



## Volunteer fire crews get \$40K in honor of fallen colleagues

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Four volunteer fire departments received a helping hand Friday on the 10th anniversary of the Texas Panhandle wildfires of 2006 that took the lives of 12 people.

One of those was Kathy Ryan, a Borger woman who braved the fires in an effort to rescue an elderly couple.

Ryan learned the wildfire was spreading toward her home at a pace fire officials would later report was 200 yards a minute. With the help of two other Good Samaritans, Ryan helped secure Oleta Pfeffer's escape. When the fire cut off their escape route and the oxygen-deprived air stalled her car, Ryan attempted to escape on foot with Oleta Pfeffer's husband Bill, but the two did not make it.

In honor of Ryan's heroism and to support rural fire and rescue volunteers, Ryan's family and a local law firm established the Kathy Ryan Rural Fire and Rescue Fund.

"It was instinct for Mom to go to someone's aid," Ryan's daughter Pamela Ayers said.

"She didn't think about (helping others). She just went and did it," daughter Tonya Griffin said.

"Sometimes it's hard to find how to help people, so we've done scholarships to train people to help a little bit more."

In January, Amarillo Area Foundation began accepting applications for \$10,000 grants and quickly received \$150,000 in requests from 15 departments.

This year, three grants were given out to the Spearman, Wellington and Dimmitt volunteer fire departments. These fire departments are spending the money on fire shelters, 10 sets of bunker gear and training and recruiting, respectively.

"The fire shelter is a tent in a small, compact pack that is a last resort, but it's another line of defense that you can pull over yourself," said Spearman Fire Chief Roger Close.

"It's real common in the Forestry Service and wildfires on TV, but not in the Panhandle."

The Kathy Ryan-Elias Macias Jacquez Designated Fund also gave out \$10,000 in grants to the Cactus Volunteer Fire Department.

Elias Macias Jacquez died in April 2011 after he and three other firefighters were injured fighting a wildland fire in Moore County. During the operation, their firetruck became stuck in rough terrain and could not outpace the fire.

Jacquez was equipped with bunker gear, which is a heavier coat and boots for fighting structure fires. Their department was not equipped with wildland fire gear, a lighter version for fighting more mobile fires.

“As a firefighter, everything is necessary and nothing can be left out,” said Jacquez’s wife, Josephine Jacquez, who is also a volunteer firefighter, along with their daughter Amanda.

“I honestly believe this will help the Cactus Fire Department provide the proper training. They didn’t have the proper training, and with these funds, they can now get it.”

The Cactus Fire Department will use the \$10,000 grant for training and recruiting.

The \$40,000 granted to the four volunteer fire departments will go towards crucial equipment and training, but 11 fire departments that applied were not chosen due to limited funds. Jessica Tudyk, grants manager at Amarillo Area Foundation, said the need is also great among those departments.

“What became apparent in both situations is that firefighters needed not just training in structure fires, but wildfires,” said Joe Lovell, who helped launch Ryan’s Rural Fire and Rescue Fund. “We’ve been focused on the human capital, because without these volunteers, the firetrucks wouldn’t mean anything. We’re hoping that people will spread the word and help us raise money so we can help others.”