

Redmond Firefighter Receives Heroism Award

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth presented a heroism award on September 13 to Ron Rucker, a Redmond Air Center smokejumper squad leader who risked his life to save another smokejumper and a pilot caught in an airplane's wreckage.

Ron Rucker received the "Chief's Award for Heroism and Emergency Response" Rucker was serving as an air tactical group supervisor on a twin-engine airplane used for directing firefighting resources on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest when it crashed on take-off July 21, 2005, at North Las Vegas Airport.

Rucker dragged Marge Kuehn-Tabor, a Grangeville Air Center smokejumper squad leader, out of the wreckage minutes after impact. Kuehn-Tabor was training under Rucker at the time, and suffered compressed vertebrae and cracks on both sides of her pelvis.

He then returned to the wreckage and attempted to pull Jonathan Stairs from the cockpit. Stairs suffered multiple leg fractures and a head injury, and was working as a pilot for Commander Northwest, an aviation company based in East Wenatchee, Wash.

Pilots and paramedics at the crash site later said they were surprised the three survived because the Aero Commander airplane sustained such major damage to its nose and cabin.

Rucker suffered several lacerations and a dislocated toe in the crash. Kuehn-Tabor and Stairs are still recovering from their injuries.

Kuehn-Tabor trained as a rookie smokejumper at the Redmond Air Center in 1991 and worked there for four years before transferring to the Grangeville Air Center. She is currently on a leave of absence from the Forest Service and lives in Cambridge, Idaho.

Bosworth presented Rucker with the "Chief's Award For Heroism and Emergency Response" at a ceremony in Arlington, Va., that Rucker attended with his wife Margaret and daughter Corey. Bosworth also presented an award to Deyna A. Kuntzsch, a Chugach National Forest employee who killed a charging grizzly bear in Alaska before it reached members of her work party.

Rucker said he was proud to receive the award, but believes other Forest Service employees would have reacted the same way.

"You just do it," he said. "We all face similar danger. It was another day in the life of a firefighter."

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