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PRESS RELEASE

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State wildland fire dispatcher Liz Wallace wins national award

(Fairbanks, AK) – Alaska Division of Forestry Wildland Fire Dispatcher Liz Wallace won the 2019 National Excellence in Dispatching Award from the National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC) in Boise, Idaho, it was announced Thursday.

Wallace, a dispatcher for the Fairbanks Area station, had earlier been named Alaska Dispatcher of the Year for 2019, qualifying her as one of 10 dispatchers from different Geographic Area Coordination Centers around the country similarly eligible for the national award.

Wallace is only the third Alaska wildland fire dispatcher to win NICC's national dispatching award since the program began in 1988. The others were Dave Kirk in 1989 and Dave Hendren in 2001, both of whom worked for the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center (AICC).

Wallace began working as a dispatcher for the Division of Forestry in 2015, and has since taken on increasing responsibility, climbing the dispatch ladder to become an initial attack (IA) dispatcher in 2017.

“As an IA dispatcher, (Wallace’s) ability to remain calm in high-stress situations through fluctuating activity levels is one of her biggest attributes,” her nomination said. “Her ability to do so with a smile on her face while maintaining a positive attitude and sense of humor at all times makes her a perfect fit for the stressful and demanding job that is an initial attack dispatcher.”

Wallace received a “Golden Teletype” trophy in recognition of her selection for the 2019 state award. For the national award, she received a flame-shaped glass sculpture emblazoned with the words, “In recognition of superior performance and contributions to the dispatch community.” Her name will also be engraved a plaque hung at the NICC Dispatch Center in Boise.

“I’m almost embarrassed,” Wallace said upon receiving the national award. “It’s crazy because there are so many awesome dispatchers in Alaska and nationally, and we all work together. It’s really humbling.”

AICC Manager Ray Crowe presented Wallace with the national award in person during a small ceremony held outside Thursday at the Fairbanks Area Dispatch Center. They were joined online through a Zoom-equipped laptop computer by NICC Dispatch Center Manager Jarrod Simontacchi, NICC Deputy Dispatch Center Manager Sean Peterson and Alaska Division of Forestry Wildland Fire and Aviation Program Manager Norm McDonald. A small crowd of Fairbanks station staff also attended in person, all wearing face masks to comply with protocols aimed at reducing the spread of COVID-19.

Crowe, who presented Wallace with the state award Wednesday, lured an unsuspecting Wallace to the Thursday award presentation by telling her Simontacchi and Peterson were simply “Zooming-in” to congratulate her on her state award. She was flabbergasted to learn she had won the national award, as well.

“Oh, my God,” a stunned Wallace said.

McDonald said the quality of Wallace’s work was highlighted for him and many others during the Shovel Creek Fire, which burned 22,487 acres just outside of Fairbanks in 2019. McDonald is the IC on Alaska’s Type 1 Incident Management Team (IMT) and an IC on one of Alaska’s two Type 2 IMTs.

“We witnessed all the hard work that Liz and all of Fairbanks dispatch did last year from the ground level,” McDonald said.

Division of Forestry Director Chris Maisch, who also attended Thursday’s ceremony, said “We have a division full of talented people who do great work. It’s always nice to see those people get recognized.”

Maisch acknowledged the impact COVID-19 had on the ceremony, which was evidenced by all the face masks and lack of hand shaking or hugging that normally accompanies such an event.

“I wish we could celebrate a little more than we can now,” he said.

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CUTLINE INFO:

Wallace NICC Dispatcher of Year 2019-1 – Alaska Division of Forestry Wildland Fire Dispatcher Liz Wallace (center) displays trophies she has received for outstanding performance, with Alaska Interagency Coordination Center Manager Ray Crowe (right) and Alaska Division of Forestry Director Chris Maisch (left).

Wallace NICC Dispatcher of Year 2019-2 – Alaska Division of Forestry Wildland Fire Dispatcher Liz Wallace displays the “Golden Teletype” trophy she won as Alaska Dispatcher of the Year for 2019, and the flame-shaped engraved glass statute she won as recipient of the National Interagency Coordination Center Dispatcher of the Year for 2019.

Wallace NICC Dispatcher of Year 2019-3 – Alaska Division of Forestry Wildland Fire Dispatcher Liz Wallace (left) and Alaska Interagency Coordination Center Manager Ray Crowe (right) use online videoconferencing software to display the trophy Wallace received as the National Interagency Coordination Center Dispatcher of the Year for 2019 to a national audience via online videoconference.



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Elizabeth Wallace
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DISPATCHER OF THE YEAR

National Excellence
in Dispatching
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Elizabeth Wallace
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2020 Excellence in Dispatching
Presented to Elizabeth Wallace
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