

Historic all-female crew recognized for response to Lexington fire

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On the morning of Sept. 5, an all-female crew rushed to extinguish a brush fire.

At the time, none of them thought their acts of service would reach historic proportions. But the three women of Station 1 on East Third Street were recognized Wednesday for making history within the Lexington Division of Fire.

In the past 233 years, there has never been an all-women crew responding to a fire in the city of Lexington, according to Battalion Chief Joseph Best.

"September 5 was the first time," said Best. "But, it can happen tomorrow depending on particular instances."

Lexington Division of Fire Chief Keith Jackson presented the trio — Captain Maria Roberts, Amanda Arbogast and Sarah McGill — with certificates.

"We look at being the best," said Jackson. "These three young women, have not only done their best, but they are the best."

The women appreciated the recognition, but all agreed that they were just doing their job.

"It was just another run for us," said Roberts, who joined the division in November 1999. "I had two really good firefighters riding in my truck and that's not any different than any other day."

Arbogast said: "I didn't think anything would come out of it."

"I was just doing what I was trained to do," she said.

McGill said she was honored and felt privileged to be at the station that morning. McGill was coming back in from lunch when the call came in; the other two were already at the station. Three is the standard number of firefighters sent out on a call.

In a division where there are 14 women out of 523 firefighters, this accomplishment shows the change that has happened over the years, said Assistant Fire Chief Kristin Chilton.

"I've been here for 20 years," said Chilton. "It's really good to see the changes that weren't here 20 years ago." If more women are hired and trained, Chilton said, female firefighters will begin to be a normal sight.

Roberts, who says firefighting is in her blood, will soon be promoted to major. Her job will change significantly, as she'll be responsible for 30 firefighters.

"It's exciting," she said. "It's a very different position. My job is to make sure they go home in the morning."

Originally from Chicago, Roberts started out as a volunteer firefighter when she was 16. Roberts, whose father also volunteered as a firefighter, moved to Kentucky to pursue her bachelor's degree in fire protection and administration at Eastern Kentucky University. She says it feels good to excel in a profession she loves.

"It's the greatest profession in the world," said Roberts, whose husband is a retired Richmond firefighter. "You get to help people, fix problems and work with a team."

Roberts, a mother of two boys, said firefighting is "the best job in the world."

Achievements are high on the list for all three women. Arbogast and McGill both received the Recruit Excellence Award while in the fire academy.

Arbogast, 30, a native of Eastern Kentucky, joined the department on March 6 and has enjoyed every day of it.

"I've had a great experience since I've been here," she said.

Arbogast said that she always wanted to do something in the medical field. After taking an emergency medical technician class, she wanted to learn more and eventually make it a full-time job.

"I absolutely love it," said Arbogast. "Especially in Lexington, a recognized department makes me feel good I can be a part of it."

Arbogast has aspirations to continue learning. She plans to take a paramedic class soon.

McGill, 28, who said she has always had a passion for helping people, joined the department Aug. 9.

Before joining, she worked in medical sales. She also worked as a recreation therapist for the elderly. She said she's done with the career changes and looks forward to a long career as a firefighter.

She's studying for her red book test, which firefighters have to take to operate the fire engine.

"Right now I'm focusing on my test and learning," she said. "I'm gaining as much experience as I can from the women and men that I'm surrounded by at work."

McGill said she appreciated the recognition Wednesday, but this is bigger than her.

"There have been women who have been a part of the department and have done some amazing things," she said. "I look up to the women who came before me."

