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Former firefighter to be added to memorial

By JASON ALEXANDER
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A former Kenockee Township firefighter will join a list of nearly 800 Michiganders on a memorial that honors those who died while on duty during a ceremony at 8 p.m. Friday in Pontiac.

Peter Neilson will be placed on the Michigan Fallen Heroes Memorial as one of four first responders to be recognized this year.

Neilson, a former chief and 25-year member of the Kenockee Township Fire Department, died of a heart attack in 2007 after responding to a fire call. He was 74.

"I can't think of a more fitting person to receive this honor," said Kenockee Fire Department Chief Tom Skelton, who knew Neilson for 15 years. "I couldn't think of a better role model for just about anybody in the world."

Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard is the president and founder of the memorial. He began collecting private funds for the project in 2002 after returning from ground zero after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

"We wanted to honor all those first responders statewide who lost their lives on duty," Bouchard said. "Sadly we have to add names every year."

Neilson's widow, Doris Neilson of Kenockee Township, will be attending the ceremony.

"It is a great honor," Doris Neilson said. "He worked hard, and his life revolved around the fire department. He would not go anywhere without his pager. I travel a lot and I knew if he wasn't at the airport, he was on a fire run and he couldn't pick me up until he was done."

Peter Neilson served in the Army for 21 years before joining the fire department. He retired from the military as lieutenant colonel in 1976.

"They are honoring a great man," Skelton said. "I feel privileged for having known him."

The memorial on the east side of North Telegraph Road, between Telegraph Road and the Oakland County Courthouse, 1200 North Telegraph Road in Pontiac.

Each year a new phase of the project is unveiled. This year, brick pavers and ground lighting will be revealed.

Additional Facts

IF YOU GO

LOCAL 9/11 SERVICE

- The Port Huron Police Department will host a Service of Remembrance for those who lost their lives on Sept. 11, 2001 because of the terrorist attacks.
 - It will take place 9 a.m. Friday at the International Flag Plaza, just north of the Blue Water Bridge.
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