

Service recognized by Rotary club

BY MATT SMITH
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Rotarian Dan Taylor, during Thursday's annual Cleburne Rotary Club Vocational Service Excellence Awards presentation, typified this year's conferrees as worthy difference makers.

"When I look at the bios of the recipients today it makes me

proud to be living in Cleburne, Texas and to know we have people like this here working to serve our community," Taylor said. "It's amazing."

All, Taylor continued, exemplify the Rotary Club's objective, which is to "foster the ideal of service as a basis of worthy enterprise."

Cleburne Rotary Club President Jared Treesh agreed.

"We have an incredible group of people here today and I thank each of you for what you do for our community," Treesh said.

Cleburne Police Officer Kerri Abbott was the first of several called forth to receive the award.

A 20-year veteran of the

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Cleburne Police Officer Kerri Abbott receives a Cleburne Rotary Club Vocational Service Excellence Award.

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department, Abbott oversees the Cleburne Police Department's Community Services Unit and serves as the department's community resource officer. In that role, Abbott has developed and managed numerous programs for the benefit of the community including the Police Explorer/Cadet Program.

The year-round program provides a comprehensive overview and hands on experience to youth interested in pursuing law enforcement careers.

Abbott also coordinates Teen Academy, an annual one-week summer program for middle school students and an internship program whereby Cleburne High School juniors and seniors may receive academic credit by volunteering for CPD.

In addition to those duties, Abbott has taught Rape Aggression Defense training classes to area women over the past several years and manages the department's guardian program. That program assists law enforcement officers in interacting with and outreach efforts to residents who may be non-verbal and/or affected by Alzheimer's or dementia.

Abbott also serves on the Texas Law Enforcement Explorer Advisors Association's board of directors and with the Cleburne Christian Women's Job Corps.

"We're appreciative of the Cleburne Rotary Club and all they do to support public service in our community," Cleburne Police Chief Rob Severance said. "We consider

them a strong partner in our efforts to provide a higher quality of life in Cleburne."

CPD's Meritorious Conduct Board nominated Abbott for the Rotary award, Severance said.

"Kerri does so much for our department and Cleburne through her work with our community outreach efforts," Severance said. "Recently, she coordinated our spring picnic event at Carver Park, which was a great event that included many of our partners throughout the city as well as non profits and other groups."

Taylor next called CHS Heavy Equipment Technician Program instructor Dennis Querry front and center to receive his Vocational Service Excellence Award.

Querry, a CHS graduate and former Holt Caterpillar employee, brings "critical knowledge of the industry" needed by students hoping to enter the field, Taylor said.

Taylor spoke of Querry's commitment and

hard work to build the recently-launched program from scratch.

Querry, before he officially started, began setting the facility up so that things would be in order and ready to go once students arrived. Since then he's worked to secure grants to fund and improve the program and to expand internship opportunities for students. He did so, Taylor said, during the challenges of COVID-19 and the fact that 30 percent of students were working remotely from home when the current school year began.

"It's great today that the Rotary Club has recognized Dennis and the work he's done," Cleburne ISD Superintendent Kyle Heath said. "We're certainly excited for the program he's helped start and very grateful that the Rotary Club has recognized the efforts of our teachers and staff through the years. They've always been supportive of our district and

have done so many things to contribute and provide services to our students and staff."

Cleburne Fire Chief Scott Lail said that when asked, as he had been in previous years, by the Cleburne Rotary Club to nominate an individual from the fire department for the award he simply couldn't do it.

"I knew I couldn't nominate just one person," Lail said. "The reason behind that is that all during this pandemic it's been all hands on deck. So I asked the Rotary Club if it would be possible to spread that award over the entire department, and they so graciously agreed to that."

It's been a challenging 400 plus days to say the least, Lail said, during which several members of the department ran a COVID-19 testing center, became vaccine providers and ultimately operated a vaccine hub.

Thanks to the efforts

of the Cleburne Fire Department and others who partnered with them 2,200 people were tested for COVID-19 while 25,276 vaccines were administered over a 147-day period with 12,398 having been fully vaccinated at the Cleburne hub.

"Those were people from all over Texas, multiple states and eight foreign countries," Lail said. "The furthest of which were Bosnia and Venezuela so I feel like we made a dent."

All of which required a team effort, Lail said, adding that the usual firefighter business of responding to calls didn't pause just because a global pandemic crashed the party.

"CFD responded to 7,416 calls for service during that time and never missed a call," Lail said. "Those at the hub saw their lives change because they were vac-

inating people. The remaining firefighters lives changed because every call they went on was treated as a COVID-19-positive patient because the firefighters had to protect themselves, their families and crew mates. So they were going out putting PPE, face shields and everything on an every call. That made their jobs exponentially harder but they never missed a call.

"For me that is service excellence from a group of people and that's why I turned down the award for a single person. It had to be the whole group this year."

Rotarian and former Cleburne Mayor Tom Hazlewood commended the department's hard work throughout the pandemic.

"I couldn't be more proud of them," Hazlewood said. "They made a big difference in a lot of peoples' lives."



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