



From left, top to bottom: Division Chief Eve Tolefree, Captain Sandy Herd, Captain Lexie Engleman, Lieutenant Kathy Elkins, Firefighter Tiffany Saturday and Engineer Karen Glotzbach



Written by **Mary R. Gage**
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Female firefighting force

Mary R. Gage shares the stories of six women who risk their lives to protect Lawrence from flames and danger

The concept of a female firefighter was simply revolutionary less than one generation ago. Professional women firefighters did not exist in the United States until 1973 and in Lawrence until 1981.

Now barriers are broken, but women remain a rarity in fire departments across the nation. Currently, of the city's 140 firefighters, six are women.

Like any of their colleagues, these women fight fires, save lives and work as part of the team. They will tell you they are just normal people. They will tell you that every firefighter in Lawrence, man or woman, is a highly trained professional. They tend to downplay their accomplishments and talk of support, respect and camaraderie. Nonetheless, they are very much professional pioneers. Their accomplishments amaze and their stories inspire.

EVE TOLEFREE

Position: **Division Chief**

Posting: **Fire Station No. 5**

Year Joined: **1986**

Fact: **Can deliver babies and treat gunshot wounds but won't pull her children's loose teeth.**

"I certainly didn't expect to become a firefighter," says division chief Eve Tolefree, who wears a lot of hats, including a firefighter helmet. Among other responsibilities, she oversees community relations, employee wellness, recruitment and risk management. She also serves as the department's liaison with Lawrence Memorial Hospital and University of Kansas Athletics.

Tolefree worked as a paramedic for the Douglas County Ambulance Service for almost 10 years. Then, in 1996, city and coun-

ty officials decided to merge this service with the Lawrence Fire Department. The organizations officially became Lawrence-Douglas County Fire and Medical, and paramedics like Tolefree were offered the opportunity to cross-train as firefighters and remain part of the organization.

Tolefree decided to give it a try and signed up for the first recruitment class of the new department. She emphasizes how smooth her training was because of the positive feedback from her mostly male colleagues.

"I was very blessed and fortunate that the group of guys I had was very helpful and very respectful," she recalls.

Tolefree learned that as a firefighter she'd have her own bedroom (shared with someone on a different shift) and separate bathroom facilities. She would share a fitness room, a "living room" area and a kitchen, but primarily she would share the enormous responsibility of fighting fires and responding to medical calls.

Before long, she was working 24 hours on, 24 hours off over six days followed by four days off—a challenging schedule and job, but one that suited her well. Her family—husband Brian, three daughters and one son—was supportive. However, she admits they were pretty happy when her promotion to division chief allowed for an 8-to-5 week-day schedule.

As the chief in charge of recruitment, Tolefree continues to look for ways to interest qualified young men and women in becoming firefighters. She believes that if she can just get young female athletes to come visit, she'll have a chance to convince them what a great job it is.

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SANDY HERD*Position: Captain**Posting: Fire Station No. 3**Year Joined: 1987**Fact: After retirement next year, she hopes to start a business to board and train horses.*

Sandy Herd wasn't about to give up her manicured nails and great wardrobe to become a firefighter. In fact, the possibility never even crossed her mind. Then her company asked her to relocate to St. Louis and she took a hard look at options to remain in Lawrence.

"I decided to apply to be a firefighter because I wanted a good job in Lawrence," says Herd. "When a position became available in 1986, over 100 people came to the informational meeting."

The first strenuous physical test cut the field in half. And half of those left didn't pass the subsequent written test. Interviews pared down the candidates one by one until Herd was hired in January of 1987, becoming the Lawrence Fire Department's third female firefighter.

"To me, the job seemed to offer a lot of opportunities. If you wanted to advance you could—there were always supplemental training options available. I wanted to jump-start my career," she continues. "I always liked that I was able to keep learning because I was pretty ambitious, and that was honestly something I liked about the fire service."

Over the years, Herd has completed paramedic training, served as the public education officer and achieved the rank of captain. In her time off, she feels fortunate to have been able to compete with and show her three horses.

"We have quite a history of helping each other out. Firefighters want to help people," she says. "And the guys are just fabulous. They're wonderful."

LEXIE ENGLEMAN*Position: Captain**Posting: Fire Station No. 2**Year Joined: 1981**Fact: Built her own house in 1997*

They call her "the old pioneer," and Captain Lexie Engleman doesn't mind. In 1981, she had completed a master's degree in education, taught physical education for a few years, married and just had a baby.

"I needed a job, and I anticipated very much another job in teaching, when I saw the ad in the paper. I thought I'd just look into it," she remembers. "I kept passing the tests, but I didn't tell my parents about it. They found out about it on the news during breakfast in Great Bend. Back then, hiring a female firefighter, that was very new. I'm afraid they had to scrape my mother off the ceiling."

Engleman says the job is physically demanding, something she encountered on her very first day when she was sent out to fight a trailer fire in the wake of a damaging tornado that hit Lawrence in 1981.

She stays fit to keep up with the demands. Partial to weight training, she has even placed fourth in a statewide body building competition.

And when you ask her about retirement? She laughs and says, "I'm still having too much fun. These guys become your family. My motto is: Everybody has a good time and gets home safe."

KATHY ELKINS*Position: Lieutenant**Posting: Fire Station No. 4**Year Joined: 1986**Fact: President of the Lawrence firefighters union (International Association of Firefighters Local 1596) for six years*

Kathy Elkins was finishing a degree in recreation administration when a friend suggested she should look into firefighting as a career. She doesn't know whether it was fate, but within a week of that comment a job opening became available, and in March of 1986 she joined Lexie Engleman as one of two women on staff.

"I feel very lucky. The guys here are great," she says, "and just like them, I have to come in and prove myself every day."

Within months of her hiring, the Lawrence Fire Department suffered a heavy blow when firefighter Mark Blair lost his life fighting a fire in July 1986.

"That hit us all hard. I thought, 'This is really real. Is this really what I want to do?'" says Elkins.

She was able to work through it and has thoroughly enjoyed her career, but admits it isn't always easy.

"Depending on what happens, some of the stuff you deal with will stay with you forever. There are calls I will never forget."

That's where her dogs, Casey and Cody, and her cat Mulligan come in.

"I can have the worst day, when I can't talk about it," she notes, "and these animals—they're a lifeline. They're always so happy to see you with their unconditional love."

She also enjoys the family atmosphere at a station. Most of the days are fairly regimented as firefighters stay busy between calls with training, inspections, community education and other responsibilities. But on weekends, she says the firefighters usually eat a big breakfast together, and occasionally there's time to play cards or do something as a group.

TIFFANY SATURDAY*Position: Firefighter**Posting: Fire Station No. 2**Year Joined: first in 1997, again in 2005**Fact: Hiked to the top of Pikes Peak in 2007*

Tiffany Saturday is the youngest of Lawrence's female firefighters. Like the others, she didn't picture herself in the job. She was training with Douglas County Ambulance Service to be a paramedic and hoped to eventually work with her father, a pilot for LifeFlight in Kansas City, when the fire and ambulance departments merged in 1996.

She opted for the training to become a firefighter and loved the job. When her son was born a few years later, however, she decided to try something different that would allow for a more regular schedule. For four years she ran a doggie day care business. She enjoyed the dogs but missed the department the whole time she was gone.

"I really wanted to come back," she says. "I missed the camaraderie, I missed the people and I missed the job itself."

The only problem was that she was out of shape. In fact, she failed the Candidate Physical Abilities Test on her first try. Undaunted, she hired a personal trainer, worked hard and was able to pass the test.

"I had to start all over," she says, "and really fight for a job."

Now that she's back, she wouldn't have it any other way.

"I love my job very much. I like putting my finger on a particular time in someone's life and helping them. The department is the same way. If anyone is in need, the department as a whole is there for you. I look at these guys like brothers."

KAREN GLOTZBACH*Position: Engineer**Posting: Fire Station No. 2**Year Joined: 2000**Fact: Rides a Harley-Davidson motorcycle*

Growing up, Karen Glotzbach dreamed of becoming a doctor or a veterinarian, but life's twists and turns led her in a different direction. She was raising three children and working in the medical field when her desire to help others led her to become a paramedic. Then a few years later, when a position opened at Lawrence Fire and Medical and there was a possibility to be both a firefighter and paramedic, she jumped at the chance.

"I liked the thought of them both being combined," she says. "In fact, once I started the job, for the first time ever I thought, 'This is it; this is what I should be doing.'"

As a firefighter, Glotzbach has not only been able to help others in a very basic way, but she's also been able to grow personally.

"There are so many different directions you can go as a firefighter, so many different types of education you can pursue," she explains. "Early on, one of my goals was to drive the fire trucks. And to be honest I was a little intimidated by it."

These days, Glotzbach is often behind the wheel of one of the big trucks. And after years of training, she's sometimes the most experienced person on the truck.

"That's a pretty powerful thing as a woman," she says. "It feels pretty fantastic to be the expert."

Meanwhile, her veterinarian dreams have led to her "zoo," as she calls it. She owns five horses, five head of cattle, four dogs, two cats and some chickens. And when she's not tending to them, or hunting, fishing or trail riding, you might find her smoking some ribs for a charity event in her latest venture: KB's Smokehouse, a barbecue catering business.

It seems her girlhood dreams weren't too far off the mark.

The CPAT: Can you do it?

In order to be considered for a position as a firefighter, candidates must first pass a Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT). In 10 minutes and 20 seconds, you must be able to complete eight tasks while wearing a 50-pound vest that simulates a firefighter's apparel and gear.

So strap on your gear and attempt to do this:

- 1) Pile on an extra 25 pounds (to simulate a hose pack) and climb stairs.
- 2) (You get to take off the extra 25 pounds.) Drag a fire hose from truck to "fire ground."
- 3) Remove and carry equipment to the fire ground.
- 4) Place a ladder and extend it to a window or roof height.
- 5) Force entry by breaking through a wall or a locked door.
- 6) Search for victims by crawling through a dark, unpredictable area.
- 7) Drag and remove the department's dummy, Rescue Randy (who weighs 125-150 pounds), from the fire building.
- 8) Break through a ceiling and check for a fire hose extension.

Has your 10 minutes and 20 seconds expired? I think I'm still climbing some stairs.**Oh, and don't forget they'll also ask you to climb a 100-foot extension ladder.****Good luck!**