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# SOUND COMMITMENT

## Tradition of honor

### Bagpipes and drums play vital role in spirit of Mesa firefighters

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Mesa Fire Department deputy chief Mary Cameli has seen the department's honor guard pipes and drums in action dozens of times over the past seven years. She still gets goose bumps.

"You can't escape the chills when you hear them play," Cameli said. "The intensity of the music truly draws out your emotions, and there's just so much tradition in the bagpipes."

The 18-member guard has been booked solid in recent weeks, performing at events such as Arizona Diamondbacks baseball games and the opening ceremony of the annual state firefighters school. On Oct. 19, they are scheduled to perform such classics as "The Star-Spangled Banner," "Amazing Grace" and "Danny Boy" at the Arizona Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Phoenix.

While bagpipes and drums have long been part of honor guards on the East Coast, the Mesa Fire Department was the first department west of the Mississippi to add such a section, said Tom Hand, a drummer with the guard and a training coordinator for the department.

Back in 1996, the department formed an honor guard at the request of a dying firefighter who wanted the fire department to play a big role at his funeral, Capt. Rick Apple said. By the end of the same year, the bagpipes and drum section were added.

"One of our goals is to carry on fire service traditions from our day-to-day duties until our deaths," Apple said.

Kilt and tartan-clad bagpipe-playing firefighters can be traced back to the 1800s, said bagpipe player and Battalion Chief Dewey Ray.

In the 1840s, poor Irish, English and Scottish people came to the United States to escape starvation, Ray said.

"The Irish weren't looked upon too highly. They were discriminated against and they usually had to take the worst, most dangerous and poorest paying jobs," Ray said. "So, a lot of them became firefighters and miners."

When they lost their lives, which wasn't uncommon back then, the firefighters threw traditional wakes and funerals — complete with bagpipes.

Since the Mesa honor guard was formed, it has performed for two governors and at the Fiesta Bowl and various national and international firefighting events. Every year band members go to Colorado Springs, Colo., for the International Association of Firefighters Fallen Firefighters memorial.

Among the most emotional events they've attended was a memorial for the 354 firefighters lost in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and a Sept. 11, 2002, Diamondbacks game at Ball Park One in Phoenix in which the crowd erupted after they played "America the Beautiful."

As members of the guard watched the families of the firefighters enter Madison Square Garden in New York, a small boy approached them, Apple said.

"He looked up at us and says. 'Mister, Mister. I want to thank you for coming for my daddy,' " Apple said. "It was a hard thing, but it comes back to tradition."



**MEN OF HONOR:** Members of the Mesa fire honor guard march into Bank One Ballpark before a Diamonbacks game. Left row, front to back: Battalion Chief Dewey Ray, engineer Brett Bigelow and officer Tom Hand. Right row, front to back: Rick Knowles, Capt. Dave Millett, firefighter Paul Liddell and engineer Tim Rhoades.

DARRYL WEBB, TRIBUNE