. It's unknown whether Stewart was wearing a seat belt.

"Today, Ault-Pierce Fire Protection District suffered a great loss of one of their own," Capt. Roger Moore, a public information officer for the Eaton Fire Protection District, said at an afternoon news conference.

Stewart was married and had two elementary-age children. His brother, Shawn, and father, Paul, are also volunteer firefighters for the Ault-Pierce district.

"The Stewart family has been very dedicated to the fire service," Moore said. "He will be greatly missed."

The Colorado State Patrol said the fire truck was southbound on Weld County 33 about 6:20 a.m. when it ran off the left side of the road, overcorrected, then ran off the right side, rolling onto its roof.

About 1,400 people live in Ault, located at the intersection of Colo. Highway 14 and U.S. Highway 85 about 18 miles east of Fort Collins. About 860 people live in Pierce, located about four miles north of Ault on U.S. 85.

"With a small community size, everybody is closer-knit," said Chuck Burman, a former Ault-Pierce firefighter. "It's going to hit everybody a little bit more than in a big city."

Burman, who served as chief for the department in the 1960s, knew Stewart's great-grandparents, grandparents and parents.

The community will step in and help the family grieve, said Ken Dahlgren, another former chief.

"It's just devastating," he said. "It makes your heart stop. People will pull together and help the family out all they can."

Moore said Stewart "aggressively" sought training opportunities and advancement in the fire service.

"He is a person you really like to have as a friend and a colleague," Moore said.

Stewart worked for the Colorado Department of Transportation as an equipment operator and sometimes drove semitrailers for the agency.

"He wasn't supposed to die so young," Rathbun said.

Source:

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