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June 19, 2003

Steven Mark Herr

Dec. 23, 1945, to June 15, 2003

Steven Mark Herr, 57, of Nevada died Sunday, June 15, at Mercy Hospital Medical Center in Des Moines.

He was born on Dec. 23, 1945, in Ames to Robert and Deloris (Cox) Herr. He was a 1964 graduate of Nesco High School. He served in the U.S. Air Force from 1965-1967. He married Barb Elliott on June 2, 1968, in Iowa Falls. He was employed at R. H. Donnelley Co., served as Fire Chief of Nevada for 19 years and retired on March 26, 1999, from the city's zoning department. He was a member of the First United Methodist Church, William F. Ball American Legion Post #48 and Iowa Fireman's Association. He enjoyed the computer, being with his grandchildren, feeding critters and sitting on his deck.

Survivors include his wife, Barb Herr of Nevada; a daughter, Kenda Kay (and Kenneth) Hapes and of Nevada; a son, Micheal Wayne (and Janet) Herr of Nevada; two grandchildren; a longtime family friend, Stephanie Potter Lobdell of Nevada; two brothers, Ronald Herr of Boise, Idaho, and Martin Herr of Zearing; and two sisters, Karen Chance of Nevada and Sharon Bartine of Colo.

He is preceded in death by his parents and a sister-in-law, Elly Herr.

Funeral services were held today, Thursday, June 19, at 10 a.m. at the First United Methodist Church in Nevada with Pastor Steve Williams officiating. Burial with military rites was held at the Nevada Municipal Cemetery. A memorial fund has been established. Chet Ryan Mortuary, Nevada, handled arrangements.

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Steve Herr Former Nevada Fire Chief is laid to rest

Marlys Barker, Editor July 01, 2003

At 11:12 a.m. Thursday, June 19, the page went out:

"Attention all Nevada firefighters ... Chief Steve Herr has returned to quarters on June 15, 2003, and has now accepted his next assignment."

Silence, tears and heart-felt emotions swept across those gathered at the Nevada Municipal Cemetery as the brief, but moving message was read by dispatch and heard through the pagers of the many firefighters and emergency responders gathered around the casket of former Nevada Fire Chief Steve Herr.

Herr, who was fire chief in Nevada nearly 20 years, from 1977 to 1995, will be remembered in Nevada as a well-loved leader who worked hard, respected the public and had a deep laugh that corresponded nicely with his wonderful sense of humor.

"He always had this deep, chuckle laugh," said long-time neighbor and friend Glen Samson, who lived close to Herr for 27 years. Samson remembers weekend neighborhood gatherings, picnics and trips with Herr's family to go roller skating.

Barb Herr, too, remembers roller skating. In fact, that's how she met Steve, the man she married June 2, 1968.

They met at The Diamond Roller Rink in Iowa Falls, where Barb grew up. Steve, she said, came from Zearing (his hometown) to skate, when he wasn't skating in a barn in Hubbard.

It was after Steve returned from serving in the United States Air Force that the two married.

While marriage is known to be a life-changing event, Steve's marriage to Barb and his interaction with Barb's father had a tremendous impact on the direction his life would take. It was through Barb's father, a 47-year member of the Iowa Falls Fire Department, that Steve became interested in fighting fires.

He joined the Nevada Volunteer Fire Department early in their marriage, not realizing at the time that he would eventually apply and be hired for the top position in the department.

When he became Nevada's fire chief in 1977, Barb said she wasn't worried, but she was concerned. "Because I knew what it entailed."

Steve Hambly of Nevada served on the Nevada Volunteer Fire Department during Herr's entire time as fire chief. Hambly has fond memories of Herr, as well as a great deal of respect. "He was the first one at the scene, and he'd never go home until all the trucks were put away, no matter what time of day or night," Hambly said.

Hambly believes what made Herr a good fire chief is his upbringing. "He was a good old farm boy, who knew how to work hard and respected people. He respected everybody," Hambly said.

When the pagers went off at the cemetery last Thursday and the message was read, Hambly said it was one of the toughest things he's ever experienced.

There are so many good memories that Hambly holds of Herr, he said he wouldn't know which one to pick out and highlight. "There's just so many things ... his loyalty to the community and to the fire service ...

He was the chief when Lincoln Highway Days first started, and the department started our barbecue at the fire station. He was in charge of all the Fourth of July fireworks during his term."

Herr will also be remembered in this community as the man who brought an aerial fire truck to town. "That was kind of his baby," Barb said. That truck was part of the procession down Lincoln Highway to the cemetery last week, and it was parked beside those gathered at Herr's burial.

Those on the fire department remember Herr's quest to bring an aerial truck to the city. Fred Malven, of the Nevada Fire Department, thinks one of the community's biggest fires under Herr's time, when the drying facility at the former Crow's burned to the ground, probably helped Herr to make a point about the city's need for the truck.

"A ladder truck from Ames did figure prominently in that (Crow's fire), because it was used to cool some of the other (nearby) facilities and keep them from being involved. Consequently, that one piece of apparatus (an aerial truck) and one person was able to do a lot. I think in Chief Herr's mind, it certainly was a scenario he kept in mind, along with other things, to defend the concept of a ladder truck."

Barb said she remembers when the aerial truck was being built for the city, the Herr family drove to Snyder, Neb., several times to check on the progress of the truck. She also remembers how pleased her husband was recently when Fire Chief Larry Francis informed him that the truck had once again passed inspection.

Purchased in 1984, Francis, the present Nevada chief, said the truck is still well within the current standards.

"I would think that the ladder truck was [Herr's] biggest contribution," Francis said of Herr's time as chief. "I understand it (purchase of the truck) was fought really hard in the city council. It's a very expensive piece of equipment to put in a station. Being able to do that is a very major accomplishment." Nevada's ladder truck was purchased for \$199,000 in 1984. To purchase an aerial truck today would cost anywhere from \$400,000 to \$700,000, Francis said.

Both Hambly and Malven remember that probably the "biggest fire" under Herr's term was when at the Nevada Poultry facility, which was located on N Avenue between Fifth and Sixth Streets. It was "large-scale fire," Malven described, that happened after the purchase of the aerial truck.

"It (the Nevada Poultry fire) occurred at a time when there was still some uncertainty among members of the community about whether an aerial ladder truck made sense in a community of this size," Malven remembers. He said it certainly put those concerns to rest.

Malven also remembers that the use of the ladder truck kept a potentially major fire from becoming more than a small fire at the Camelot Theatre. He said a fire started in the space above the "starry suspended ceiling" of the theatre. "It ended up being relatively minor, because the aerial truck allowed people to gain access to the building to control what could have been a very formidable fire," Malven said.

In addition to bringing the very important aerial truck to Nevada, Herr is remembered by Malven for his demeanor. "His calm under fire was universally recognized, both in an emergency sense and in an administrative sense," Malven said.

Malven said he heard one of the firefighters say that Herr was a very "human leader."

"I think that was because he was totally unpretentious. His uniform was always the uniform of the firefighters," Malven said. "You were just as likely to see him in a T-shirt and workpants working on apparatus. In hind site, he was really a firefighters' kind of chief."

Barb said her husband liked being the fire chief in Nevada, because "he liked the people. He loved when the little kids would come for Fire Prevention Week, when they'd walk up to the station, and he'd have the trucks out, and they'd have color books, and then the little kids would write him a letter. He enjoyed that and the pictures that they drew."

When he was fire chief, Barb said, his job was his life. "He had no other passions at that time."

Samson, as a neighbor and friend, also recognized Herr's dedication to the job. "He was very serious about his job. In fact, he would stay on the fire line with those guys. That (fire service) was something that was in his blood."

In later years, Barb said, Herr enjoyed his computer, his grandchildren, feeding critters and sitting on his deck. He also enjoyed stopping in at the fire station in recent years to talk to Francis about the Nevada Fire Department. "He was still interested in what was going on," Barb said.

"I always enjoyed it when he stopped by and any other retirees who stop by," Francis said. "It's always nice to hear their stories. It was always a real treat when Steve stopped by."

As the bells tolled - four times, five bells each time - at his burial, a tradition that dates back to pre-radio transmission days in New York City, there were tears around Herr's casket. Some of those gathered struggled with their emotions as they tried to say good-bye, and mostly, they remembered his service.

"I don't know how many hours he devoted (to this city's fire department). There were hours he never turned in. I don't think I could ever think of a day Steve took off," Hambly said.

"I think all of us admired him for his sense of humor and his sense of perspective. I don't remember an occasions where he appeared to have made a decision in his own interest," Malven said. "He was really a very selfless leader."