



KENOSHA NEWS PHOTO BY BILL SIEL

Bunky Tabbert displays the mementoes given to him Tuesday night in honor of his 50 years of service with the Somers Fire Department.

Bunky Tabbert honored

BY ARLENE JENSEN
KENOSHA NEWS

SOMERS — Ernest "Bunky" Tabbert was honored Tuesday for 50 years of service on the Somers Fire Department.

At a meeting of the Somers Town Board, Tabbert was applauded by town officials and residents for his devotion to the fire service, beginning when he was only 19 years old.

Town Chairman Carol Fischer proclaimed today to be "Bunky Tabbert Day" in the town.

"The citizens of Somers go to bed at night knowing they are safe because Bunky is on watch," Fischer said.

He has been chief twice. His first stint was 1970-79 and the second was 1984-91. He remains active with the department.

Tabbert is also a charter member of the Somers Rescue Squad, which was formed in 1977.

After receiving his award, Tabbert thanked his fellow Somers residents for the accolades.

"It has been an honor to serve

you," he said.

Firefighting runs in the Tabbert family. Since the fire department was formed in 1934, there has always been a Tabbert on the department.

The late Ernest Tabbert Sr., Bunky's dad, was the first chief of the department. He served from 1934 until 1961.

Bunky's wife, Dee, is on the rescue squad, and his daughter, Carrie Schnabel, is on both rescue and fire departments. A son, Jimmy, was a firefighter for five years in the 1980s.

George Wojtak, Bunky's son-in-law, is a full-time firefighter and emergency medical technician, assigned to the town hall station. Son-in-law Darin Schnabel is a volunteer firefighter and EMT.

Uncle Ted Tabbert died in 1949 in the wreck of a Somers fire truck while responding to a call. Ed and George Tabbert, both uncles, and cousins Boots and Donnie also served.

Randy Tabbert, Bunky's nephew, was a Somers firefighter

at the time of his death. Randy's son, Cory recently joined the department.

Brother Lenny served on the department until he moved to a northern county in Wisconsin and retired from firefighting. Brother-in-law Al Schlitz and nephew Mark Schlitz also answered the bell for Somers.

"I was brought up to be a volunteer," Tabbert said Tuesday. "I've always wanted to help others. The house I was born in was across the street from the fire department. In those days, everybody pitched in and helped out."

He said modern equipment, knowledge and training have improved the life of firefighters. "Equipment like radios and breathing masks have made a big difference."

Fire Chief Steve Krause is not a Tabbert, but called Bunky his mentor.

"After I got on the department, he encouraged me to get more training, to gain knowledge. I owe a lot to him."