

He's 'Chopper' to most

Tauer always prepared to help Three Lakes Fire Department

BY ROGER G. BLOCKS
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Powerfully built, never abrasive, rarely challenged, excellent instructor, wonderful demeanor, that's the Three Lakes Fire Department's assistant fire chief. He observes, listens and acts. Called "Chopper" by most, and that's with a capital C.

Born in Rhineland, Lee Tauer grew up in Hiles and worked for and with his father in the woods from age 12 until adulthood. First bunching pulpwood, then cutting logs, Chopper grew in the footprint of grandpa Alois Tauer, a carpenter in the summer, logger in the winter and wildland forest firefighter honored in the Hiles Town Hall for saving a life.

Chopper's dad, after military service, joined the local Hiles Fire Department, had a career in road construction and then all things pertaining to wood. Dad provided a hard-working example for Lee and his brother, Anton, a practicing electrical engineer. Mom served Forest County as deputy treasurer and then treasurer in a public employee work career of 29 years.

Chopper earned an associate degree at Nicolet College, concentrating on auto body repair. He's been a proud employee of Borel Auto Body in Rhineland for 16 years. He does not mix work and his voluntary fire department duties. Fire and work do not mix. No compromise works in his



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business.

Dad, Mom and many of his relatives have been volunteer fire service and/or local government officials. Thus, when back in 1999 Chopper was recruited by now Three Lakes Fire Department Capt. Scott Lea, he was given opportunity to "do something helpful" as his way to provide public service. No more would he feel helpless when encountering an accident or fire. He'd learn fire duties and perform when needed.

Behind his smile — one his mother said to use at every opportunity — is a man trained for action. He's taken many fire and emergency courses, including Entry I and II, Certified I and II, Operational Haz-mat, Extrication (Basic and Advanced), Ladder Ops and Placement, Emergency Medical Technician, Rapid Intervention Training, Officers Training, National Incident Management System (NIMS) at 100, 200 and 400, and Chain of Command. In short, he's been increasingly prepared.

Rustlewood Resort was Chopper's most challenging fire response to date. High and variable winds, smoke clouding responders' view, flame in cottages and trees, and a propane tank needing shutoff were instant problems. Fire department cooperation involving Stella, Monico, Eagle River and the Department of Natural Resources needed constant coordination. All were elements of the memorable challenge, says Chopper.

Writing grants is an area that Chopper feels he's been helpful and thus derives joy. Three Lakes Fire Department's skid-pack (for water, pump and hose), brush equipment and side-by-side utility task vehicle are modest examples of his contribution via creative writing skills.

A bachelor, Chopper believes moderation in all things is key to success and good health. Grant writing seems to follow. His preparation for training classes and response to emergency situations display a well-orchestrated path and follow his personal credo: "It's all about planning and getting everyone back home — safely!" He takes pride in doing it right.

Chopper loves ATVing and rides his Polaris 850XP at every opportunity. Like his father, he is a woodsman. He knows the forest. His hobby is making maple syrup. Thus, when time allows, Chopper is to be found in the woods. Why wouldn't his nickname be Chopper?

He's one of Three Lakes' finest. He's lived in Three Lakes for 15



Three Lakes firefighter Lee "Chopper" Tauer helped train other firefighters with vehicle extrication techniques during a training session last year. —NEWS-REVIEW PHOTO

years, been Fireman of the Year in the period 2003-'04 and had a 3.96 grade-point average in school.

We're proud to say, "I know the lad Lee Tauer — Chopper. He's like a

Harley-Davidson, a jewel out of a Wisconsin factory that's been slightly modified for even better performance."

Lucky us.