

## *Thomas M. Lakin*

Thomas Lakin was born in Sunset Hills Missouri and moved to High Ridge when he was four years old with his parents and four older siblings. His father worked for the Post Office while his mother taught grade school at St. Paul's in Fenton. After moving to High Ridge his mother began teaching third grade at High Ridge Elementary School. Over the next eight years he had four additional younger siblings - true to the nature of a good Irish / Catholic family. After attending St. Anthony's Catholic School in High Ridge, he then moved on to Northwest High School. Lakin graduated in 1977 and felt that not many of his classmates even really knew him, but rather his other siblings were more well-known in the district.

After high school, Lakin attended Jefferson College in Hillsboro for two years then finished his Bachelor's Degree at the University of St. Louis – Missouri graduating in 1981. He worked at Schnuck's in Fenton in the restaurant from 1976 until 1986. During that time, he became a volunteer firefighter at the High Ridge Fire Department in 1982. He became a full-time firefighter in 1986, and moved up the ranks - from Engineer to Captain to Deputy Chief to Assistant Chief to Chief - a position he held until he retired in 2021. Fire Service became his passion and he enjoyed going to work every day. Lakin felt blessed to work with not only the best firefighters, but good people who always put the community first. Every firefighter he came in contact with had the same goals: to help as many of our citizens as we can during their most difficult times.

When the COVID Pandemic became a reality in our community in 2020 the High Ridge Firehouse stepped up with more community outreach. To lift the community's spirits, they organized their own version of 'Friday Night Lights' by parading the firetrucks and emergency vehicles through the various subdivisions with lights flashing and sirens and horns blaring much to the delight and applause of all the people who came out on their porches to observe the spectacle! Furthermore, when it was apparent that the traditional Northwest Graduation Ceremony was not going to be held (the first cancellation since 1952) Chief Lakin and his crews went out in their trucks and vehicles once more and presented 'Congrats GRADS Class of 2020' signs to over 90% of the graduates at their homes and took photos of them all holding their signs!

Even since his retirement, Lakin still makes himself available in extreme weather and emergencies to provide food and beverages to all first responders on the job site. He, like many of his retired firefighter friends, monitors emergency radios or has phone alert apps to stay up to date on emergency situations 24 hours a day to respond at a moment's notice to lend a hand if needed. Lakin is currently trying to fulfill a dream of one day buying a food truck so he and a small crew of volunteers can go to disaster relief sights and provide sustenance and supplies for all the workers and first responders.

During Lakin's career he also became involved with many community activities. Some outside the fire department such as:

The Ladies of Charity  
High Ridge Rotary  
Northwest Chamber of Commerce  
The Knights of Columbus

He also taught Junior Achievement at our local elementary schools which took him out of his comfort zone and helped him realize how fortunate we are to have such great teachers in our school district.

One of Lakin's proudest accomplishments is the role he has taken in promoting and supporting BackStoppers Inc. He joined the BackStoppers of Jefferson County in 2018 and became a board member in 2020 which he still serves on. The BackStoppers provide financial and emotional support to all first responders that die in the line of duty. The Jefferson County Branch supports BackStoppers Inc. with fundraisers that we host throughout Jefferson County. In 2023 the organization, with the help of our community, raised over \$230,000.

Lakin married his wife Kimberly in 1993 and they have three daughters. Two of his daughters and his wife are registered nurses while his youngest daughter is currently at Mizzou finishing up her Occupational Therapy Doctorate. Lakin spends most of his retired time traveling or at the firehouse where he still has an office.

Community outreach is an occasional act for some, , but for Tom Lakin it is a way of life and a calling he feels deeply about. He attributes his success to having a strong mother as well as teachers who played a pivotal role in his life. Upon hearing about this award, Lakin didn't feel he was truly deserving as he said, 'so many others have done so much more'! He just surrounds himself with caring, hard-working people and together they get things done.