



By Jan Schultz

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Every May at the Nebraska State Fire School during opening ceremonies, a youngster is in the spotlight to receive a special award.

That recognition memorializes Jack Browning, a former Imperial Volunteer Fire Department (IVFD) member and officer, who died in a tragic drowning accident on Father's Day weekend in 1988.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of his passing, but his memory lives on each year at the fire school.

The Browning Memorial Award this year went to three-year-old Cooper DeWitt of Albion, who is battling leukemia. His cancer is in remission, but he still has two years of intensive treatment ahead of him.

Coincidentally, Cooper's middle name is Jack.

During the special presentation May 17, Jack's widow, Donna Browning McNair of Imperial, was in attendance with other family members.

She said it was the first time she's attended the ceremony, and found it to be quite special. She thought this year marked the 24th year since Jack's death, but said nephew Rob Browning, an IVFD member, quickly reminded her it was 25, telling her there would be a special 25th anniversary display at fire school.

The display at the fire school expo included the news story when he died, his IVFD jacket and helmet, and other memorabilia.

It's likely several departments across the state as well as some of IVFD's younger members were unaware of who Browning was. The display this year helped change that.

As part of his award, young Cooper received a plaque and "tables-full" of gifts donated by departments across the state.

Some of the gifts Cooper and his family took home included bunker coats and remote-controlled fire trucks. The IVFD donated an electronic tablet.

Volunteer fire departments in Nebraska are invited to nominate youngsters from their communities for the Jack Browning Memorial Award each year.

Nine IVFD members attended fire school this year, and three others assisted as instructors at the event in Grand Island.