

Don Roberts

Donald F. “Lefty” Roberts joined the Florence Fire Department as a firefighter in 1952, 18 years after its creation. He was one of about 25 volunteers. As in everything Don did in his life, he participated in the fire department with commitment and passion. Just 12 years later he became the department’s first paid chief.



Before Don became a full-time Fire Chief, he worked for the Hudepohl Brewing Company in Cincinnati. While assisting his wife Bobbie in raising their two sons, Randall and Scott, Don assisted in the creation of the Boone County Knothole Baseball Association and managed his son’s team. Don, a good player in his own right, gained the nickname “Lefty” from batting left-handed in fast pitch softball games.

The rapidly growing area of Florence brought many challenges to Chief Roberts. Don led his department through these times from that 25 man volunteer department to a 60 member City Combination Department. While implementing a growing full-time staff, Don was insistent on keeping a professional volunteer membership. The Florence Fire Department has grown from those humble beginnings to currently operating three stations with 40 full-time and 36 volunteer emergency responders.

Don Roberts was vital in the early planning stages of the City of Florence as we know it today. When the “big” buildings came to Florence, Don was there to insure sprinkler systems and code compliance. Don was known as a no nonsense Chief, very by the book. Don was a leader who treated staff fairly and was considered a friend by all who worked with him.

Don believed in firefighting organizations and shared his talents in them. Don was extremely active in the creation of the Boone County Fire Chief’s Association and a past president. Always involved with the Northern Kentucky Firefighters Association, Don was known as a Fire Chief who would help other local Chief’s and departments whenever called upon. Don also worked outside the State and served as vice-president of the Southeastern Fire Chief’s Association.

After many years of active service to the KFA, Don succeeded Bob Hebler as our secretary in 1978. He held this position for 12 years retiring in 1990. This was also around the time Don decided to hang up his boots. Through Don's years in the fire service he made many friends.

Testament of this was Don serving as the presenter in 2004 for his good friend Bob Gaddie's Hall of Fame induction. Imagine that, a Northern Kentuckian fostering a lifetime friendship with Gaddie.

Don's retirement years were filled with joy and many activities like Sports, golf, fishing, camping, and hunting trips with family and friends to Canada, Maine, and Michigan.

Don also enjoyed his friends in Florence and was know to drop in on city council meetings. But the center of his life for his last 11 years was his granddaughter Logan. Throughout all his years, he stayed faithful to his Grace Episcopal Church.

Ironically, the day after our KFA E-Board completed their quarterly meeting in Lexington, and firefighters from throughout the state were attending classes at State Fire School, we received word of Chief Robert's sudden passing. We couldn't help but remember all these same meetings and classes that Don has attended throughout the year, and how his support and dedication helped to maintain and advance our beloved fire service.

Don "Lefty" Roberts was a man for all seasons. Whether it was golf, hunting, baseball, or firefighting, he lived a full-life with his beloved Bobbie and family always closely followed by his religious faith and his fire department.

Chief Lefty Roberts graced the KFA for over 50 years with his sprit, dedication, and friendship. It is our pleasure to posthumously honor Don tonight with his induction into the KFA "Hall of Fame".

Presenting Chief Roberts award will be Don's good friend and KFA Hall of Famer Bob Gaddie, and the man who followed Don as secretary of the KFA Mr. Dave Jansing.

Accepting on behalf of Don will be his wife of 56 years and a great lady of the KFA, Mrs. Bobbie Roberts.