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TOP STORY

## Avery County celebrates retirement of Fire Marshal David Charles Vance

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David Charles Vance (left) receives the Order of the Long Leaf Pine from Avery County Sheriff Kevin Frye.  
Photo by Jeffery Cardwell

NEWLAND — On Thursday, June 10, at the Avery County North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service Community Building, Avery County celebrated the retirement of Fire Marshal David Charles Vance. Vance, a lifelong resident of Avery County, has dedicated the last 56 years of his life to service in Avery County.

Longtime chief of the Green Valley Fire Department and Avery County Fire Marshal, Vance is a mentor and leader for the Avery community. Vance was born on June 11, 1940, in Avery County and graduated from Cranberry High School in 1958, where he was a member and caller for the smooth dance team. He is a member of the Cranberry High School Restoration Committee.



Vance attended Lees-McRae College for two years before joining the U.S. Air Force in 1961. He was on active duty for four years and in the reserve for two years. After completing his military service, Vance returned to Avery and began working for the Tar Heel Mica Co. fabrication plant with his father, where he worked for 27 years. In 1965, Vance became a member of the Green Valley Fire Department and from 1979 to 1989 served as the department's Fire Chief. Vance has also served for 53 years as the treasurer of the Avery County Firefighters Association.

Following his service as the fire chief with Green Valley Fire Department, Vance served as the Avery County Fire Marshal and Emergency Manager, a position he has maintained as a member of North Carolina Emergency Management for more than 30 years. During his time as the Fire Marshal and Emergency Manager, Vance led Avery County through many major events, such as hurricanes Frances, Hugo and Ivan, ice storms, floods and, currently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

Avery County Sheriff Kevin Frye commended Vance for his leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic and for putting others before himself, even during times of personal loss. He presented Vance with the highest honor reserved by the North Carolina Governor's Office, the Order of the Long Leaf Pine.

The Order of the Long Leaf Pine is awarded to "persons who have made significant contributions to the state and their communities through their exemplary service and exceptional accomplishments" according to the society's webpage. Only a few hundred of the awards have been bestowed to citizens of The Tar Heel State. Vance is now an Ambassador Extraordinaire of the Order of the Long Leaf Pine.

Mike Causey, North Carolina Fire Marshal and Commissioner of the North Carolina Department of Insurance, presented Vance with a plaque for the Order of the Guardian. According to the NC Department of Insurance website, the Order of the Guardian is presented to "citizens who have more than 30 years of outstanding service in either the fire or insurance industry."

Vance also received a flag of North Carolina awarded by Governor Roy Cooper, as well as a United States flag and Certificate of Special Recognition from the Office of US Rep. Madison Cawthorn and plaque of recognition from Avery County leaders.

After the awards were presented, Vance enjoyed the "Avery County Roast," in which loved ones and peers recalled their favorite, often humorous, memories of Vance. Surrounded by family, Vance was joined at the ceremony by many of his cousins, children, as well as nieces and nephews. Vance says he looks forward to fishing, farming and spending his time with family in his retirement.

Marisa Mecke is a Report for America corps member for Mountain Times Publications. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.