

EASTERN SHORE NEWS

'Fire and EMS were Jimmy Rowley's life'

Longtime Parksley first responder, firefighter historian dies at 59

Dec. 5, 2013



Parksley Volunteer Fire Company's James Rowley gives the invocation during the Fire and EMS Memorial Recognition Ceremony held at Nandua High School in Onley on Tuesday, June 5. Rowley died on Wednesday. / Staff photo by Jay Diem

Written by

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PARKSLEY — The Eastern Shore of Virginia lost a mainstay of the volunteer firefighting community Wednesday.

Jimmy Rowley, a 44-year member of Parksley Volunteer Fire Company who served in many different roles in the volunteer and first responder community over the decades in a humble, understated manner, died Wednesday morning after an illness.

Rowley was secretary and rescue captain of the Parksley fire company and also served in official capacities over the years in the larger volunteer community, including in the Delmarva Volunteer Firemen's Association, where he was parliamentarian.

Rowley, 59, also was known as the informal custodian of the history of volunteer firefighting on Virginia's Eastern Shore and was often consulted for his knowledge.

“Fire and EMS were Jimmy Rowley’s life,” said Freddy Matthews, the Parksley company’s president. “Jimmy had an unbelievable memory for the past and the history of the fire and EMS service in Accomack County.”

Rowley also served as a 911 dispatcher from 1992 to 2008 and was well-known for his calm demeanor during emergency situations. Toward the end of his tenure he was a supervisor at the 911 Communications Center and trained other dispatchers.

Funeral services are Tuesday at 2 p.m. at Grace United Methodist Church, Parksley. Interment will be held in Parksley Cemetery.

A viewing will be Monday from 6-8 p.m. at the Parksley fire hall.

Rowley’s depth of knowledge of local firefighting history led in recent years to his passion for building a memorial to local volunteer firefighters and rescue workers who died in the line of duty.

Rowley was a linchpin on the committee formed to promote the Eastern Shore Line of Duty Memorial, which is planned for the grounds of the Eastern Shore Regional Fire Training Center in Melfa.

After researching and talking with older volunteer firefighters about their recollections, Rowley concluded the memorial initially should include the names of eight men who perished in the line of duty on the Eastern Shore.

In addition to his volunteer roles, Rowley was a long-time employee of the magistrate’s office in Accomac.

Rowley had worked at the office since 1999 and admitted to keeping a copy of the magistrate’s manual and a set of state code books next to his recliner at home for after-hour consultations.

Rowley also was known for helping and planning the funerals of local firefighters.

“Every fireman’s funeral — just about every single one we’ve had here on the Shore — Jimmy’s been a big part of,” Matthews said.