

Survivor Story: Ryker Haselden

**Gulfport, MS Local 272 / Fire Lieutenant
Diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2017**

In the summer of 2017, I had been a fire fighter for about 11 years, originally hiring on with Gulfport Fire Department in 2006 and Harrison County Fire Rescue in 2011.

I underwent a routine PSA (prostate specific antigen) test as part of my department's annual wellness screening. I had no symptoms and felt fine. My PSA level was elevated according to the bloodwork. The physician's assistant informed me that an elevated PSA could be an indicator for prostate cancer.

A second test a month later showed another increase, and I was scheduled for an appointment to see a urologist. A prostate exam revealed an abnormality on my prostate, and I was then scheduled for a biopsy. The biopsy came back positive for cancer and an elevated Gleason score. I was given the options of surgery or radiation. I chose surgery and, just a week shy of my 47th birthday, had my prostate removed. I was out of work at both my departments, Gulfport FD and Harrison County Fire Rescue, for approximately three months while in recovery.

The thing that scared me the most during my battle was the fear of not being able to support my family. My wife Brandi and I have been married for 15 years and we have two sons, our youngest being physically disabled, requiring Brandi to be a full-time caregiver.

I had tremendous support throughout my journey from my family, both my departments — especially the GFD & HCFR executive fire administrations, the FCSN, and my friends and peers.

In the time since my surgery, I have worked with both my departments' administrations and elected state officials to get presumptive cancer legislation passed in Mississippi and to bring awareness to cancer in the fire service. In 2019, Governor Tate Reeves signed the "Mississippi First Responders Health and Safety Act" into law.

As of October 2022, my cancer has not returned, thankfully, and I do bloodwork twice a year to keep an eye on my PSA level.

