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Orlando's New Fire Chief Sworn in at Change of Command Ceremony

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ORLANDO, FL – December 2, 2019 – Today, Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer officially swore in Orlando Fire Chief Benjamin M. Barksdale, Jr. as the 20th Orlando Fire Chief during the time-honored Change of Command ceremony held at the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts.

Chief Barksdale began his new role as the newly appointed Fire Chief on November 15, 2019, overseeing the day-to-day operations of the department and serving as chief counsel to the Mayor on matters of public safety. Prior to coming to Orlando, Barksdale served as the Fire Chief of Prince George's County, Maryland, where he led more than 2,500 personnel, including sworn and volunteer firefighters. He began his firefighting career in 1987 with the Arlington County Fire Department in Virginia where he rose to the rank of Assistant Chief, and was also one of the initial responders at the Pentagon in response to the attacks on September 11, 2001.

"I am confident that under Chief Barksdale's strong, capable leadership, OFD will continue to deliver the highest level of safety and fire protection for our community," said Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer. "During Chief Barksdale's tenure, his agency was dedicated to ensuring firefighters have access to mental health programs and treatment and had a strong track record of overseeing initiatives to encourage opportunities for people from all backgrounds in fire service."

Chief Barksdale was sworn in and presented with a Chief's helmet and badge before he addressed the crowd.

"My vision for the Orlando Fire Department is simple," said Chief Barksdale. "We will continue to build on our 134-year foundation by having a department that is diverse and inclusive and a fire service industry leader and we will provide the highest level of emergency medical care and fire responses in the most efficient manner and with pride."

Mayor Dyer also recognized Deputy Fire Chief Richard Wales for his time serving as Interim Fire Chief. Chief Wales will return to his role under the Fire Support Services Bureau.

ORLANDO FIRE DEPARTMENT BACKGROUND:

Established in 1885, the Orlando Fire Department began as a group of dedicated volunteers. Operating as "Orlando Hook and Ladder Company No. 1", "Orlando Hose Company No. 1", and "Mechanics Hose and Engine Company No. 2", these firefighters proudly served to protect the lives and property of the 1,666 citizens of Orlando.

In 2018, Orlando Fire Department achieved ISO Class 1 for the 10th year in a row. This rating places the Orlando Fire Department in the top 1% of fire departments in the United States, and is the only fire department in the state to have ISO 1 classification, International Fire Accreditation, Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) certification, Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services (CASS) and ACE accreditation (911/Communications Center).

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