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Deputy Fire Chief to take helm in Naperville

Oak Park Deputy Fire Chief Mark Puknaitis has been selected to be chief of the Naperville Fire Department. Puknaitis' last day in Oak Park will be Dec. 12.

"Deputy Chief Puknaitis has been an important member of our emergency response team for more than a decade," said Oak Park Fire Chief William Bell. "His dedication to the Village, the department and his duties has earned him the respect of his peers and those who have worked with him. The Oak Park Fire Department is better for his having served it for so long."

Village Manager Tom Barwin added, "The fact the City of Naperville would select its new fire chief from the Oak Park Fire Department says a lot. The pool of applicants for such an important post surely was deep and broad. Mark's selection is a compliment both to his abilities and to the quality of the staff and programs of the Oak Park Fire Department."

Chief Bell credited Puknaitis with helping introduce the concept of advanced life support medical services on all fire apparatus, pushing for automatic external defibrillators (AEDs) throughout the community and making Oak Park one of only six departments nationwide accredited for both its fire and emergency medical services.

"While we hate to see Mark go, we fully understand why he has chosen pursue this great career opportunity," Bell said. "His decision to leave, while unfortunate for Oak Park, is the right one for his family, his career and for himself. He not only will be taking the helm of an organization 200-strong with 10 neighborhood fire stations, he will be doing it in his hometown."

Puknaitis said he always would be thankful for the many groups and individuals who were there to give their support.

"I will always cherish this place called Oak Park for its community spirit and ability to move ahead in the face of many challenges," he said. "I have truly enjoyed my work here but realize that the time has come to move on. I look forward to using my skills and abilities in Naperville with the same zeal and enthusiasm that I have had here.

"I also will be indebted always to Oak Park in a very personal way – I met my wife at an *A Day in our Village* fire station tour."

Chief Bell said the task at hand in Oak Park is to determine how best to fill Puknaitis' role.

"We have some very capable individuals in the Oak Park Fire Department who I know can step in without missing a beat. But we are going to take our time before making a final decision on the future of the position," Bell said.

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