



VCOS VCOS NEWS

The Official Newsletter of the Volunteer & Combination Officers Section
of the International Association of Fire Chiefs

Summer 2006

CHAIR'S CORNER

By Chief Timothy S. Wall

As I write this article we have just wrapped up our May Board Meeting in Raleigh, NC. It was hosted by our good friends, Dan, Steve, Mike and staff from *National Fire Rescue Magazine*, who treated us with great generosity of time and attention.

As chair of the VCOS, I was extremely proud to have been invited to deliver an address on May 6, 2006 at the Inaugural Dedication ceremony of the new North Carolina Fallen Firefighters Foundation Memorial. The ceremony was very well attended, not only with firefighters from all over the state of North Carolina, but from all over the country. I commend the Foundation on its efforts; it produced a day of great significance and beauty to honor those who sacrificed their lives for the love of their work. It was quite a moving ceremony to see family members accept the folded flag of the United States to memorialize a line-of-duty death that occurred more than 70 years ago.

I will share with you some quick notes on upcoming VCOS projects:

National Firefighter Safety Stand Down Day took place on **June 21, 2006**. We hope that all fire service leaders will share their accomplishments for Stand Down Day (even if the

activity took place the day before or the day after the "official" date). We are looking for pictures and descriptions of activities and training designed to improve firefighter safety and reduce the number of LODDs. Send your information to Michael Chiaramonte at lynbrookfd379@yahoo.com to be posted on the VCOS website. Let's share with others what you accomplished for this special day.

The VCOS Annual Meeting will take place at FRI in Dallas on Thursday, September 14, 2006, 1:30 pm – 3:30 pm in the Dallas Convention Center. We hope all of you will attend the annual meeting—we will update you on the many VCOS accomplishments and conduct our election of officers. We hope you will take the time to share with the Board of Directors what you feel we are doing right and what you hope we can improve. The VCOS booth will be on display with up-to-date information on the VCOS Symposium along with giveaways and chances for raffle prizes. You are encouraged to come by and speak with your section officers to discuss your own issues and challenges as well as to share your experiences.

The VCOS Symposium will take place in Orlando, FL on November 9-12, 2006 at the Sheraton World Resort. This is the only national symposium for leaders of volunteer/

combination departments. The VCOS is very proud of the educational opportunity we offer. It is also a wonderful opportunity to network with your peers. To register and review the conference presenters, visit www.iafc.org/vcos.

The VCOS White Ribbon Report. The White Ribbon report is the third report published by the VCOS Section of the IAFC and it will target the

Bettenhausen Receives Thanks from Obama

VCOS' own Secretary/Treasurer Robert Bettenhausen, Fire Marshal of the Tinley Park (IL) Fire Department, received a thank you letter from Senator Barack Obama for his attendance at an Illinois constituent coffee in Washington, DC where he was able to discuss a few issues of concern with the Senator.

From left to right: Senator Durbin, Robert Bettenhausen, Senator Obama



Please see CHAIR, p. 7

Generational Thinking

By Deputy Chief Mike Jaffa

I recently had the privilege of meeting with chiefs from across the country for some training. While the training was valuable and will help us continue to develop an important program, the after-hours conversation was almost as valuable.

Every evening, as we gathered for dinner, the conversation moved to a discussion of “the new generation” and the effect it was having on our departments—how the new generation coming into the fire service no longer honors the traditions or values that many of us feel are the basis of the fire service as we know it. “Where is the desire to serve their fellow man, be a part of the fraternity that is the fire service, be a hero, or, God forbid, die with honor?” some asked.

Instead, the new generation appears to be motivated more by the job security, the 24/48 schedule which allows more “family time” and the ability to work a second job and supplement their income. The chiefs discussed the pros and cons of each and every generation they had seen come into their departments. From the “Baby Boomers” who seemed to have all the right motives and desires (probably because the chiefs having the discussion were overwhelmingly made up of that generation) to the “Generation X’ers,” “Y’ers” and whatever we are going to label the current group, no single generation seems to exhibit all the attributes that the chiefs were looking for.

An equally interesting topic of dinner time conversation was the subject of retirement. The pending retirement of some of the chiefs led the discussion to the fact that most are looking forward to that day when they are financially secure, have a schedule that allows them to spend more time with their families, or allows them to take another job (usually part-time) to supplement their income.

The more I listened, the more I saw similarities in what the chiefs wanted after retirement and what the newest generation is searching for during their active duty in the fire service. One of the people involved in the discussion who was not a chief officer offered the idea that maybe, since the new generation seems to place so much importance on family time and interests outside the fire service, they would also place a higher value on training and physical fitness, making it more likely that they would go home at the end of each shift. Maybe, she pointed out, NOT dying in the line of duty was better than that age-old tradition of “death with honor.”

No matter the reason people join the fire service—either as a volunteer or as a paid member—do we, “The Chiefs,” have the right to question their motivation? I, for one, think not.

I do, however, think it is our responsibility to take those “new generation” members who walk through our doors and who want to follow in our footsteps and train them to be the best firefighters, EMTs, company and chief officers they can be. After all, when all is said and done, it is just possible that they are ahead of their time and know *now* what they want out of their profession and actively seek it *now* instead of waiting until they retire. And maybe that way of thinking is just fine.

Mike Jaffa is deputy chief of the Bernalillo County Fire & Rescue Department in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

NEWS & NOTES ...

NEW VCOS VISION STATEMENT Volunteer & Combination Officer’s Section Vision

The Vision of the VCOS is to represent the interests of all Volunteer and Combination Fire/Rescue/EMS agencies. We will be a dynamic organization, characterized by our integrity, customer focus and membership development, with value placed on people and the superior utilization of technology. We will excel by creating educational programs, through unrivaled networking, and by helping VCOS members further their success and reach their potential.

Excellence Award Presented to PA State Fire Commissioner Ed Mann

The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF) has selected Pennsylvania State Fire Commissioner Ed Mann as a recipient of the Firefighter Life Safety “Seal of Excellence” Award. The award was presented at the May 19, 2006 PA Fire Expo in Harrisburg, by officials from Pennsylvania and the NFFF Board of Directors. According to the NFFF, Ed is the driving energy behind the LODD prevention program, “The Courage to Be Safe...So Everyone Goes Home,” in Pennsylvania and the nation. While Ed will quickly credit thousands of PA fire officers, instructors, and firefighters, the NFFF feels he clearly deserves this award due to not only his efforts, but the fact that PA LODDs have dropped from 17 in 2004 down to seven in 2005.

Dedication Held at North Carolina Fallen Firefighters Foundation Memorial



Members of the VCOS Board of Directors attend the inaugural dedication ceremony of the new North Carolina Fallen Firefighters Foundation Memorial.

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VCOS Bylaws Modifications: 2006-2007 Election

The VCOS Board of Directors voted in favor of the following modifications to the VCOS bylaws at their May 6, 2006 board meeting. The current bylaws (2002 version) and the strikeout version (2006 version) are posted on the VCOS website (www.vcos.org) so that you can review the entire document.

These revisions to the bylaws will be included with the election package which will be mailed in late June; you will be asked to vote on each of the following nine changes:

1. The VCOS Board of Directors has submitted a new mission statement (in italics below) to update the original in Article I, Section 2.

The mission of the Volunteer & Combination Officers Section of the IAFC is to provide Fire/Rescue/EMS Chief Officers who manage Volunteer/Combination Departments and affiliated support personnel with professional and leadership opportunities.

2. There is a need to clarify language throughout the bylaws. When the term “**Executive Committee**” is written in the bylaws and it refers to the entire board, the term should be changed to “**Board of Directors.**” When the term “**Executive Committee**” is written in the bylaws and it refers to the governing committee composed of the Chair, the Vice-Chair, the Secretary-Treasurer and the International Director, the term is properly referred to as “**Executive Committee.**”
3. The current bylaws identify the VCOS representative to the IAFC Board of Directors as the “**Section Director.**” The term should be changed to **VCOS International Director.**
4. **Article III – Section Officers**
Section 1. The current bylaws do not identify the VCOS International Director as a member of the Executive Committee. Modify this section to so state.

5. **Article IV – Duties of the Officers**

Add new Section 6 as follows to provide duties of the **Executive Committee:**

The Executive Committee will serve as the primary leadership of the Section.

- A. *coordinate all current projects*
- B. *coordinate future projects*
- C. *assign various directors to specific projects*
- D. *review the annual budget and make recommendations to the board of directors for its approval, disapproval or change.*
- E. *study and evaluate the finances of the Association with the purpose of formulating plans for increasing revenues, and budgeting control of present and future finances*
- F. *carry out other duties assigned by the board of directors.*

6. Article V – Meetings and Elections

Section 3. Change the current bylaws to acknowledge that we have an “**Elections Committee,**” not a “**Nominating Committee.**” Members submit their intent to run for office and the Elections Committee provides the logistics for a legal election.

7. **Article V – Meetings and Elections**

Section 5. Remove the portion of the original bylaws that laid out the first staggered election process. The verbiage is no longer needed. The staggered election process is still in force. Eliminate the portion related to the above.

8. Article V – Meetings and Elections

Section 5. The current bylaws do not address the future of electronic balloting. Change the verbiage to include “a mail ballot and/or an electronic ballot” and make changes throughout the bylaws where “mail ballot” exists.

9. Article VIII – Section Operations

Add Section 3. The current bylaws identify the **immediate past chair** as a member of the VCOS Board of Directors. However, there is a potential conflict if the immediate past chair is newly-elected as an At-Large member, thus resulting in ten (10) individual members on the board rather than eleven (11) individual members. The new language below will clarify that situation and will prevent any controversy about the number of votes a board member may cast.

New Section 3 language: Each individual on the VCOS Board of Directors is entitled to one vote and one vote only. There is the potential that the Immediate Past Chair could be elected at large in which case the individual would only have one vote on the Board of Directors.

The VCOS ballot will be mailed in late June. Make your VCOS membership count! Submit your vote for the board of directors and for the revisions to the bylaws. Your ballot MUST be postmarked by August 15, 2006

Symposium
in the
Sun
2006

November 9-12, 2006 • Orlando, FL
Sheraton World Resort

Leading the evolution of volunteer and combination fire departments



Please visit the VCOS website for updates and a conference registration form:

www.vcos.org

Johnny G. Wilson Memorial Award

Former VCOS Member Michael Robinson received the 2005 Johnny G. Wilson Award in Orlando at the Pro Board Accreditation Training Conference during the conference dinner on February 3. He was nominated by Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute Director Steve Edwards.



Director Steve Edwards (left), and Michael Robinson with the Johnny G. Wilson Award

The Pro Board established this award in honor of the late Johnny G. Wilson, Georgia Fire Fighter Standards and Training Council. The award is presented annually to an individual who has devoted untiring effort to the advocacy of professional qualifications through the accreditation and certification processes.

Division Chief Michael Robinson serves as the public information officer for the Baltimore County Fire Department, but he still finds countless hours to serve as chair of the Maryland Fire Service Personnel Qualifications Board (MFSPQ). This organization, established in 1986, is an independent corporation with the purpose of promoting a certification system for the state of Maryland. He has been chair almost since the inception of MFSPQ, which is composed of all the major political jurisdictions and fire service organizations in the state.

MFRI Director Edwards writes of Robinson: "His unique talents have been able to focus the varying interests of such a diverse group into what was best for the certification of our emergency service personnel. This has resulted in our fire service organizations being united on the certification front like no other effort in my memory."

Under Robinson's leadership, Edwards noted that MFSPQ generated over 71,000 certifications in 19 years of existence.

In addition to his dedication to the state fire service, Robinson has also been active on the national certification level. For the Pro Board, Robinson served 10 years on the Committee on Accreditation. In the NFPA standards-making system, Robinson served on the Professional Qualifications Technical Correlating Committee.

In nominating Robinson for the Johnny Wilson Award, Edwards noted that "It is my opinion and those of many across our state that Michael has demonstrated through his efforts that he is worthy of such recognition."

IRS Conducts 'Courtesy Review' of Program

By Chief John Bales

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) recently conducted a "courtesy review" of the Golden Fire Department's volunteer firefighter program for compliance with the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.

In the past, many volunteer fire departments, including Golden, have provided volunteers with nominal "pay-per-call" fees allowable under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). At the end of each year, they were issued 1099s for tax purposes.

In September 2005, the City of Golden was contacted by the IRS for a review of all 1099s. During the visit, the IRS requested more information on why volunteers are issued 1099s instead of W-2s in relation to the pay-per-call payments. The pay-per-call stipend was \$8. The Golden Fire Department provided, and paid the premiums for, workers' compensation insurance, and life and disability insurance of \$150,000 per volunteer firefighter. Each volunteer firefighter participated in the Golden Fire Department's volunteer firefighter pension fund, administered in Colorado by the Fire and Police Pension Association (FPPA).

The IRS determined that the \$8 per call stipend constituted taxable compensation and therefore was subject to a withholding tax and the issuance of an IRS Form W-2 to each volunteer firefighter. The IRS took the position that in order to avoid withholding under an expense reimbursement arrangement, reimbursements must be made under an "accountable plan" that complies with Section 62(c) of the IRS Code. The requirements for establishing an "accountable plan" are detailed, and any fire department wanting to develop an accountable plan should work closely with its legal counsel and qualified tax attorneys to develop an IRS-qualified accountable plan.

The IRS also concluded that the portion of the premiums paid to purchase life and disability insurance in excess of \$50,000 was taxable compensation. A solution that may be found to be acceptable, according to legal counsel, is to have the local pension system purchase the insurance as part of its administration of a fire department's pension plan.

On a positive note, the IRS determined that the volunteer firefighters' participation in the volunteer pension plan and the city's workers compensation plan would not be considered compensation.

Finally, the IRS and the FLSA regulations may permit a fire department to establish a program as defined by IRS Code Section 457, a plan to reward volunteer firefighters for length of service. A fire department interested in establishing a Section 457 plan for length of service rewards should work closely with its legal counsel and qualified pension/tax attorneys to determine whether such a plan is appropriate for their department.

Upon review with legal council of the applicable FLSA and IRS laws, it was determined for Golden, CO that:

- The FLSA and IRS regulations are in conflict. However, the IRS regulations would prevail over the FLSA regulations.
- Issuing W-2s to volunteer firefighters of the Golden Fire Department would void their status as bona fide volun-

Continued on next page

MANAGEMENT MINUTE



Don't Assume — Get the Facts!

By Chief John Buckman, III, IAFC President 2001-2002

Too many people waste valuable time and precious resources wondering what other people are thinking, intending or doing. Rather than just asking them for clarification, they make assumptions—usually assuming against themselves—and then make decisions based upon those assumptions.

I realize that this is one of my weaknesses. I really don't want a confrontation, and therefore I put things off. What I have come to find out is by putting things off I spend a tremendous amount of time and energy worrying about the confrontation instead of just doing it and getting through it.

Courtesy Review, from previous page

- teers and make them employees of the city.
- If volunteers became employees, several active volunteer firefighters would be forced to resign due to their work assignments with other career fire agencies.
- An accountable reimbursement should be put into place to reimburse actual expenses incurred by volunteers.
- Most importantly, if volunteers became employees of the City of Golden they would not be eligible for the FPPA volunteer pension plan.

As of December 31, 2005 the pay-per-call program was ceased and an accountable reimbursement plan has been put in place for accountable business expenses. The disability and life insurance plans as well as workers compensation remain in place. On May 11, 2006 the City of Golden City Council approved a length of service award program compliant with IRS regulations and Code Section 457 to recognize services provided by the volunteer firefighters.

The aspect of being a volunteer firefighter in this country has changed and will continue to change dramatically. Also impacting this situation are much needed changes in federal tax laws. It is up to volunteer/combination members to continually lobby their political representatives at the federal level to push for necessary changes such as the Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Act of 2005, for example.

Today's volunteer firefighters live and serve in a much different world than their counterparts of the past. We must do everything in our power to preserve the volunteer fire service tradition but must be understanding of the laws that pertain to our service and do everything in our power to respond to the changes.

John Bales is a 37-year veteran of the fire service and is currently fire chief of the Golden (CO) Fire Department. He is a graduate of the NFA's Executive Fire Officer Program and has earned the Chief Fire Officer Designation. He is a member of IAFC and VCOS. He can be reached at jbales@ci.golden.co.us.

People always imagine the worst when they don't know what is true. People are usually afraid of what they don't know. Instead of checking into things, they assume facts that may not exist, then build prejudices around those assumptions. They make bad decisions based upon those assumptions, on rumors, or on other people's opinions.

I have to come to realize that I must force myself to confront the day and the challenges of the day. It also helps when I make that commitment, because two things happen. First, you find out the real facts of any situation. Second, when you have all of the facts instead of assumptions, you can do something specific about the issue—but only if you really know what is going on.

Chair, from p. 1

“how to's” of being a successful fire chief. It follows the previously published and distributed Blue Ribbon and Red Ribbon reports, which focused on: 1) preserving and improving the volunteer fire service, and 2) leading the transition in volunteer and combination fire departments, respectively.

The Ribbon Report Committee, composed of nationally-recognized leaders in the volunteer fire service community, has already met several times to work on the last report in the series and they are confident that the White Ribbon Report will be completed and released in time for FRI in September 2006. I give a heartfelt “chair's salute” to the committee members for their dedication in writing these documents. This is a prime example of the way the VCOS educates, challenges, and shares suggestions and ideas on a national scope. For copies of the previous reports, please visit the VCOS website at www.vcos.org.

As I close out my year as chair, I would like to share the news that the section has been assigned a new IAFC staff liaison, Joelle Fishkin. Joelle is replacing Amber Wells, who was our IAFC staff liaison for two years. Amber will be moving to the Member Services Department of the IAFC, so you will have the opportunity to work with her again. Amber was recognized for her outstanding work for the section and was thanked by the Board of Directors at the Board Meeting in Raleigh, NC earlier this month. Joelle can be reached at jfishkin@iafc.org.

I would also like to thank the officers and members of the VCOS, and the officers and staff of the IAFC for their guidance and kindness in helping me fulfill my duties as chair. A special thank you to the officers and members of the North Farms Volunteer Fire Department and to my office staff for their many contributions. Stay safe.

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Updated June 2006

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We regret to announce that Jim Wilson has resigned from the VCOS Board. We wish him all the best and we thank him for his many important contributions to the work of the VCOS.

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