

A heart for helping others

By Sarah Schulz

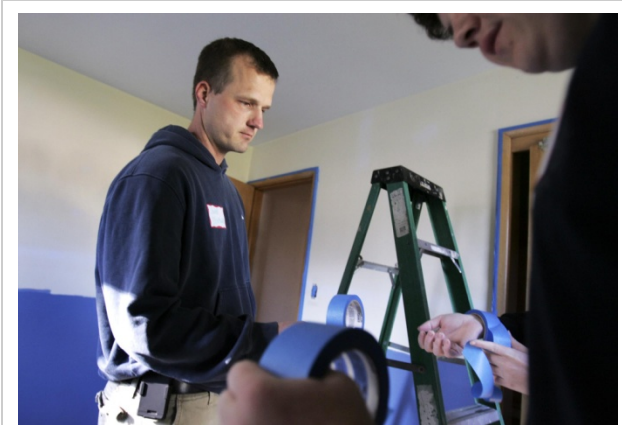
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Giving back to his community means a lot to Jared Stockwell.

As a firefighter/paramedic with the Grand Island Fire Department, he helps people in moments of crisis.

As a Community Youth Council board member, he helps motivate students to think about others.



Grand Island firefighter/paramedic Jared Stockwell (left), who is also a CYC board member, helps out during a CYC Join Hands Urban Renewal Project on the 100 block of West 19th Street in Grand Island. The CYC effort saved about \$4,000 for the Housing Development Corporation, which partnered the project. (The Independent/Barrett Stinson)

As a concerned citizen, he has helped secure funding to buy smoke detectors for low-income residents.

But Stockwell is the last person to brag about his contributions.

"He's humble, giving, patient and when you're talking to him, you're the most important person in the world," said Matt Whitman. "I have nothing critical to say about him. He's my best friend, but I admire him and I don't look up to many people. He is someone I aspire to be like and that's a short list. He's one of a few people on that list."

Whitman and Stockwell met when they both moved to Grand Island 10 years ago. Whitman leads the college/young adult ministries at the Evangelical Free Church, where Stockwell has helped with various youth groups. Stockwell and Whitman's wife used to work at a summer camp together, and that is also where Stockwell met his wife, Sheree.

A native of Geneva, he came to Grand Island after graduating from the University of Nebraska at Kearney in May 2000. He worked at Mid-Plains and took care of his grandfather before becoming a firefighter in January 2005.

"Being a firefighter wasn't really on the radar," Stockwell said of his career aspirations.

A friend had taken a class to be an emergency medical technician and he thought the career sounded interesting. When he learned the GIFD was hiring, he decided to apply.

"I like it," he said. "I like the day-to-day training and learning. There's always something to learn. You never know what the day will bring."

About two years ago, Stockwell added paramedic to his resume. He decided to take the classes necessary to be a paramedic because he liked the "busyness" of the ambulance and enjoyed the contact with patients.

Fire Chief Troy Hughes said Stockwell took the training through UNK and it was about a two-year process because of the classroom activities and the numerous ride-alongs.

"He has a general sense of how to improve the department and a sense of duty," Hughes said. "Jared is a great employee. He's a great role model."

Those qualities drew Wendy Meyer-Jerke, public information officer for the city of Grand Island, to ask Stockwell to be on the board for the Community Youth Council a year ago. Meyer-Jerke is the coordinator for the group.

"All board members are asked to serve on one committee, but this year Jared was a part of three: The Movie in the Park event held last July; City Government Committee, which meets monthly; and most recently has been the go-to person for the Join Hands Urban Renewal Project," she said. "In most cases, it takes a CYC member, student or adult a year to take in what the CYC is all about. In Jared's case, he stepped up right away at our planning retreat and brought up many valid ideas and suggestions of ways the students could become involved that fit with the group's mission statement. The idea of an urban renewal project was one he mentioned and the students loved it."

On Saturday, Stockwell joined a group of CYC students to fix up a Hall County Housing Development Authority property for a new resident. Meyer-Jerke said he took the lead on the project with the student co-chairmen.

Stockwell said part of that position involved having his home serve as the collection site for all the tools that were needed for the project. He also helped transport the tools to the job site.

"I am thrilled to have Jared as a board member of the CYC. The CYC is very fortunate to have such a giving and committed member as part of their group. He has the natural knack of relating well to young people," Meyer-Jerke said. "He does a wonderful job of guiding the students and offering advice, but still lets them lead. You can tell that the students respect and value his opinion."

Stockwell said being on the board has been a fun experience and he enjoys working with the youths, trying to contribute and giving them some vision for ways they can help others.

"Jared is someone that has a genuine interest in making our community a better place to live, which he demonstrates on the job and also through his many volunteer efforts," Meyer-Jerke said. "He is a man of fairness, integrity and character and is the type of person who is willing to offer a helping hand no matter the situation or circumstance."

Hughes agrees that Stockwell is generous with his time. For example, he came to Hughes after a trailer fire killed two people in a Grand Island mobile home park last year. It's unknown if the trailer had a working smoke detector.

Hughes said Stockwell wanted to do something. So he worked with the Community Emergency Response Team to collect data on the number of mobile homes and low-income households that lacked working smoke detectors. He used that data to write a federal grant and was given \$110,000, which will buy 3,750 smoke detectors. He's now working with multiple agencies to coordinate distribution and installation of the devices this summer.

"Jared's really spearheaded that," Hughes said. "He did a lot of the work on his own time and he got a

venture grant from the United Way for educational materials."

Stockwell said he felt the extra work was a "worthwhile endeavor" and he feels it will benefit the city and could help a family get out of a burning home safely. Educating the public and raising awareness is the ultimate goal, he said.

"It's an opportunity to serve and contribute," he said. "That's the bigger thing."

In addition to his grant writing, board service and full-time job, Stockwell has also competed in the Firefighter Combat Challenge, which plays into his athletic ability. He played football for UNK and participated in the Nebraska Shrine Bowl. Whitman said Stockwell is the rare combination of a competitive athlete who is also empathetic.

"You have to be around him to truly see his character," Whitman said. "He cares about people and does things not expecting anything in return. He has unending generosity. It's just completely authentic. He's not playing the game."