



# REMEMBERING HEROES: NEW MURAL HONORS GRANITE MOUNTAIN HOTSHOTS - CRONKITE NEWS

Posted on July 2, 2023 by Bri Pacelli |Cronkite News



Ten years after the Yarnell Hill Fire, where 19 members of the Granite Mountain Hotshots perished, a mural honoring their lives was unveiled at the Prescott Chamber of Commerce.

The Granite Mountain Hotshots were a wildland firefighting crew based in Prescott. On June 30, 2013, while battling the Yarnell Hill Fire about 50 miles south of Prescott, 19 of the 20 members of the crew lost their lives. It was the deadliest wildfire in Arizona history.

Arizona artist Katie Von Kral created the mural to honor the bravery of the hotshot crew and capture the essence of their courage.

During a news conference Wednesday when the mural was unveiled, Von Kral said she wanted people to know more about the individuals that comprised the crew and “give reverence to the 19 men who heroically gave their lives to save ours.”

She said she also wanted to honor first responders and the people who continue to put their lives on the line.

As a Phoenix resident, Von Kral said, the opportunity to create the mural held personal significance. She brought the idea to Prescott city officials more than a year ago. After it was approved, she spent time with family members of the hotshot crew, learning about them, and researched the tragic fire so she could accurately portray the lives of the men she called heroes.

Van Kral said she hopes the mural will be part of a long-lasting memorial for families of the crew and for Prescott residents.

“Every time people drive by and see it, I hope they do get that sense of the honor and the legacy these guys have left,” she said.

Located on one side of the building that houses the Prescott Chamber of Commerce, the mural is a collage composed of 462 square feet of acrylic art pieces broken into three sections. They feature portraits of each of the men and larger images that describe their work as hotshots. It also includes an image of the 2,000-year-old alligator juniper tree the Granite Mountain crew saved in the Doce Fire west of Prescott just a few weeks before they perished.

Arizona Sen. Ken Bennett, R-Prescott, Prescott Mayor Phil Goode and Prescott Fire Chief Holger Durre were among those who spoke at the unveiling.

Goode said the mural “gives everyone in the community, tourists and other people that want to visit a visual connection with all those young men.”



Although it has been a decade since the tragedy, he said, the impact of the Granite Mountain Hotshots' sacrifice extends far beyond the town of Prescott.

Durre said it represented the greatest loss of firefighters since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the World Trade Center.

He said several positive things have come from the Yarnell Fire. “Significant progress” has been made to raise firefighter safety standards in the past 10 years, he said, adding that the use of cutting-edge technology such as aerial drones that follow firefighters' activities and monitor weather patterns ensure their safety in dangerous situations.

Durre described how the tragedy brought the community and the current fire department closer.

“This is such a close-knit community,” the fire chief said. “Everybody knew a Little League player, a friend from high school, a friend from church who was one of these hotshots. One of the things that has come out of that is that our fire department has gotten kinder.”

John Marsh, father of Eric Marsh, the hotshot crew's superintendent who died battling the Yarnell Hill Fire, said he takes comfort in the fact that thousands of people continue to remember his son and his crew.

“The major impact is that they're more sympathetic,” Marsh said. A tragedy like this makes them more aware and “makes them appreciate the service that all of our public servants give.”