

# Loss of a giant

*Big in stature, presence, Lambert's death felt by fire department*

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**W**hen Marcus Lambert was training to become a firefighter, Lake Bridgeport Fire Chief Willie Garrett warned him he might struggle to get his massive 6-foot-3 frame onto the rope for a drill.

"I said, 'this is going to be tough on you because you've got to be able to lift yourself up on a rope,'" Garrett recalled. "And he said, 'I won't have any trouble. I can get it done.'"

Lambert instead became part of the training.

"They were like, 'Hey, big guy, come over here. We're going to stretch out a rope between this building and that building and he's going to lay in a box and we're going to take him across.' All these little guys, were like, 'Dude, what?'"

With his large frame and even larger presence and drive, Lambert was a giant in the Lake Bridgeport Fire Department. In 18 years with the department, he filled a number of roles while piling up dozens of state and national certifications. He became the president of the department, a role he kept even when a new full-time job at the hospital in Graham took his residence out of the county.

His surprising and untimely death March 7 at 44 left a giant void in the department, much larger than the man. To Garrett, he's lost much more than a colleague and fellow firefighter.

"I lost a friend. He was definitely like a brother," Garrett said.

A memorial service for Lambert was held Saturday at Hawkins Funeral Home in Bridgeport, with several firefighters in attendance to pay their final respects. Outside the funeral home, an American flag hung from the top of Bridgeport's extended ladder truck.

Lambert joined Lake Bridgeport Fire Department while working for West Wise Special Utility District in July 2003. He

soon became a valuable addition with his ability to break away from work to help with calls during the day.

"If he was working for them, as long as there wasn't an emergency call, he could respond for the fire department," Garrett said. "He quickly became a first responder."

He soon found a passion to which he dedicated the rest of his life. Through the fire department, he went to EMT school and then on to the fire academy and later became a paramedic.

"Once he got the taste of fire, EMS and medicine, he blasted off," Garrett said. "He was learning every day. He pushed everyone else to learn."

"He had a stack of certifications."

There were so many that Garrett and his top officers only listed the 28 most difficult certifications he attained for his memorial service.

For 10 years, he worked for Wise County EMS, starting as an EMT and then later paramedic. He eventually became a training officer for the agency.

"He was a good medic and would give you the shirt off his back. He had a great bedside manner," said Randall Preuninger, Wise County EMS administrator. "He liked to teach. He was good to put with new members to teach them."

He later worked for the Faith Community Hospital EMS in Jacksboro before going to Graham Regional Medical Center in January 2019 to work in the emergency room.

Garrett said Lambert was working to bridge his paramedic certification into becoming a registered nurse.

His work with the Lake Bridgeport Fire Department will leave a lasting impact on the community. As the president of the department, he was responsible for its finances, certifications and training.

"As the chief, I'm operations and run the fire, the grounds and the people," Garrett said. "Marcus was responsible for the finances, all the paperwork and all the logistics."

"He had a very big role in the department."

He worked to also secure grants with Garrett, including a recent \$200,000 grant from the Texas Forest Service for a large brush truck. Over the years, they have also received grants from FEMA for trucks and other grants for equipment.

"He always made sure we had our paperwork together and the narratives, I'd write something, and he'd read it. He'd make corrections, and I'd read his corrections and we'd send it off," Garrett explained. "Just making sure all the I's are dotted and the T's crossed and taken care of. He left a giant legacy and a huge void."

Garrett also feels that void personally. Their shared interests of cooking, fishing and hunting, made them friends and good travel companions on trips to the National Fire Academy in Maryland.

Though Garrett originally had no interest in going to New York City, Lambert persuaded him to go with him on one trip.

"We walked the entire island of Manhattan in three days," Garrett said. "This big giant could see over everybody. I just walked behind him. It was like Mutt and Jeff."

"He was such a big Teddy bear. He liked stuff like operas, plays and classical music."

The cause of Lambert's death is undetermined, pending autopsy results. He was working at an event out of state when he died.

The loss of Lambert was compounded in the department by the recent death of longtime volunteer Tommy Hudson from COVID-19.

"[Hudson] wasn't necessarily the foot on the ground fireman, but he volunteered with us and was always there washing a truck or changing a battery," Garrett said. "There's that hole right now. We lost our little fix-it man. And then Marcus, who did so much to keep the department going. There's definitely a hole."

And giant shoes to fill, much larger than Lambert's size 14.



RICHARD GREENE/WCMESSENGER

**LASTING LEGACY** — As the Lake Bridgeport Fire Department's second president, Marcus Lambert helped the department secure several grants for trucks and equipment.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**TOUCHING TRIBUTE** — Bridgeport firefighters joined other agencies Saturday in paying tribute to Lake Bridgeport Fire Department President Marcus Lambert, who died March 7.