



#I AM Richmond 911 Jackie Crofts

From a very young age, Jackie Crofts knew what he wanted to be.

"I can remember seeing my grandpa getting up at all hours of the night to go help people. I wanted to be just like him."

The deputy director of technology for the Richmond Department of Emergency Communications (DEC), Jackie is responsible for supporting critical systems for the emergency communications center, including public safety technology and communications. He is the 12th and final #IamRichmond911 honoree.

His grandfather, Dale Hawks, was a charter member of the Cana (Virginia) Volunteer Fire Department in the rural community in southwestern Virginia. He remembers hearing the continuous ring of the emergency calls on his grandfather's house phone.

"They called it the fire line ...way before 911," Jackie said. "He had a spare closet where he kept his gear. I remember going in there and putting his hat on. I wanted to go with him. ... When he came home from a call, I was told stories and got a play-by-play, which drove the desire to follow in his footsteps."

Jackie got to tag along to the fire house starting around age 8. In high school, he began volunteering with the Cana Volunteer Fire Department then became a certified firefighter and EMT.

"I've seen bad accidents – 100-car pileups. I've cut people out of cars. In a small community, a lot of the people you're going to help are people you know," Jackie said. "I miss it. I don't forget where I come from."

After a short stint working with computers in the textile industry, he began answering and dispatching 911 calls with Forsyth County Fire Department in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He became a system administrator there before taking the same position with DEC in 2007.

"My background and my grandfather's influence prepared me for what I do at DEC," Jackie said. "Since I was a firefighter and a communications officer, I understand being on the other side of the radio as well as taking 911 calls."

In 2015, he was promoted to technical services operations manager, which became the new position of deputy director of technology.

"We're working behind the scenes to make sure our public safety partners have the tools to respond to calls and communicate with our officers 99 percent of the time," Jackie said.

"We're dedicated to providing a high level of service to the public and our public safety partners. We're that conduit, so the public can get the services they need on their worst day. ...With text-to-911, next generation 911 and the 800 800MHz radio system, we're striving to stay on the cutting-edge of technology."

Now a husband, father and grandfather himself, Jackie still feels his grandpa's influence.

"The decision my grandfather made to be a volunteer responder touched our entire family ...Volunteer firefighting and EMS goes beyond the average volunteer work in small communities. It becomes a lifestyle. ... If you need something, he's the guy you call. Still is – and he's 88."

Jackie raises funds for the Richmond Police Athletic League (PAL), coaches his children's sports teams and volunteers at his church.

"One of the things I'm proud of is working with the PAL golf tournament. I bring in all the vendors that we work with on donations and sponsorships through the people I know and my connections."

Held each year in May at the Stonehenge Golf and Country Club, the golf tournament is the primary fundraiser for PAL.