

Fire fighter family affair

Durans climb up the ladder at Phoenix Fire Department

By Peter Madrid

WHEN EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT FIRE CHIEF

Mike Duran Jr. retires from the Phoenix Fire Department this month after 34 years of service, his legacy will live on in more ways than he could ever have imagined.

Duran, 58, made history when he became the department's first Latino assistant chief on March 13, 2000. He was then given the title of Executive Assistant Fire Chief this past February.

But the legacy of which Duran is most proud?

The fact that all three of his sons are also members of the Phoenix Fire Department and the family name will carry on for years to come.

"I never guided them to fire service," Duran says. "They made that choice themselves. And I am proud to see their service and the actions they've taken to become involved. Their duty goes beyond fire-fighting skills. I am very proud of their support and service to the public."

The Duran family roll call is as follows: Mike Duran III, 35, captain; Jonathon Duran 32, engineer, Station 3; and Matthew Duran, 28, fire fighter, Station 25.

"As a little boy you grow up wanting to do what your parents do," Mike Duran III says. "All kids say they want to be a fireman. But we grew up with it. We saw what our dad did and respected that.

"We knew how neat it was what our father did. We hung around the station and with dad's closest friends. It was truly a family thing."

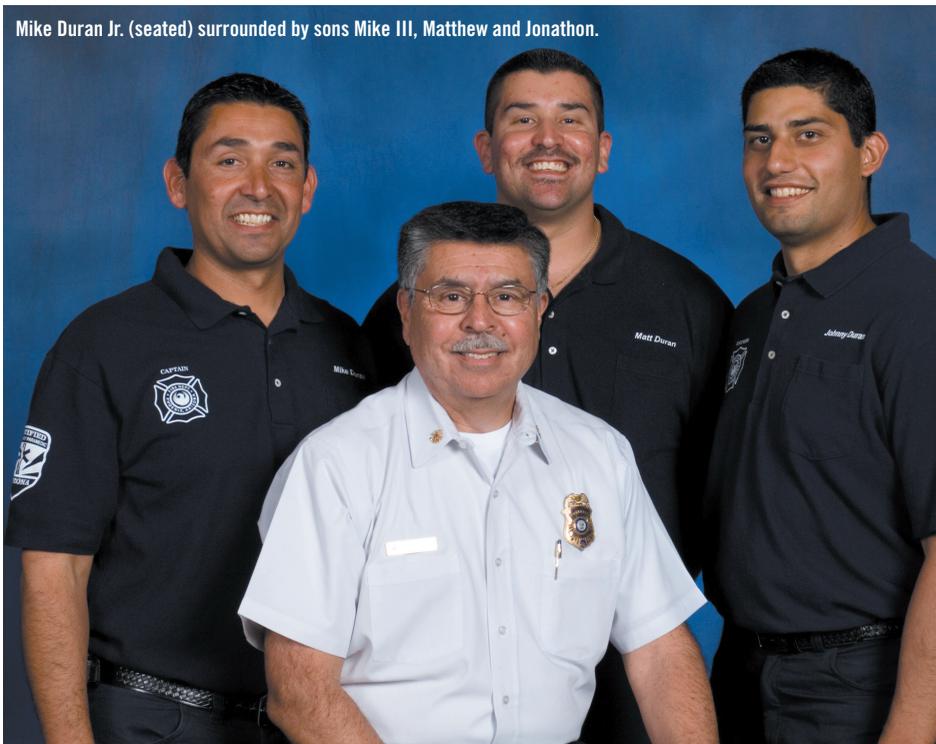
Just as he served as a role model to his sons, the elder Duran also had a mentor and driving force behind his decision to become a fire fighter.

Duran's parents lived next door to a retired Latino fire captain named Raul Cordova. Duran says knowing what Cordova had accomplished – reaching rank of captain - inspired him. In 1973, Duran reported to the Phoenix Fire Department as a recruit.

Of his early years in the department, Duran says it was a great opportunity to give back to the community and be proud of it. When he joined, he says, he had those expectations.

Still, something was missing.

Mike Duran Jr. (seated) surrounded by sons Mike III, Matthew and Jonathon.



"I noticed was there were not a lot of Hispanics," he recalls of management within the department. "But they were beginning to open the door and gain an opportunity. As I moved through the process I considered it was time for me to give back to Latinos. I wanted to lead and support those efforts. I wanted to have influence to change the culture of the Phoenix Fire Department"

It wasn't easy.

"At times I felt challenges," Duran says. "At times you felt you had to work twice as hard to prove yourself. That's okay, but I wanted to move forward and move on. It gave me those opportunities. I wanted to do the same for other fire fighters. I felt compelled to help Latinos. I wanted to make sure everyone had an opportunity, and not closed because of color."

And then there's the inherent danger that fire fighters face each time the alarm sounds. Multiple that times three sons and it's a harrowing thought.

That was evident on March 14, 2001, when

Station 14 responded to a 5-alarm fire at a southwest Phoenix shopping center. That day, 8-year PFD veteran Bret Tarver lost his life and four other fire fighters were injured. Son Matthew was one of the fire fighters battling that blaze.

"I stopped by the scene after work not just because Matthew was there, but because lots of the fire fighters there were also friends of the family," Duran says. "For us (fire fighters), being part of the family is what it's all about. You almost always adopt everyone you come in contact with."

As his career comes to a close, Duran says he has no regrets. He has served his community well, has gained family members within the Phoenix Fire Department and is proud of what his sons have accomplished.

And now he gets to spend more time with his immediate family, which includes wife Virginia and 11 grandchildren.

"I hope he enjoys life and is happy," Mike Duran III says of his father's upcoming retirement. "He will leave a legacy. He will be remembered for what he's done." ■