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Robert Clarkin was already a seasoned veteran when he was hired as a firefighter for the Burleson Fire Department in 2007. His military background and integrity were two of the reasons his lieutenant nominated Clarkin as the department's 2013 Firefighter of the Year. The honor was presented at the department's annual banquet.

The 45-year-old firefighter/emergency medical technician went to the fire academy at LSU in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in 2002. He earned his associates degree in fire science from Community College of the Air Force in 2013. Clarkin worked at the Lockheed Martin Fire Department as a firefighter/EMT and volunteered as a firefighter with Benbrook and Mid-North.

"Firefighter Clarkin exemplifies our department's patch as it speaks to honor, duty, trust and integrity," Lt. Casey Davis said. "He can always be counted on. He exemplifies his duty to this department through his tireless dedication to our honor guard. He shows honor to fallen firefighters and service men and women through the honor guard. He continues to improve and lead this program and is an amazing ambassador not only for the City of Burleson but for the Burleson Fire Department and firefighters everywhere."

The award winner grew up in Highland, Illinois, and graduated from St. Paul Catholic High School in 1986. He now lives in Whitney. He and his wife Shannan share three children, 17-year-old Cody, 16-year-old Brianna and 16-year-old Marisa.

Clarkin has served in the United States Air Force Reserves for 20 years. He is a master sergeant and serves as the assistant fire chief of operations. Clarkin drills at Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma City. He served in Saudi Arabia and went to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He was also activated, stateside, for the Gulf War.

Serving others runs in Clarkin's family. His wife is a licensed vocational nurse in Clifton and is working toward her registered nursing degree. His older sister Patty is the head nurse at a cardio rehabilitation facility; his younger sister Gina was a social worker and her husband Frank is a firefighter/paramedic in Florissant, Mo.; brother Brian is an emergency medical technician for the Highland Ambulance

Service; and brother John is a volunteer firefighter in the community they all grew up in.

Clarkin said he wanted to work for Burleson because he wanted to serve a community and gain experience and education in municipal firefighting. He was asked to start the department's honor guard, which he currently serves as the commander. He and guard members traveled to West, Texas, in April 2013 and stood watch over the caskets of the volunteer firefighters who died in an explosion at a fertilizer plant.

Lt. Davis described Clarkin as "a great family man and a man of faith. He is trustworthy. He is always working and doing his job when no one is looking. He is a great man and I am blessed to serve next to him."