By Stan Stamper
Publisher

HUGO — Rural volunteer firefighters from across Choctaw County were treated to an old fashioned barbeque dinner Saturday night at the Kiamichi Technology Center.

The meal was simply a way for numerous businesses and individuals across the county to express their appreciation to the men and women who give much of their time and resources to protect other peoples' property.

The event was coordinated by Choctaw County Emergency Management Director, Pat Collins, and her husband, Sheriff Lewis Collins.

Speaking to the large gathering of firefighters, Sheriff Collins said he had never undertaken a fundraising effort that was "so easy."

"Virtually everywhere I have gone, people were very willing to contribute to this appreciation dinner. It's an honor for us to be able to honor you."

At the conclusion of the event, each county firefighter family was given a Christmas ham, and Sheriff Collins said that State Representative R.C. Pruett had been very generous in making the ham gift possible.

Several dignitaries spoke brief words of support for the dedicated group of firefighters. State Sen. Jerry Ellis said he was proud of the fact that Oklahoma was the number three state in the nation in the number of volunteer firefighters. "For saving lives and protecting property... thank you," Ellis said.

St. Representative R.C. Pruett echoed Ellis' remarks. "When other people run from danger, you run to danger, rising your lives. God bless you for what you do."

KEDDO Representative Larry Morgan also addressed the group, calling them "a band of brothers." Morgan said KEDDO would continue to emphasize training "to keep members of this strong brotherhood safe."

One of the highlights of the banquet event was a video presentation that included a collection of county firefighters hard at work putting out fires and protecting property. The presentation was created and presented by Shane Miller, who drew praise from Sheriff Collins for his contribution to the event.

A number of volunteers also devoted a lot of time to make the event a success including John Allen Mitchell, who prepared the barbecue, Terry Park, Todd Ruffin, Jimmy Brandon, Ed and Patricia Bernard, Harold and Shelly Chamberlain, Shonda Johnson, Matt Cathey, Veronica Chamberlain and Ray Noble.