

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 344

Celebrating the life of Harry E. Diezel.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 7, 2019
 Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 18, 2019

WHEREAS, Harry E. Diezel, a veteran, firefighter, and public servant who dedicated his life to safeguarding and strengthening the Virginia Beach community, died on January 9, 2019; and

WHEREAS, a native of Washington, D.C., Harry Diezel graduated from Falls Church High School, then served his country as a member of the United States Army with the 82nd Airborne Division and the 1st Cavalry Division; and

WHEREAS, after his honorable military service, Harry Diezel briefly studied law, but was drawn to a career in public safety and joined the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department in 1966, rising to the rank of lieutenant; and

WHEREAS, on May 1, 1974, Harry Diezel became chief of the Virginia Beach Fire Department and quickly earned a reputation as an innovative leader and a staunch advocate for the firefighters under his command; and

WHEREAS, Harry Diezel was committed to the health and wellness of his firefighters, supporting state presumption laws for workplace-related heart and lung conditions, and implementing a voluntary physical fitness program; and

WHEREAS, Harry Diezel worked to change state building codes to improve fire prevention measures in high-rise and multi-dwelling structures and laid the groundwork for the Automatic Aid system, which allows dispatchers to reach across city lines to ensure that the closest fire company responds to an emergency; and

WHEREAS, among his proudest accomplishments, Harry Diezel secured funding for the Virginia Beach Fire Training Center, a 10,000-square-foot facility complete with offices, classrooms, an auditorium, and a burn building; and

WHEREAS, Harry Diezel also helped develop the Urban Search and Rescue Team, which led to the development of the FEMA Team, Virginia Task Force 2; members of the local team and other FEMA teams from around the country have trained at the Fire Training Center; and

WHEREAS, Harry Diezel helped the Virginia Beach Fire Department grow from a staff of 120 career firefighters to more than 500 firefighters, and he played an instrumental role in the recruitment of women into the fire department; and

WHEREAS, Harry Diezel retired as fire chief in 1997, but returned to public service when he was unanimously appointed to fill a vacancy on the Virginia Beach City Council; he subsequently won election to two additional terms and represented the residents of the Kempsville district for 10 years; and

WHEREAS, Harry Diezel also went on to serve on the leadership team of the city manager and used his wealth of experience to serve as an ombudsman for all public safety divisions within the city; and

WHEREAS, in May 2018, the Fire Training Center was renamed as the Chief Harry E. Diezel Fire Training Center in recognition of his legacy of excellence and incomparable service to the city; and

WHEREAS, Harry Diezel will be fondly remembered and greatly missed by his wife of 54 years, Ginny; his son, Matthew, and his family; and numerous other family members, friends, and fellow firefighters; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby note with great sadness the loss of Harry E. Diezel, a pillar of the Virginia Beach community; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of Harry E. Diezel as an expression of the General Assembly's respect for his memory.

ENROLLED

SJ344ER