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# City's fire chief of 19 years reflects on accomplishments

## He's credited with improving quality of department

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

**NEWPORT** - Fire Chief Larry Atwell retired this week after nearly a half-century of battling blazes.

Reflecting on his 19 years' tenure as chief in Newport, Atwell cited three things that he was especially proud of accomplishing.

"We established the incident command system. It's the system in place that allows for a more effective emergency response," said Atwell. He cited a gas and water line incident that occurred on Oct. 5, 2000 - leaving 3,700 homes without gas or water. "It helped all the agencies - the department, CG&E, the state - work together."

**ADVFTDREMFMT** Atwell, 64, also noted the increase in emergency response units during his tenure. Newport now has two units with two paramedics on staff. This replaced the one basic unit with an EMT.

"I think I also helped instill pride in the department. The men show pride in themselves. If anyone stops by for a visit, they'll notice the house and apparatus is clean and orderly and amazingly well-kept," said Atwell.

"He's been a very professional fire chief and a good friend. We don't have as many fires in Newport now," said City Commissioner Jan Knepshield.

He went on to say that is because of the quality of the fire department's citywide inspections.

Atwell joined the Louisville Fire Department on Sept. 1, 1959. He rose through the ranks until becoming the district chief with responsibility for downtown Louisville. After 28 years, he retired from that department and assumed the chief post in Newport.

"The best day on the job was the day I started because it set the wheels in motion for all we've done," he said.

His retirement is partly due to a battle with spinal cancer that has required him to use a wheelchair since March 2004.

"I've pumped some new blood and life as far as pride and discipline goes," said Atwell. "But my job is to set the course. It's



**ZOOM** The Enquirer/patrick Reddy

Larry Atwell is retiring as chief of the Newport Fire Department. He made the decision partly because of spinal cancer, which has required him to use a wheelchair since March 2004.

not me doing the work. It's the people in the trenches that's getting the job done."

Atwell offered some advice to his as yet unnamed replacement. "In my opinion, I hope the chief takes it a step forward and uses computerization. I didn't do that, but that's the future of firefighting."

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