

1996

Captain Alan Zwegat
Firefighter Theodore Schueren
Firefighter Kellee McDonald

Willoughby Fire Department

Sometimes no matter what you do, it's not enough. You did everything right and then some, and the outcome is not what you hoped. You cry, you second guess, you rationalize, but in the end, you can't help but think, if only I had..... Somehow you don't feel like a hero.

That is the situation that Willoughby Fire Department personnel found themselves in on November 7, 1996. Responding to a call of a house fire on Skiff Street, arriving firefighters learned that two young boys were possibly inside the heavily involved residence. Captain Alan Zwegat, and Firefighters Schueren and McDonald fought their way into the house, through intense flames and choking smoke, and eventually located a 2 year old boy in the living room and a four year old boy in the basement. They were able to carry them out of the house but neither boy survived. The tragic outcome however, cannot diminish the efforts that went into rescuing the boys.

"There are certain situations in which we can make a difference," said Willoughby Fire Chief Mel House. "In this one - we couldn't. And not just as firefighters, but as fathers, this is one situation that makes you pull your heart out."

Firefighters and police officers were offered counseling to help them cope with the tragic outcome. The entire Willoughby community came together to help the family deal with the loss of the two youngsters.

The brave acts of the three nominated firefighters were honored at Hellriegel's Inn at the annual Blue Coats Dinner on February 12, 1997 at which time they were awarded the Jorge Medina Distinguished Service Award.

Zwegat has served as Willoughby's Fire Chief until his retirement. He recently relocated to Florida, and is enjoying retirement. Schueren has advanced through the ranks of the Willoughby Fire Department and is currently a Battalion Chief. Kellee McDonald left the department and completed nursing school. She married and is now Kellee Elbe and is living in Iowa.