



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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‘MR. BROWNSVILLE JR.’ HONORED WITH DREAM DAY

Uniontown, PA – If you live in Brownsville, chances are you know Jackie Conner.

“He’s a Brownsville fixture. He’s like Kennywood Day and Fiddles’ hotdogs,” South Brownsville Volunteer Fire Company Chief Ron Barry said. “If Frank Ricco is ‘Mr. Brownsville,’ Jackie is ‘Mr. Brownsville Jr.’ and he’s the best goodwill ambassador we have.”

Conner, 57, dreamed of being a firefighter, but was unable to do so. However, he’s known to fire departments throughout the region as their biggest supporter and unofficial mascot, so when he made a special request, they answered the call in a big way.

“I grew up with Jackie, and he’s always been a huge fan of the fire department. When I became chief, he’d come to me all the time asking how he could help. He comes to bingo and all our events, and we all take turns taking him to the local parades; so, we all look after him,” Barry said.

Following a string of hospital visits, Conner’s sister, Joyce Hampton, recorded a video of him recovering from surgery in October. When she asked what he wanted most in the world, he said, “a big parade” and listed all the fire departments he wanted in attendance. His wish came true Saturday, when hundreds of people packed downtown Brownsville for Jackie Conner Day.

“I posted the video at 10 p.m. on a Saturday night about two weeks ago, and my phone never stopped ringing until the parade was over. Everyone wanted to know how they could help, what they could do. That’s one good thing about social media – when it works well, you reach a lot of people,” Barry said. “I reached out to Chief Richard Black and asked, ‘Do you think we can have a little parade for Jackie?’ He said, ‘Absolutely not. He’s going to get a big one. A huge one. He deserves it.’”

Chief Black, of neighboring Brownsville Fire Company No. 1, joined forces with Hampton; Conner’s brother, Barry Miller; and Brownsville Mayor Ross Swords to plan the perfect parade, with Conner serving as grand marshal. More than 70 fire trucks from 37 fire departments, the Brownsville Junior/Senior High School Marching Band, local businesses and non-profit organizations, and countless people who know and love Conner lined the streets for the community’s grandest festivities in decades.

“I’ve lived in Brownsville my whole life, and that was the biggest parade I ever remember us having. We used to have some big ones, but nothing like this. It was just overwhelming. Everybody came out for Jackie,” Barry said. “My truck was last in the parade, so I used the (public address) system to tell the

crowd, 'It's just like the old days,' and everyone cheered, because they remember how things used to be. It brought a tear to your eye just being there."

Following the parade, Conner addressed the crowd from center stage at the downtown amphitheater. Because he named the LaBelle Fire Department first on his guest list, the station gifted him with a custom fire helmet and jacket. He also received more than 20 t-shirts from other fire departments, along with gifts and Jackie Conner Day proclamations from state and local legislators, businesses and more.

Many revelers wore t-shirts bearing the slogan, "We got your back, Jack," and handmade signs bore sentiments like, "Brownsville loves you, Jackie!" Conner wasn't shy about taking the microphone to address the crowd and invite his friends on stage.

"When Brownsville hosted the annual Fayette County Firemen's Convention in 2021, Jackie asked if he could be grand marshal of the parade, and it broke my heart to have to tell him that we already had one," Barry said. "It was wonderful to see him be the center of attention this time. There's hardly a person in this town that doesn't know Jack, so he deserves it."

All in attendance sang and danced along to the Jackie Conner Day theme song, "Put a Little Love in Your Heart," by Al Green and Annie Lennox. Hotdogs, beverages and other refreshments were donated by businesses and citizens for the occasion. A meet-and-greet with the guest of honor saw hundreds take photos with Conner, and the festivities concluded with an oldies dance at the Brownsville Sons of Italy – Frank Ricco Lodge No. 731.

"He was out there boogying and having a good time. It was his day – whatever he wanted. We were determined to fulfill his every wish that day and, if we didn't do it, we came pretty close," Barry said.

Conner's family has organized a fundraising campaign to assist with his medical expenses. To contribute, visit www.GoFundMe.com and search "Jackie Conner," or contact the South Brownsville Fire Department at 724-785-8448.

While Brownsville came together to make his dreams come true, it's Jackie Conner who's left a lasting impact on his community.

"Jackie probably lies in bed at night – just like the rest of us – and wonders what his purpose is. Even if he doesn't know it, we all know it now. He was put on this earth to show there is pure love in the world. He's a beautiful soul, and we could all learn a little bit from him. We should all be so lucky," Barry said. "Some are born with the ability to be a firefighter and others aren't. You need three things – a sharp mind, skilled hands and a big heart. The first two, Jackie may not have necessarily been blessed with, but the third one; he has enough heart for everyone. For that reason, he's more of a firefighter than all of us."

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettedcountypa.org.

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