



Celebrating 40 Years of the National Volunteer Fire Council
1976 – 2016



Congratulations

The International Code Council (ICC) would like to congratulate the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC), for its 40 years of dedicated support to our nation's volunteer fire, EMS and rescue services organizations.

We wish NVFC all the best as it continues to provide a voice and support to the heroes who volunteer to protect their communities and keep us safe.

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NVFC

The First 40 Years

By Chief Kevin D. Quinn
NVFC Chairman



2016 marks a milestone for the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) – we celebrate 40 years as an organization. To commemorate this occasion, we are pleased to provide this publication that recounts not only the history of the NVFC, but also looks at how the overall fire service has changed in the past four decades and what we can expect moving forward.

The fire service looked quite different in 1976 than it does today. A firefighter's primary operational responsibility was just that – fighting fires. The U.S. surpassed all other industrialized nations in annual fire death rates and property loss. The U.S. Fire Administration and National Fire Academy had only recently been created, and the field of EMS was in its infancy. There was no Congressional Fire Services Caucus to focus on legislation affecting the fire service. There were fewer safety precautions to protect firefighters, and risks such as heart attack, cancer, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicide weren't part of the discussion.

Also of great significance is that even though volunteers made up 85 percent of the fire service, they had virtually no influence on federal legislation and no representation in national matters of importance to the fire service.

It was in this climate that the NVFC first emerged. A group of representatives from seven state firefighters' associations met in Chicago in late November 1975 to discuss the need for the volunteer to have a dedicated and unified voice at the national level. They realized it was critical for the needs of volunteers to be heard in Congress, in federal agencies, in developing standards, and when working with other national organizations.

On March 15, 1976, representatives from 18 states met in Memphis, TN, and the NVFC was officially organized. The idea was that representatives from every state's primary volunteer fire service organization would comprise the NVFC Board of Directors and speak as a unified voice for the volunteer in national matters.

With this guiding vision, the NVFC has grown by leaps and bounds since 1976. We now have a board comprising 49 state fire service associations (one state doesn't currently have an association representing volunteers). As a membership association, we also have nearly 20,000 individual and department members.

The organization has been there to meet the challenges volunteers face and address critical issues head on. From groundbreaking programs and innovative resources, to legislative and regulatory advocacy, the NVFC continues to serve the volunteer in meaningful and significant ways.

Looking at where the fire service stands today, it is a very different landscape than in 1976. The fire death rate per million population declined by 70 percent from 1977 to 2013, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). On-duty firefighter fatalities have dropped as well, from an average of 152 per year in the late 1970s to an average of 72 per year from 2010-2014. Technological advances have changed how we are equipped and how we respond, significantly enhancing firefighter safety. We also have much greater awareness of the dangers we face – not just from fighting fires, but from cancer, PTSD, vehicle crashes, and heart attacks.

Fire departments today are offering increasingly specialized and diverse services, from EMS, to HazMat response, to search and rescue, to fire prevention education, and more. In fact, the number of fire calls per year is less than half of what it was in 1980, while the number of EMS calls has quadrupled.

Through all the changes we have seen, one thing remains certain. The NVFC will continue to serve the boots-on-the-ground volunteer firefighter, EMT, and rescue worker, and we will never shy away from the big issues facing our constituents. Today, the volunteer has a strong voice at the table when it comes to critical fire and emergency service issues. We will continue to advocate for the volunteer, develop new resources, and implement innovative programs that will strengthen the volunteer emergency services and help volunteers overcome any obstacles.

As we look toward the future, we must remember our past. I know our organization's founders must be proud of how the organization has evolved and how it fulfills the mission they formulated in 1976. As we pass this milestone, I am excited to see what lies ahead. ●

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Forty Years of Change

By Ronny J. Coleman

President, National Fire Heritage Center

The past 40 years have been a period of significant change in the fire and emergency services. As the NVFC commemorates its 40th anniversary, it is a great opportunity to look back over the past four decades and consider both where we've been and where we're headed.

WHAT WAS THE FIRE SERVICE LIKE IN THE 1970s?

If you could go back and be a firefighter during the 1970s, would you do it? Or would you rather remain in the present? Has the fire service become a better place to work over the past 40 years, or has it gotten worse? Were those really the "good old days"?

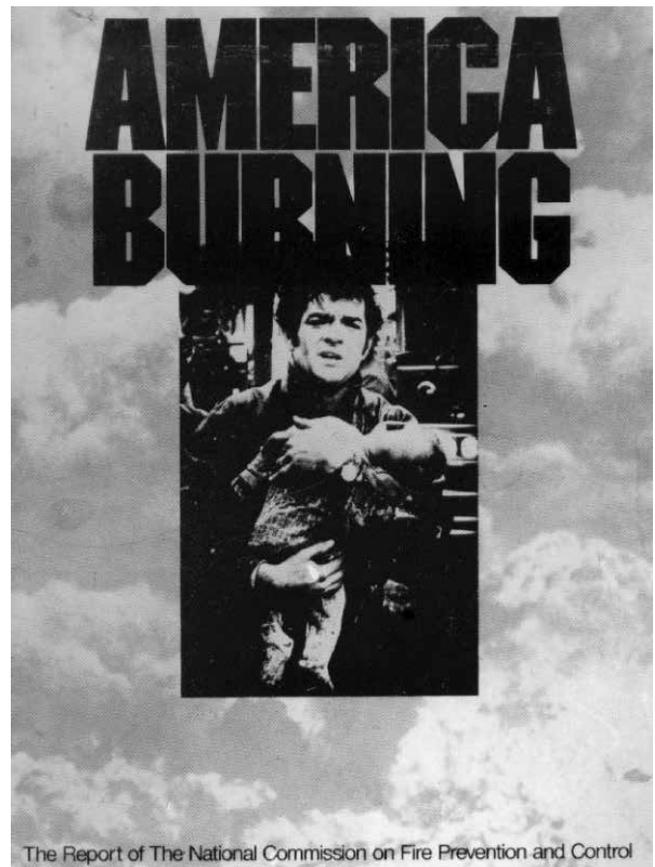
Without a doubt there are arguments that can be made both ways. On the one hand, who really wants to go back to a time when you actually had to climb up on the engine company and find the self-contained breathing apparatus box, remove it from that box to do it ... and suffer the criticism from others for wearing it?

On the other hand, wouldn't it be nice to live at a time when virtually every firefighter was a person who had developed a job skill and work experience that they brought to the department to make it more efficient and effective? It seemed like almost everyone was a skilled tradesman of some sort before they became a firefighter.

Whether glad for the changes or nostalgic for the past, one thing is certain – the fire service of today is very different from that of 40 years ago. Consider the following points.

Then Versus Now

- Working fires were a frequent event; now they are a rarity.
- Emergency medical services was once a small percentage of fire department calls; now they are 70 to 80 percent of the workload.
- Heavy smoking was a common characteristic among firefighters; now it is to be avoided.
- Being a smoke eater was once a label to be proud of; now it is a sign of ignorance.
- Riding the tailboard was a real (but dangerous) thrill; now you're in a seat and buckled up.



The landmark report *America Burning*.

- There were very few textbooks available to study; now there is a huge library of available material.
- Fire apparatus used to last 20 years on the line and 10 years in reserve; now they are supposed to be replaced in 10 years.
- Turnouts were cheap and expected to last forever; now they are expensive and have short useful lives.



Photo courtesy of Laurelee Veitch

EMS has become an integral part of many fire departments.



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Supporting Those Who Serve





Firefighter protective clothing has undergone changes over the last 40 years.

There are many reasons for the changes in the fire service over the past 40 years. One of the best explanations is that America was changing and the fire service only had a few choices. The two most obvious were to adapt to those changes or remain stuck in the past. Interestingly, the fire service chose a third path; some things changed while others remained intact. That phenomenon created the modern fire service. What we are today is a combination of the past and the present at the same time.

Four decades have transpired since 1976. There have been thousands of incremental changes that have transformed the profession over that period of time, yet there is still the contention that the fire service lives in the past. Perhaps it is time to take a step backward and clarify what is so different about today in comparison to yesterday. There are many components of the fire service we take for granted today that didn't even exist 40 years ago. Change has been with us almost constantly, even if we were not paying attention to it.

It all started with a rude awakening: America was burning! In the landmark 1973 report of the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, *America Burning* opened people's eyes to a very serious problem: The U.S. surpassed all other industrialized nations in annual fire death rates and property loss. The report concluded that the fire service, building designers, the government, and the public all shared the blame.¹

The report was profound and prophetic. It set the stage for many of the changes that we now take for granted. One of the most

significant results was the creation of the U.S. Fire Administration and the establishment of the National Fire Academy. These entities have been critical in encouraging the fire service to accept the ideas that have emerged from the changes that society in general has prompted. Ed Metz, the Librarian of the National Fire Academy, has written an excellent history of the formation of the Commission which describes, in detail, the sequence of events leading up to the report.²

FOUR DECADES OF CHANGE

America Burning launched a period of great change in the fire service, some of which was met with enthusiasm and some with resistance. Knowing where we come from and how we got here is important – the past forms the basis for how things are today, which in turn will help shape the future.

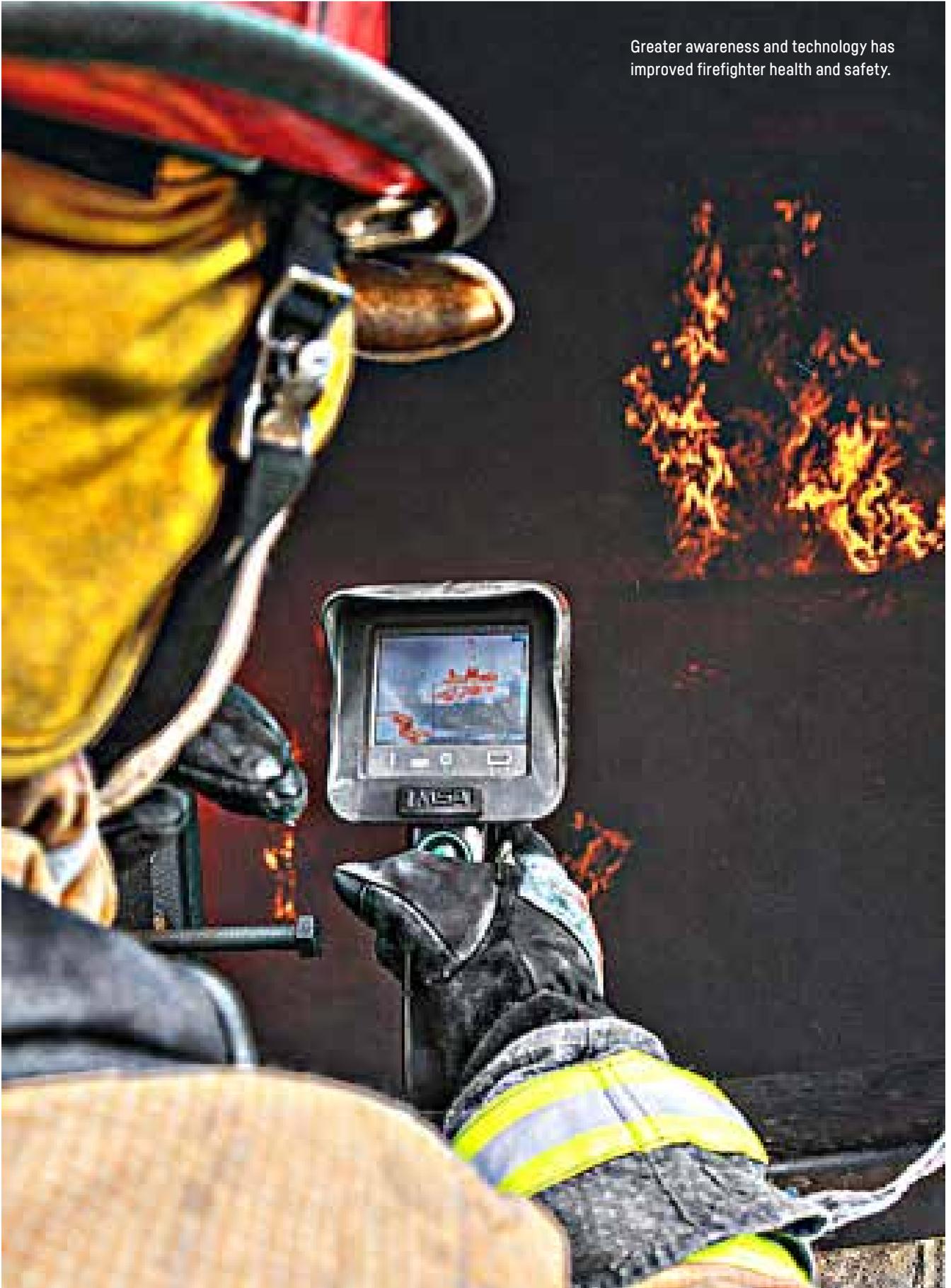
With this in mind, let us review some of the things that exist today that were not in existence prior to the 1970s.

ICS

During a single two-week period in 1970, 500,000 acres of wildland burned in California. Although everyone tried their best to cooperate, numerous problems came into play in regard to communications and coordination.

Congress approved the funding of a system to “make a quantum leap in the capabilities of Southern California wildland fire protection

Greater awareness and technology has improved firefighter health and safety.



agencies to effectively coordinate interagency action and allocate suppression resources in dynamic multiple-fire situations.”³ The system soon became known as FIRESCOPE (Firefighting Resources Organized for Potential Emergencies).

The first FIRESCOPE Technical Team was established to guide the research and development of the design. The two major components to come out of this work are the Incident Command System (ICS) and the Multi Agency Coordination System. By 1978, ICS was the preferred method of command and control for the fire service.

EMS

There were many factors for the rise of EMS in the early 1970s. In 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson had received a report that revealed more people died in vehicle accidents in 1965 than were lost in the Korean War. This report made several recommendations for preventing loss. These recommendations included standardization of rescue squad and firefighter personnel training. This led to the first nationally recognized curriculum for Emergency Medical Technician in 1969.⁴

Also in the early 1970s, the United States was firmly engaged in the Vietnam War. On those remote battlegrounds, injured warriors were receiving a much higher level of care than ever before. It was a level of care that was not even being provided to the civilian population in the States. At the time, many fire departments were responding to medical calls with only an American Red Cross card for first aid. As doctors and medics returned to the U.S., they brought with them the advancements in emergency medicine that they used on the battlefield.

In 1972, the television show *Emergency!* debuted and was based upon the Los Angeles County Fire Departments’ use of paramedics.⁵ The plot of the pilot included the passing of the Wedsworth-Townsend Act in California, which allowed the creation of paramedic units. Soon there was widespread belief that if a fire department responded then the crew must be paramedics, whether that was true or not. Numerous fire agencies began to elevate their EMS programs to the paramedic level. Jim Page emerged as an influence leader at this time and began an active campaign to spread the word on how fire departments could benefit from being qualified as medics.

Protective Clothing

Insulating and protecting astronauts from temperature extremes is central to NASA’s human space flight program.⁶ NASA has spent a great deal of effort developing and refining fire-resistant materials, including polybenzimidazole (PBI), for use in vehicles, flight suits, and other applications demanding extreme thermal tolerances.

In 1978, PBI was introduced to the U.S. fire service, and Project FIRES (Firefighters Integrated Response Equipment System) launched an outer shell material for turnout gear, PBI Gold. In 1983, PBI fibers were made commercially available and a dedicated production plant opened in Rock Hill, SC, to meet demand.

The Role of the Computer

In the early 1980s, a revolution occurred with computer technology. Computers shrunk to the size of desktops instead of being monsters that required air-conditioned facilities. The IChiefs Network

(International Computer Hardware Information Exchange Fire System) was born. Initially linking up only three computers, it served as the basis for a new methodology of documentation.

Entire books could be written on how much the computer has impacted the fire service, but at a minimum we should consider the impact of the Internet and social media. These methods spawned a huge increase in the distribution of information in fire agencies both large and small.⁷

Natural Disaster and Urban Search and Rescue (USAR)

Catastrophic events such as earthquakes, massive floods, tornados, and other forms of natural disasters seemingly increased at an extraordinary rate in the 1980s. If we go back to the Armenian earthquake in 1988, it was revealed that while the U.S. had good intentions to provide mutual aid and support, there really was no response system in existence to aid in these types of catastrophes. In the aftermath of that earthquake, the federal government instituted the USAR function and a new acronym was added to the vocabulary of the fire service. New techniques and resources were created that never existed before. Since then, deployment of USAR teams has become a respected methodology both nationally and internationally.⁸

Grants Program

Another area of growth was the involvement of the federal government in providing grants related to emergency response. The federal government began a serious effort to provide financial resources to local governments to be better prepared for a wide range of deployment possibilities. The Department of Homeland Security also provides grants to local and regional emergency service organizations to help secure badly needed resources such as equipment, apparatus, and personnel.⁹

Terrorism

In just a matter of minutes on September 11, 2001, the future of the fire service was altered by an act of terrorism. Aircraft were flown into the World Trade Center in New York City, and 343 firefighters were killed during the response. The Pentagon was attacked in Washington, DC. Another plane crashed in Pennsylvania. As a result of this tragedy, terrorism is now on the list of risks to be considered by emergency service departments.

Firefighter Safety

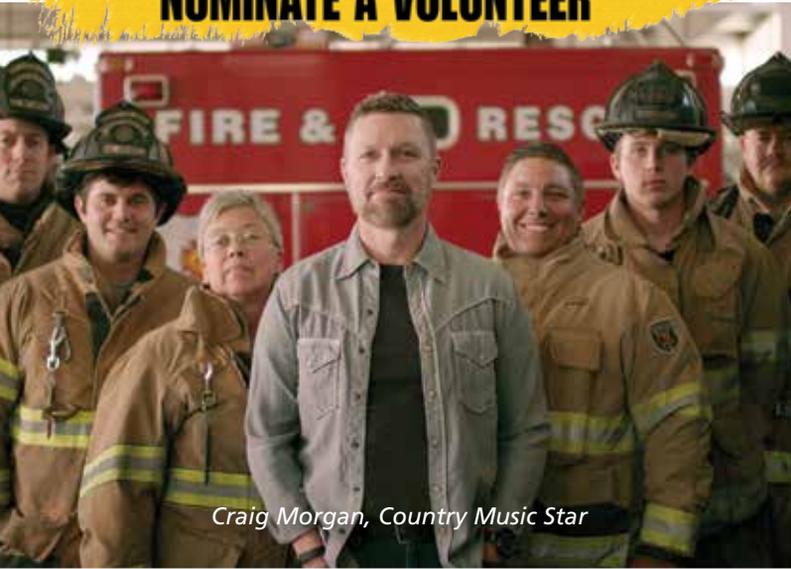
Probably one of the most significant changes in the past four decades is the overarching desire to improve firefighter safety. Organizations including the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation and the National Volunteer Fire Council have spearheaded efforts to focus on this issue. There is now increased awareness throughout the fire service that firefighters do not have to die in the line of duty to prove their heroism. Increasing attention is being given to what firefighters and department leaders can do to prevent tragedies, including efforts in the areas of behavioral health, heart health, cancer, vehicle safety, proper use of personal protective equipment, and more.

Smoke Detectors and Residential Sprinklers

The increased awareness of the prevalence of home fires opened the door for research into the concept of life safety as opposed to

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property protection. While smoke detection technology has been around since the 1930s, it was not until the 1970s that it became financially feasible. The smoke detector was an extremely effective tool in reducing home fire deaths.

Residential sprinklers were coming into focus around the same time. There have been several leaders in the field that have helped spearhead residential sprinkler ordinances as well as initiated training and awareness about the impact residential sprinklers can have on saving lives, limiting property loss, and increasing the safety of first responders.

Code Development

Modern fire and building codes emerged in the late 1800s as a result of conflagrations in metropolitan areas. For many years, fire and building codes were more or less geographically distributed for the simple reason that they were grassroots efforts to set minimum standards. During the 1990s it became very clear that there was a need for more standardization and uniformity between the codes. This resulted in the creation of the International Code Council and the development of the International Code family, which includes the International Fire Code and the International Building Code. Through the new code development process, there could be a much higher level of coordination among code-writing bodies.

Quest for Standards

Another trend that emerged in the past few decades is the significant increase in industry standards. Specifically, the standards that affect operations have gained a great deal of support. Consensus standards, such as those developed by the National Fire Protection Association, have made a significant impact upon local policy formulation for fire agencies.

Training and Education

Basic training has been part of the fire service since the late 1800s. What has changed significantly is the increase in the body of knowledge in the fire service. Organizations such as the Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education System (FESHE) have increased the level of involvement in both training and education.

The HazMat Revolution

Hazardous materials incidents continue to plague the fire service. Over the last 40 years, there have been significant inroads made in this field, yet it is not uncommon for there to be a major tragedy. Even the smallest fire organization may find itself confronted with a major disaster.

The Wildland-Urban Interface

Most history books define a conflagration in the past as being a phenomenon that destroyed a metropolitan city. The Great Chicago Fire, the Great Boston Fire, and the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire characterized conflagration as being a function of fires due to density and contemporary construction. The nature of the urban conflagration has changed in the last 40 years. Today, the wildland-urban interface fire is the model for modern conflagrations. Urban-

ization and suburbs growing into a patchwork quilt of wildland fuels has created a formula for disaster.¹⁰

WHAT THE FUTURE MAY BRING

The rate and impact of change in society has been accelerating over the past several decades and is likely to continue. Those who are just starting out in the fire service can look at this article as a prologue for the changes you are likely to see over the next 40 years.

This is not the first time the fire service has experienced rapid growth. Imagine being a firefighter in the 1860s up until 1900, when the industrialization of the country led to unprecedented change.

The type and number of changes in the fire service of the future are going to be linked with the activities and events that have already occurred. More importantly, they will be linked to changes in society. Some will be subtle and some will be dramatic, but they will alter the future in the same fashion, just as the events chronicled in this article have led us to where we are today.

Whatever your attitude and perspective is on change – whether you embrace it as advancement or dread it as unnecessary – one thing is certain; change is inevitable.

As Benjamin Franklin once warned us, “Be not the first to try the new thing, but be not the last to accept it.” Active participation in the process is what determines a person’s feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction with each turn of events involving change. The beginning of one cycle of change means the end of something. The ending of a cycle means the beginning of something. Awareness of which direction we are going is of the utmost importance in influencing the outcome and consequences.

What we make of each is where opportunity resides. Looking forward is a better perspective than looking backward, for it is in the future that all opportunity still exists. Again, Franklin gave us good advice on accepting change:

“I have sometimes almost wished it had been my destiny to be born two or three centuries hence. For invention and improvement are prolific and beget more of their kind. The present progress is rapid. Many of great importance, now unthought of, will before that period be produced; and then I might not only enjoy their advantages, but have my curiosity gratified in knowing what they are to be.”¹¹

Everything else is just history. ●

¹www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/fa-264.pdf

²Metz, Ed, *America Burning Study 40 Years Old: Forecast the Need for Better Fire Prevention Codes*, Fire Engineering Magazine, 2015

³www.firescope.org

⁴www.jems.com/articles/print/volume-38/issue-10/administration-and-leadership/birth-ems-history-paramedic.html

⁵www.imdb.com/title/tt0068067/

⁶http://spinoff.nasa.gov/Spinoff2008/ps_3.html

⁷www.livescience.com/20718-computer-history.html

⁸https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FEMA_Urban_Search_and_Rescue_Task_Force

⁹www.usfa.fema.gov/grants/

¹⁰www.americanforests.org/conservation-programs/forests-and-fire/?gclid=CIXQksu9jssCFZSEaQod97wAAQ

¹¹Benjamin Franklin letter to Rev. John Lanthrop, May 31, 1788

The Volunteer Fire Service Unites: 40 Years of the NVFC

By Charles Dervarics

In the 1970s, the landmark report *America Burning* showed the U.S. leading all industrialized nations in annual rates of fire deaths and property loss. As federal lawmakers of the time debated possible responses to the study, the vast majority of volunteer firefighters – the front line of fire protection in most communities – had many ideas but no national organization to present them.

“It was the first time we had a real national focus on fire issues, and there was no voice for volunteers at the table,” said Philip C. Stittleburg, Fire Chief in LaFarge, WI, and a longtime advocate for volunteers at the national level.

From this initial goal of seeking to provide expert input on a topic of national importance, volunteer fire service leaders from 18 states formally launched the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) on March 15, 1976. “It was all due to this heightened interest that led to NVFC’s creation,” Stittleburg said.

Fast forward 40 years, and the Council plays an ever-increasing role in shaping federal policy on issues of importance to the fire and emergency services. As volunteers continue to comprise a majority of the nation’s firefighting force, the NVFC has worked for the creation of valuable federal grant programs to enhance and modernize operations so that volunteer departments can obtain up-to-date equipment, supplies, and training. And with now close to 20,000 members and a board comprising representatives from 49 state fire associations, the Council in 2016 boasts a broad-based constituency that gains attention among first responder groups as well as from Congress and the White House.

“We’ve gone from ‘Who are you?’ to one of the major players in fire services,” said Paul Lukus, Fire and Police Chief of Forest City, PA, for more than 40 years. “That’s been a huge accomplishment.”

LOOKING BACK: EARLY DAYS

The evolution of the Council into a major Washington, DC, player was a gradual one. “When I started in firefighting, Pennsylvania

wasn’t even a member of NVFC,” Lukus noted. But the state association soon joined the national organization, and Lukus has now served on the NVFC board for 31 years, including 16 years as Secretary. He has witnessed countless changes as the organization adapted to advancing technology and a different federal landscape.

“In the old days, you would tape the minutes, listen to the tapes, and type out notes. Then you’d go make 125 copies and collate them. It was very time consuming,” he recalled. “Now we type notes on a computer during meetings and just hit print. Everyone gets information quickly.”

Stittleburg, who served as Chair of the NVFC from 2001 to 2015, recalled his introduction to national issues back in 1979 when he became NVFC’s Wisconsin representative. “It was a fascinating time in fire service,” he said, due to the heightened awareness brought on by the *America Burning* report and the clear need to do better to protect people and property.

From its earliest days, the NVFC sought to provide input on the work of the U.S. Fire Administration, which was created in the aftermath of *America Burning* to address priorities for education, research, and training. “Importantly, through NVFC, we had a seat at the table nationally to make sure the voices of volunteers were heard,” Stittleburg said.

Early on, the NVFC would hold small national meetings each year, always in a different state. But getting a voice in national affairs increasingly meant traveling to Washington, DC, to talk with members of Congress, their staffs, and other federal stakeholders. That led the NVFC to schedule a second annual meeting each spring in Washington, DC, to bring in top speakers and schedule meetings with decision-makers within federal government agencies and on Capitol Hill.

“Eventually we had access to some of the leading speakers in fire prevention and in Congress,” he noted. The Council also engaged in direct discussions with groups representing paid firefighters, mapping out areas of common agreement.



Congressmen Curt Weldon [R-PA], Bill Pascrell [D-NJ], and Steny Hoyer [D-MD] were among those at the press conference announcing the FIRE Act, which created the Assistance to Firefighters Grant.

IMPORTANCE OF GRANT FUNDING

The past 20 years have witnessed dramatic growth in the NVFC's programming and influence, these leaders say. As many volunteer companies faced challenges from buying modern equipment to replacing retired personnel, leaders looked at ways for the NVFC to bring awareness to these issues at a national level.

One priority for the NVFC was to develop a program to help volunteer firefighting agencies with equipment and recruitment. This effort culminated in the enactment of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program in 2000 with support from the White House and Congress.

For Kevin D. Quinn, current NVFC Chair and a board member for 38 years, the issue came down to the priorities facing all local fire departments and how to best address them. "When we looked as a whole at all of our needs, it was clear that the goals could not be accomplished by just holding pancake dinners," he said. While local fundraising has always been – and continues to be – part of a volunteer company's job, he said the sheer extent of the need

for modern trucks and equipment presented an opportunity for the federal government to lend a hand.

Cooperation between volunteer chiefs in the field and the NVFC staff helped make this grant program a reality. "NVFC spent many years working with Congress and working with fire departments to send letters to Congress in support of grant funding," Lukus added. "And we still do that today. That's because there's never enough money, and every year there are calls to cut resources." The NVFC's headquarters staff are indispensable in maintaining and expanding support for these grant programs. "We've been very successful at getting federal grants," he added.

Today, AFG consists of two major programs for volunteer firefighters. One is the main AFG program, which provides direct financial aid to fire department and nonaffiliated emergency medical service groups. The program received \$345 million in FY 2016 and has provided \$7.29 billion to date.

For volunteer departments, the other major component of AFG is the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program, designed to help fire departments and volunteer firefighter interest organizations increase and maintain

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The NVFC's Chairmen have included, from left to right, Fred Williams [1976-1978], E. James Monihan [1979-1991], Robert "Red" McKeon [1991-1995], Fred Allinson [1995-2001], and Philip C. Stittleburg [2001-2015]. Not pictured are James Morgan [1978-1979] and current Chairman Kevin D. Quinn.

the available front-line firefighters in their communities. Created in 2003, SAFER received \$345 million in FY 2016 and a total of \$3.78 billion since its inception.

Before AFG, "The thinking was that fire prevention was still a locally funded issue. But this law has brought a shift in attitude from a local problem to one where the federal government could provide value," Stittleburg said. "Overall, it's had an incredible effect."

Without these grant programs, many volunteer departments would still be using outdated engines and equipment. "A new engine can cost almost half a million dollars now," said Quinn, who recently retired as Deputy Chief of the Union Fire Department in South Kingstown, RI. "There would be no realistic way to replace our equipment. Without the grants, we'd still be working with engines from 1965."

By supporting the recruitment and training of new firefighters, the grants also are a major boon to volunteer companies. "It can be a struggle for volunteer departments to recruit and keep firefighters," Quinn acknowledged. Moreover, the grants also can help departments replace personal protective gear that can cost \$2,000 per firefighter, with replacement required every 10 years. "Having access to these grants is a win-win for everybody," he added.

MANY NEW PROGRAMS

As an organization, the NVFC has played a critical role in launching many initiatives to promote the volunteer firefighter profession and raise its profile. While all of these critical milestones are listed in the following sidebar, past and present Council leaders offered insights on what they viewed as some of the most significant advancements across 40 years of work.

Physical Health

Health promotion is a priority for the NVFC and one of the Council's initiatives is the Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program, the first national program designed to raise awareness among firefighters and EMTs of their heart attack risks and help them lessen these risks. Heart attacks are the leading cause of on-duty firefighter fatalities each year. "Volunteer firefighters can come in every size and shape," Quinn noted. "Many of our guys and gals are not getting annual physicals, which can run about \$300 per person." As part of the program, the NVFC has offered on-site health screenings at fire service conferences and trade shows to help provide firefighters and EMTs a quick way to assess their health, according to Quinn.



The New York delegation congratulates the NVFC on its 25th anniversary during the 2001 fall board meeting in Albany, NY.

Cancer is another significant issue in the fire service, and prevention is a priority for volunteer departments, Lukus said. To reduce cancer risks, the NVFC is active in campaigns to teach firefighters the proper use and storage of equipment. "Having a clean environment is crucial," he said. Education efforts focus on the proper cleaning and storage of protection gear, such as not leaving it in a car or other location where children may be exposed to it. "We're educating people that you don't have to sacrifice yourself or your family to do this job properly," Lukus noted.

Mental Health

The NVFC created the Share the Load program to help firefighters and EMS personnel deal with post-traumatic stress disorder and other behavioral health issues. A 24-hour, seven-day-a-week hotline, staffed by trained counselors who are also firefighters, is available to help emergency responders struggling with stress, PTSD, suicidal thoughts, addiction, and more. "In the old days, we didn't talk about mental health," according to Stittleburg. But in recent years, awareness has grown as to the prevalence of suicides in the fire and emergency services. "We don't want to neglect our own mental health, and this program impacts lives," he said.

Building the Volunteer Emergency Services

As volunteer firefighters and EMTs retire, the NVFC has initiated several programs to attract new recruits. The National Junior Firefighter Program provides support for volunteer departments to reach out to youths, who may one day become firefighters, EMTs, or community supporters. The typical volunteer firefighter needs

188 hours of training, Lukus noted. "That's a big commitment, and sometimes you don't have people volunteering the way we used to." Junior firefighter programs help to instill a lifelong interest in the profession.

The Fire Corps program targets broader community involvement to help with non-operational tasks from public fire prevention education to fundraising. "Volunteers are retiring at higher rates than new ones are coming in," Stittleburg noted. Yet there are many ways for members of the community to serve beyond emergency response. Some can help raise money and others may have special skills or interests, such as helping with community smoke detector campaigns. He cited one unusual example in Arizona, where a few valued volunteers have a rare skill to help overworked departments: They are adept at removing rattlesnakes from homeowners' yards, a frequent reason for calls to volunteer fire departments in the area.

The Council's newest recruitment initiative is the Make Me A Firefighter campaign. Funded by a SAFER grant, the campaign provides tools and resources to help local departments recruit new volunteers as well as works to raise awareness among the public of the need for volunteers.

EMS

While the NVFC has always included volunteer EMS in its mission, the organization took a significant step forward in 2010 when it created the EMS/Rescue Section specifically for members who are EMTs, paramedics, or related rescue personnel. With improved building standards and a greater emphasis on



Then and Now: The NVFC staff circa 1996 (right) and in 2015 (above).

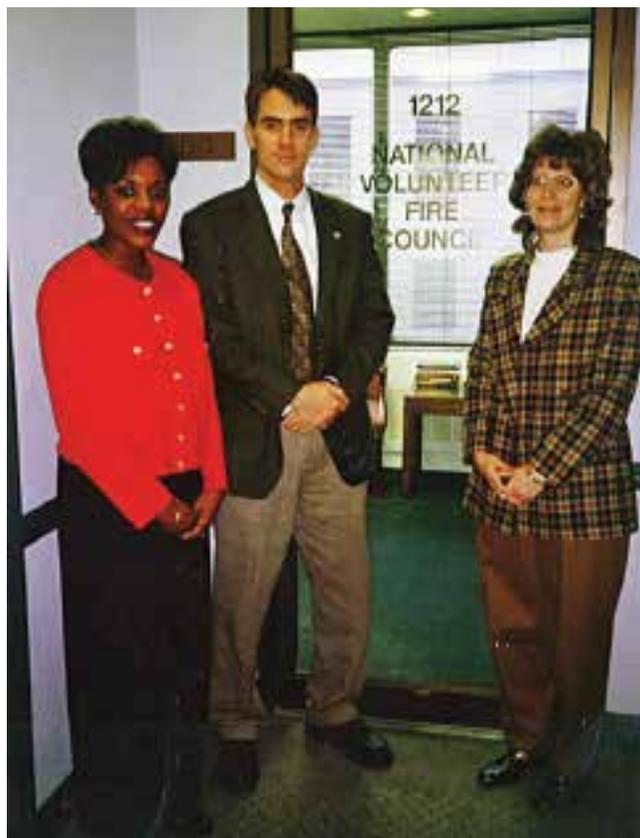
safety, volunteer fire departments today typically get more EMS calls than fire calls, said Stittleburg, who was NVFC Chair when the Section was created.

“EMS was becoming more and more of a focus and there wasn’t a national EMS organization to represent volunteers,” he said. The EMS/Rescue Section has its own governance officers and holds its own meetings, in addition to attending the annual NVFC conference.

Training

One significant change is the introduction of virtual education, so that firefighters have more options to obtain and upgrade their skills. The NVFC’s online Virtual Classroom as well as partnerships with other online training organizations provide a convenient option to help attract and keep firefighters. “Often people just don’t have the time to do this type of detailed training in person,” Lukus said. “Now you can go online and take classes.”

Today’s training also covers many different disciplines, from fighting fires to recognizing and dealing with hazardous materials. “We have more responsibilities than ever before,” Quinn noted. “We need to prepare volunteer firefighters to serve as an all-hazards fire department.”



Continued on page 21

Happy 40th Anniversary to NVFC!

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KEY DATES ON THE NVFC TIME LINE: Development of a National Organization

It takes years to develop an effective national organization and build the expertise to adapt to changing circumstances at the national level. The National Volunteer Fire Council has made significant strides since its inception 40 years ago. Here are some key events in the organization's development and growth:

1975: Representatives from seven state fire associations meet to establish the framework for a national organization to represent the nation's volunteer fire and emergency services.

1976: The NVFC is officially organized to serve as the unified voice for the volunteer fire and emergency services in national matters.

1997: The Council launches the national 1-800-FIRE-LINE volunteer recruitment campaign. New Jersey had introduced the toll-free number statewide the previous year for its departments, and the state office worked with the NVFC to expand the campaign nationally.

2000: Federal lawmakers enact the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program, a major legislative priority for the NVFC. The program helps fire departments and nonaffiliated EMS organizations obtain critical equipment, training, and resources.

2003: Congress creates the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program within the larger AFG program to help career and volunteer fire departments increase the number of trained, front-line firefighters available in their communities.

The NVFC launches the Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program to focus on the leading cause of on-duty firefighter deaths – heart attacks.

2004: Fire Corps is launched. A program under the federal Citizen Corps initiative, Fire Corps is a grassroots effort to increase fire/EMS department capacity by engaging citizens in non-operational roles.

2005: The Volunteer Firefighter Support Fund is created in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The fund provides stipends to volunteer firefighters and

EMTs to help them meet basic needs in the aftermath of a large-scale disaster.

2007: The National Junior Firefighter Program is launched to serve as an umbrella for local fire department youth programs and to foster the next generation of the fire service.

2010: The NVFC creates the EMS/Rescue Section for members who are EMTs, paramedics, and other rescue personnel. This Section has its own governance officers and holds its own meetings.

2011: The NVFC and the U.S. Forest Service launch the Wildland Fire Assessment Program, which trains fire service volunteers on how to properly conduct home assessments in the wildland-urban interface.

2013: The NVFC introduces its online Virtual Classroom training platform to meet the needs of busy members and prospective firefighters seeking multiple ways to access training.

2014: The Share the Load behavioral health support program launches. The program incorporates the Fire/EMS Helpline, which was created the previous year and is run in partnership with American Addiction Centers.

2014: The NVFC holds its first Training Summit, a multi-day event to provide in-person classroom training to volunteer firefighters and EMTs on critical topics.

2015: Supported by a SAFER grant, the NVFC launches the Make Me A Firefighter campaign, the first national volunteer firefighter and emergency responder recruitment campaign of its kind.

HAPPY 40TH ANNIVERSARY NVFC!

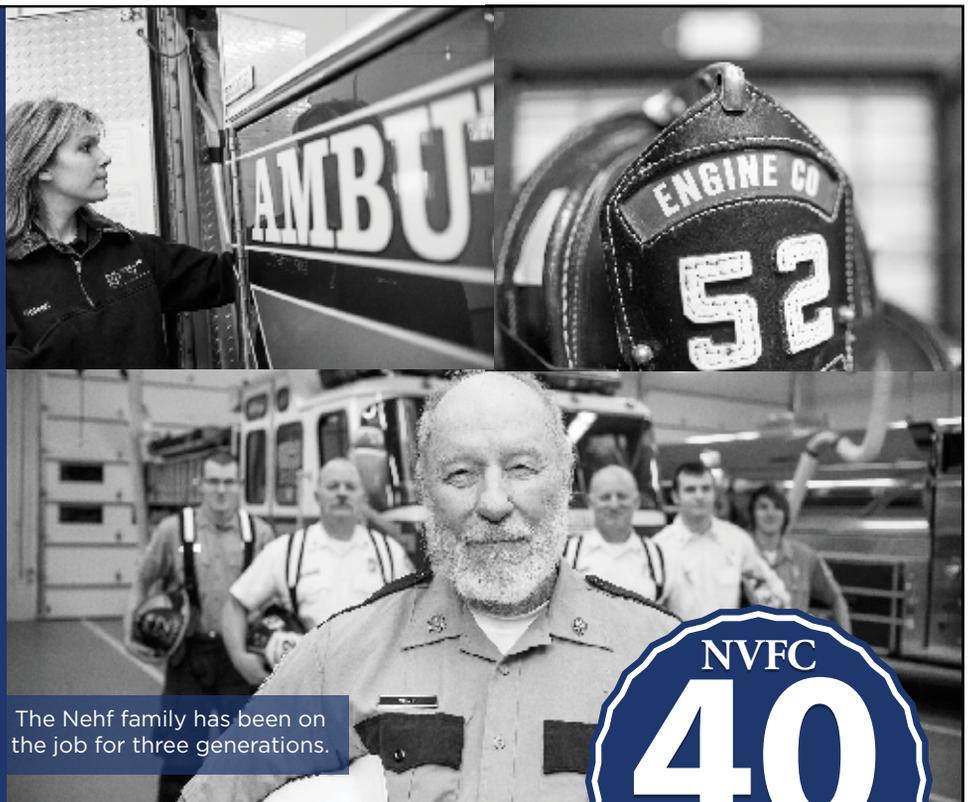
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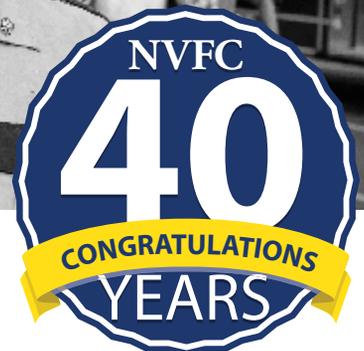
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Continued from page 17



Then and Now: Delegates at the NVFC's 1980 meeting in Austintown, OH (pictured at right), included (l-r) Bob Turner, Gus Welter, Jim Monihan, Jim Baker, and Bill Loomis. In 2015, the NVFC board (above) included representatives from 49 state fire associations.



Volunteer Firefighter Support Fund

Volunteer firefighters can suffer home loss or damage from the same tornadoes, wildfires, hurricanes, or other large-scale disasters to which they respond. Following the wrath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the NVFC began looking at ways it could help volunteer firefighters cope with their own personal losses. "These firefighters may have been out helping others rather than protecting their own homes," Lukus said. Aid through the Council's Volunteer Firefighter Support Fund provides short-term benefits to those in need. "When you don't have much, a little bit works well," he added. To date, more than half a million dollars have been distributed to volunteers in need through the fund.

With all of these programs as ample evidence, it is clear that the NVFC has gained in stature, visibility, and impact since its inception 40 years ago. While driven by volunteer firefighters and emergency personnel, this work is successful in large part due to

the NVFC's full-time staff, say longtime Council leaders. The 10 full-time employees at the NVFC's office in Greenbelt, MD, manage a variety of initiatives and represent their members well. "We have consistency with staff, and our staff members understand and appreciate the work of our members," Quinn said.

Together, NVFC staff and volunteer emergency service leaders understand that, in many ways, the profession faces the same issues it did four decades ago. "You still need money for programs and the people to run them," according to Stittleburg. However, the sheer size and scope of the endeavor has expanded significantly since 1976. He added, "The reach of our work and the breadth of our activities have changed dramatically – for everyone's benefit." ●



Then and Now: NVFC exhibit booth circa 1995 (left) and in 2007 (right).

A Giant Is Awakened!

By Dave Finger

NVFC Chief of Legislative and Regulatory Affairs

April 27, 1976

Fellow Volunteer Firemen:

On March 15, 1976, at Memphis, Tennessee, a giant was awakened! At a meeting of 18 states, a new nationwide voice of the volunteer firemen was officially organized. The name chosen was the "National Volunteer Fire Council." The purpose of the organization is to provide a voice for the volunteers in matters of interest to the fire service.

In the past, we have had no influence on legislation, appointments to the National Fire Prevention & Control Administration, location selection and type of National Fire Academy and other matters of importance to us. The Council provides a forum for the state volunteer firemen's associations to speak for the members and thus assist in formulation of unified positions.

The above is an excerpt from a letter written to the nation's volunteer fire service by Fred Williams, the first Chairman of the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC). It explains the impetus for creating a council specifically to represent the interests of the volunteer fire and emergency services.

A lot has happened in the 40 years since Williams announced the establishment of the NVFC.

- Millions of fire service leaders have received instruction through the National Fire Academy and National Emergency Training Center, which currently deliver training to more than 80,000 students each year.
- The Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program has distributed \$7.28 billion to the American fire service to purchase equipment, training, apparatus, and to fund health, safety, and prevention programs.
- The Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program has provided more than \$320 million to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters and approximately \$320 million to hire firefighters at all- and mostly-volunteer fire departments.
- The Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Program has provided death and education benefits to the survivors of firefighters and other first responders who die in the line of duty, as well as disability benefits to those who are catastrophically injured in the line of duty.

Through all of these milestones, the NVFC has been there every step of the way advocating for the interests of America's volunteer fire, EMS, and rescue services.

THE CHANGING FIRE SERVICE

Over the years, advances in personal protective equipment and other tools that firefighters use to suppress fire have led to agencies adopting new tactics and incident command structures. Many states



NVFC Chairman Fred Allinson with President Bill Clinton in 1996 during the signing of an arson prevention initiative.

and local jurisdictions now require fire departments to comply with National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards on equipment, apparatus, and professional qualifications.

Even as approaches to fire suppression became more standardized, the number of structure fires has decreased thanks to the adoption of modern building codes and practices. Many fire departments have responded to this development by offering new services, including emergency medical services (EMS), hazardous materials response, and tactical rescue, to name a few. This requires additional equipment and vehicle purchases as well as increased training.



NVFC Chairman Philip C. Stittleburg and CEO Heather Schafer with Vice President Joe Biden at a 2012 reception to discuss pressing issues in the fire service.

Adding new and specialized services is difficult to do in many small communities, due to a lack of resources and limited responder time availability. Since its formation in 1976, the NVFC has worked to maximize federal government assistance to help smaller agencies cope with increasing demands. The NVFC also has representatives serving on numerous NFPA technical committees to make sure that the needs and challenges of the volunteer fire service are considered in the development of standards.

U.S. Fire Administration

Historically, the federal government's involvement in the fire service was limited to major disaster response and fighting fire on federal lands and in federal facilities. This began to change in 1973 when the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control submitted a report to President Richard Nixon titled *America Burning*. The report made a number of recommendations that have since come to pass, including:

- That Congress create a U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) to provide a national focus for the nation's fire problem and to promote a comprehensive program with adequate funding to reduce life and property loss from fire.
- For national fire data systems to be established to provide a continuing review and analysis of the entire fire problem.
- To establish a National Fire Academy (NFA) to provide specialized training in areas important to the fire services and to assist state and local jurisdictions in their training programs.

When the NVFC was established in 1976, USFA had just been created but did not yet have a dedicated training facility or campus. That changed in 1979 when Congress appropriated funds to convert the campus of a defunct college in Emmitsburg, MD, into the new headquarters of the USFA and site of the NFA.

USFA provides free training and education programs to support fire departments and emergency services organizations in preparing for, preventing, and responding to fires and other hazards. USFA also develops and delivers fire prevention and safety education programs and sponsors research to support emergency responder health and safety. Additionally, USFA collects fire service data and provides information and analysis on the status and scope of the fire problem in the United States.

The NVFC has strongly supported USFA through the years, advocating for adequate funding and working with Congress to reauthorize the agency every four to five years. The training that NFA provides on campus, through state training academies, and, in recent years, using distance learning tools has been critical in helping to develop volunteer fire service leaders across the country.

AFG/SAFER

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program was created as part of the FY 2001 National Defense Authorization Act. AFG provides federal grants directly to local fire and EMS agencies to

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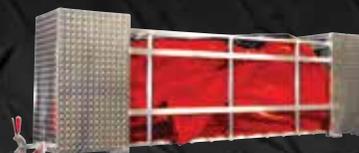
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Then and Now: U.S. Fire Administrator Carrye Brown (right photo) addresses the NVFC board at the April 1997 spring meeting and U.S. Fire Administrator Ernie Mitchell (above photo) met with the NVFC Executive Committee in January 2012.

purchase equipment, training, and apparatus. Creating a federal funding stream to help local fire departments reach a baseline level of readiness had been a top priority of the NVFC's for years, and by working with our allies on Capitol Hill and in other major national fire service organizations, we were able to achieve it. Since 2001, billions of dollars of federal funding have been directed to local volunteer and combination fire departments through AFG.

The Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program was enacted as part of the FY 2004 National Defense Authorization Act. The NVFC supported the creation of SAFER, which includes statutory language guaranteeing that at least 10 percent of funding goes to the recruitment and retention of volunteers and that an additional 10 percent goes for hiring at all- and mostly-volunteer fire departments.

AFG and SAFER are administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which was merged into the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) after it was created in 2002 in response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The NVFC has worked closely with DHS and FEMA on a number of different issues pertaining to the volunteer fire service, including the following:

- The NVFC appoints peer reviewers and criteria developers for the AFG and SAFER programs to ensure that funding is allocated as equitably and efficiently as possible.



- The NVFC administers the Fire Corps program, which was created in 2003 and was originally funded through DHS. Fire Corps gives local fire departments tools to recruit, retain, and use volunteers to perform non-operational fire departments duties.
- The NVFC partners with many DHS agencies, including USFA and FEMA, to provide stakeholder input on behalf of the volunteer fire service.



Longtime NVFC board member and past Chairman E. James Monihan urged Congress to support the Assistance to Firefighters Grant with the addition of the SAFER recruitment and retention component in 2004.

longer talk to neighboring departments that are still operating on an older frequency.

In 2012, the NVFC helped to pass legislation creating a nationwide public safety broadband network. The bill allocated 10 MHz of radio spectrum and \$7 billion to public safety to build the communications network. The bill also established the FirstNet Authority to oversee and manage construction and operation of the network. In 2015, Reid Vaughn, the Chair of the NVFC's Radio/Wireless Committee, was appointed to the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC), which advises the FirstNet Board.

Recruitment and Retention

Within the past two decades, recruitment and retention of volunteers has emerged as one of the most important challenges facing the fire service. As training requirements have increased and the number of young people living and working in rural America has dwindled, fire and EMS agencies have found it increasingly difficult to attract the next generation of volunteer personnel.

In 2007, the NVFC was able to get the Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Act (VRIPA) enacted, allowing local governments and fire departments to give volunteer fire and EMS personnel minor recruitment and retention benefits without being subject to federal income tax and withholding. VRIPA was on the books for the 2008-2010 tax years but expired in 2011. The NVFC continues to advocate for the reauthorization of VRIPA as part of comprehensive tax reform legislation.

In 2011, federal law emerged as a potential threat to volunteer staffing. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA, commonly referred to as "Obamacare"), which was enacted in 2010, requires all large employers to offer health insurance coverage to their employees. Volunteer fire and EMS personnel who receive recruitment and retention incentives are employees of the agencies that they serve, based on the definition of "employee" used in the PPACA. This meant many volunteer and combination departments were at risk of being subjected to significant fines for not offering health insurance to their volunteers.

The NVFC argued that small fire and EMS agencies could not afford to provide health insurance and that many would either stop providing recruitment and retention benefits or be subject to IRS fines if they continued. Due to the NVFC's efforts, the Obama administration issued regulations in early 2014 stipulating that volunteers who receive nominal compensation as a reward for their service would not be treated as employees for the purposes of the PPACA.

Public Safety Officers Benefits

In 2003, the NVFC helped to pass the Hometown Heroes Survivors Benefits Act, which made it possible for the families of public safety officers who die from a fatal cardiac event within 24 hours of participating in emergency response to receive the Public Safety Officers' Benefit (PSOB). Cardiac events are the leading recognized cause of firefighter line-of-duty fatalities.

Passage of the Hometown Heroes Act was only the first step in the process. The Department of Justice, which administers PSOB, did not develop regulations to implement Hometown Heroes until 2006, and as a result, many claims were pending for years. The NVFC worked to highlight this problem and get it corrected. Since then, hundreds of Hometown Heroes claims have been paid.

In 2011, the NVFC worked to pass PSOB reform legislation clarifying that volunteer EMS providers are eligible and that responders who die of a cardiac injury that is similar to a heart attack are covered under Hometown Heroes. The NVFC continues to advocate that all volunteers should have access to PSOB and supports pending legislation that would clarify that fire police (members of fire departments who assist in directing traffic at emergency scenes and during planned special events) are eligible for the benefit if they die in the line of duty.

Communications

In 2006, the NVFC testified before Congress about the communications challenges facing volunteer fire departments. Radio equipment is expensive and if a department is able to upgrade their communications system, they often find that they can no

National Standards and Codes

The NVFC's participation in the standards- and codes-making process has escalated rapidly over the past 10 years. The NVFC now has representatives on 16 different NFPA Technical Committees, compared to just six in the mid-2000s. These committees have



NVFC Chairman Philip C. Stittleburg speaks at a press conference for the Hometown Heroes Survivors Benefits Act in 2007.

responsibility for 34 different NFPA standards ranging from Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications to Fire Department Apparatus to Wildland Fire Management. The NVFC has also recently appointed representatives to NFPA and International Code Council (ICC) Fire Code-making committees.

Codes and standards help make firefighters and the general public safer, but only if they are followed. For years, the volunteer fire service had a very low rate of compliance with NFPA standards for a variety of reasons, including resource constraints and agencies either not recognizing the importance of standards or viewing standards as unrealistic. This has started to change as it becomes more common for states to require that volunteer firefighters and fire departments follow NFPA standards. Additionally, many states require compliance with standards in order to be certified as a firefighter, and it is becoming more common for volunteer fire departments to insist that their members become certified even if state law does not require it of volunteers. NVFC representatives add value to the committees that they serve on by ensuring that the perspective of volunteers is taken into consideration.

The Next 40 Years

Many of the major focus areas for the NVFC's advocacy are likely to remain the same going forward. These include maintaining funding for AFG/SAFER and USFA and ensuring that volunteers continue to have access to those programs; providing input into the development of the FirstNet Broadband

Communications Network; passing legislation that helps local agencies recruit and retain personnel; and working with the Department of Justice and Congress to ensure that the PSOB program remains accessible to volunteer emergency response personnel and their families.

New challenges and priorities continue to emerge and the NVFC will work hard to meet them. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration is in the early stages of developing new safety and health regulations for emergency responders, and the NVFC is part of a subcommittee that is developing the draft. It has become clear that there is a link between fighting fire and cancer, and the NVFC is pushing for the federal government to act, including by creating a national firefighter cancer registry and database. As the volunteer fire service's involvement in EMS and responding to hazmat incidents has grown, the NVFC has formed internal committees to deal with those issues specifically and has ramped up our engagement with the federal agencies and congressional committees that have jurisdiction in those areas.

A lot has changed in the past 40 years, but the mission of the NVFC has remained the same: serve as the voice of the volunteer in the national arena and provide invaluable tools, resources, programs, and advocacy for first responders across the nation. The NVFC will continue to fulfill our mission by working tirelessly to represent the boots-on-the-ground volunteers who sacrifice to keep their communities and country safe. ●

Body and Mind: A Healthier Volunteer Fire Service

By Craig Collins

It goes without saying: For all their benefits to individuals and society, jobs in the fire and emergency services are dangerous, stressful, and often upsetting work. This has always been true, but over the past few decades, as technology and job descriptions have evolved, the physical and psychological risks confronting first responders have increased and grown more complex.

The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) has been at the forefront of efforts to quantify these risks, to circulate up-to-date knowledge to departments and first responders, and to form partnerships and design best practices and initiatives that will save lives and improve the physical and mental well-being of first responders and their families.

Until recently, many of these efforts – including health screenings, safety training, and nutrition and exercise programs – had been targeted at the state and local levels. In 2007, the NVFC formed a Health, Safety, and Training Committee to develop a nationwide approach. “We looked at four different areas,” said Kenn Fontenot, the Committee’s Chair and NVFC’s Louisiana Director: “firefighter behavior; the standards we adhere to as a fire service; the equipment we wear and use; and also the training necessary to keep firefighters well and safe while doing their jobs.”

The committee developed a set of health and safety priorities, set forth as a series of “B.E.S.T. Practices” for the volunteer fire and emergency services, divided into four main areas: Behavior, Equipment, Standards and Codes, and Training.

“We developed several programs and presented them across the country,” Fontenot said. “We had instructors who would go out to different places and present these B.E.S.T. Practices.” Today, he said, “several of us travel to different places and present these programs or seminars, and challenge people to meet these requirements the best they possibly can.”

In 2010, the NVFC was bestowed the Senator Paul S. Sarbanes Fire Service Safety Leadership Award, co-sponsored by the Congressional Fire Services Institute and the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, in recognition of its outstanding contributions to firefighter health and safety.

Fontenot and other committee members view the B.E.S.T. Practices initiative as merely a starting point for the NVFC in its effort

to address health and safety for the volunteer fire and emergency services. While the B.E.S.T. Practices tie everything together, the Council will continue to develop and maintain programs, resources, and outreach that focus on existing and emerging health and safety issues.

The Council’s efforts embrace a full spectrum of issues.

HEART HEALTH

Both the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) have been tracking line-of-duty firefighter fatalities since 1977, and during that time, the leading cause of line-of-duty death among emergency responders, accounting for around half of all line-of-duty fatalities, has been heart disease, including heart attack and stroke.

Heart disease is the result of multiple contributing factors, many of which – such as declining rates of physical activity, high-fat diets, obesity, and diabetes – have been on the increase for decades in the United States. The NVFC, with the support of USFA, partnered with the HOPE Health Research Institute on a 2011 study of obesity in the fire service and found that rates of overweight and obesity among the fire service are slightly higher than in the U.S. population overall. Research also shows that the high stress demands of incident response put firefighters at greater risk for heart attacks than the overall population.

Since 2003, the NVFC has administered the Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program to combat heart disease in the fire service through education, awareness, and resources for action made available through a variety of channels. The program promotes fitness, nutrition, and health awareness for all members of the fire and emergency services, both volunteer and career. The program web site at www.healthy-firefighter.org provides information and resources about heart health, fitness, nutrition, lifestyle choices, and how to start a department-wide health and wellness program.

Other components of the program include:

- a booth at national and state trade shows to raise awareness through outreach materials as well as features such as health screenings and fitness demonstrations;



The NVFC's Health, Safety, and Training Committee won the Congressional Fire Services Institute's Senator Paul S. Sarbanes Fire Service Safety Leadership Award in 2010 for the B.E.S.T. Practices for Volunteer Firefighter Health and Safety initiative. Pictured here is Committee Chair Kenn Fontenot accepting the award.

- webinars and online training on a variety of health and wellness topics;
- the *Heart-Healthy Firefighter Cookbook* and online recipe archives;
- the *Heart-Healthy Firefighter Resource Guide* for helping first responders adopt a heart-healthy lifestyle;
- tools and resources to help departments start a health and wellness program; and
- the Health and Wellness Advocate Workshop, which trains firefighters to serve as advocates for health and wellness within their departments, establish health and fitness programs, and motivate department members to get and stay healthy.

Dominica D'Avella, an independent health and fitness specialist in Massachusetts, attended a Health and Wellness Advocate Workshop in 2014, and the experience encouraged her to work further with the Massachusetts Call/Volunteer Firefighters Association (MCVFA). She now serves as the MCVFA's Health and Wellness Coordinator. One of the strengths of the Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program, she said, is that it doesn't just tell people what to do – it clearly lays out the case for why they should do these things.

"It's principle-driven," she said, "which is essential to helping people make better decisions, as opposed to saying: 'Just do this,' or 'Just eat this.' It's a nice starting point for people in the fire service, a place to go and look for these resources, because people have to be aware of what they may want to change and what some strategies

for doing that might be before they're even going to consider changing their lifestyle."

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

The fact that heart disease is the leading cause of line-of-duty death among emergency responders is alarming, but perhaps more surprising is the high rate of suicides among firefighters.

Jeff Dill, founder of the Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance (FBHA; www.ffbha.org), has been tracking this trend carefully. "It's a sad and tragic situation," he said, "because there is no discrimination – from volunteer to career, firefighters to fire chiefs, rural to city – no discrimination whatsoever. And it's all because of the things we see."

The past few decades have ushered in a new era of awareness about the impact of firefighting and emergency response on the mental well-being of personnel, as the knowledge base about behavioral health issues such as depression, post-traumatic stress, anxiety, addiction, and suicide has expanded. A former captain of the Palatine Rural Fire Protection District in Inverness, IL, Dill founded the FBHA to educate fire and emergency service providers and their families about these issues. He works closely with the NVFC's flagship behavioral health program, Share the Load™, which provides access to critical resources and information to help first responders and their families manage and overcome personal and work-related problems.



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Resources available through Share the Load include several stress/coping/resilience training modules available through NVFC's Virtual Classroom; *What to Expect: A Guide for Family Members of Volunteer Firefighters*, which can be downloaded for free at the NVFC web site; the Share the Load Helpletter, which features articles, tips, and tools to help first responders take a proactive approach to behavioral health issues; and a series of video interviews with experts and emergency responders about how to find help for behavioral health problems.

The NVFC partnered with American Addiction Centers to provide the Fire/EMS Helpline at 1-888-731-FIRE (3473). This resource offers 24-hour access for fire and EMS personnel and their families to trained counselors familiar with the emergency services who can offer advice or referrals to professionals. The Helpline, which also offers an online chat feature at americanaddictioncenters.org/fire-services, is the brainchild of Mike Healy, Chief of the Central Nyack (NY) Fire Department and a fire service consultant for American Addiction Centers, and Mike Blackburn, a retired Battalion Chief from the Providence (RI) Fire Department. Healy and Blackburn currently answer all calls to the Helpline.

Said Healy, whose expertise is substance abuse counseling, "About 85 percent of the calls I get are PTSD-related. What I usually do is find them a referral for somebody who is certified to deal with people suffering from PTSD." Other calls have involved referrals to an American Addiction Centers facility or other counseling services. Other times, Healy said, callers are simply looking to speak with someone who knows what they're going through. The Helpline received about 1,000 calls in 2015.

The most important things Healy wants others to know about the Helpline are that it's confidential and nonjudgmental. "And the other thing I want them to know is that when they call the Helpline, they're going to be talking to another firefighter. Usually I can put callers at ease by telling them I had the same problem, that I suffer from alcohol addiction and that I did something about it 28 years ago. Sometimes they'll say things to me that they wouldn't say to anybody else, because I know. I know what they know."

CANCER PREVENTION

Fifty years ago, American buildings and homes were furnished with wood, glass, cloth, and metal, but the plastics, foams, and treatments of today present a much higher health risk to firefighters. According to Brian McQueen – a volunteer firefighter at the Whitesboro (NY) Fire Department, a director of the Firemen's Association of the State of New York (FASNY), and a member of the NVFC's Health, Safety, and Training Committee – "There are 84,000 chemicals in the building industry today. And the research is starting to show that some of this fire retardant material we're finding in furniture and in drapes is actually burning off carcinogens that we're inhaling and absorbing into our bodies, through our lungs and through our skin."

A growing body of research, including a landmark 2014 study by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), is revealing that firefighters have higher rates of several different types of cancers and of all cancers combined than the U.S. population as a whole. When McQueen was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma two years ago, he began his crusade, with the NVFC's



The NVFC held a Health and Wellness Advocate Workshop in Wisconsin in 2010.

help, to educate firefighters about their elevated cancer risk and to train them in how to minimize their exposure. To support these efforts, Oneida County firefighters formed a group called the Believe 271 Foundation, a nonprofit that takes its cancer prevention message to firefighters across the United States.

The work of the NVFC and Believe 271 focuses on early detection, including regular screenings, and reducing the risk of exposure to carcinogens, with an emphasis on proper use and maintenance of personal protective equipment (PPE). “We need to make sure we’re training our firefighters at the grassroots,” McQueen said, “reaching these new firefighters at a younger age and informing them that even though it’s a glory job – you see images all the time of firefighters with dirt and grime on their faces – that’s not the fire service of today, and that we need to get away from that message.”

The Council’s cancer prevention work also includes an effort to inform leaders and elected officials about the importance of adequate equipment – two sets of hoods for firefighters, for example, so that one can be washed while another is in service – and whenever possible, the installation of heavy-duty gear washers to clean equipment of soot and chemicals after a fire. To learn more about the NVFC’s cancer prevention efforts, visit www.nvfc.org/cancer.

EQUIPMENT AND VEHICLE SAFETY

Vehicle accidents are the second-leading cause of firefighter on-duty fatalities. One of the first programs launched by the NVFC’s Health, Safety, and Training Committee was the STOP (Safety Tops Our Priorities) program, a training initiative focused on the importance of using a seatbelt, slowing down, stopping, and using spotters.

Today’s emergency vehicles, particularly large pumper trucks, are notoriously difficult to handle, Fontenot said, and require considerable training to operate. “When you’re carrying 1,500 gallons of water at 8.3 pounds per gallon,” he said, “that’s about 10,000 gallons of liquid moving. And when you stop, the water keeps wanting to go. The trucks have a high center of gravity, and they roll easily. They’re hard to control.”

Fontenot admits to some frustration at the number of firefighter deaths from easily preventable causes such as not wearing seatbelts or driving too fast. The Committee is working on a white paper examining the issue of vehicle speed. “We’re going to recommend that the fire service not exceed the posted speed limit,” Fontenot said. “We’ve always taken for granted we can drive fast and get there quick, and that’s something that needs to be looked at. My belief is you don’t need to drive any faster – in fact, if the weather is inclement, you need to drive slower. We should be held to a higher standard.”

The NVFC and numerous partners, including insurance companies that underwrite individual departments, have assembled several safety and training resources encouraging the safe use and maintenance of emergency vehicles and equipment, including PPE. These resources are available on the Council’s web site and include guidebooks, training videos, best practices, and research briefs.

WILDLAND FIRE ASSESSMENT

One of the more alarming trends in recent decades has been the lengthening of the Western wildfire season and the greater intensity and unpredictability of these fires. Changes in climate and fuel



A Firefighter Cancer Roundtable was held at the 2015 NVFC spring meeting with moderator Bill Troup from USFA and panelists Dr. Bill Jenaway of VFIS, NVFC NY Director and cancer survivor Chief Brian McQueen, Trey Kelso of the Firefighter Cancer Support Network, and Ed Mann of Provident.

load, and the building of an increasing number of structures in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) have made the nation more vulnerable, and dozens of firefighters have died in wildfires since 2000. To combat this trend, the NVFC, in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, developed the Wildland Fire Assessment Program (WFAP) to help local volunteer and combination departments educate communities about the dangers posed by wildland fire and to work with property owners to conduct risk assessments.

The WFAP is the first national program targeted to volunteers that specifically prepares firefighters or non-operational department volunteers in understanding the WUI problem, identifying WUI zones, conducting property assessments, and planning awareness activities.

The NVFC and Forest Service offer in-person training courses, as well as online training in the NVFC Virtual Classroom. The NVFC web site also features resources such as the WFAP Toolkit, checklists, and supplemental resources.

CHANGING THE CULTURE OF FIRE AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The common theme among many of the NVFC's health and safety initiatives is to subtly re-shape the culture of the fire and emergency services from one that sometimes emphasizes stoicism, self-denial, and risk-taking to one that places a greater value on wellness, openness, and shared responsibility for outcomes. In many ways, the different health and safety initiatives of NVFC share the same message: Paying more attention to, and spending more time on, one's own wellness and safety takes nothing away from the mission

of public service; in fact, it can amplify the fire service's benefits to communities.

"I don't want to change the culture, I want to enhance it," said Dill. "It all starts with education, training area counselors and departments to create peer support teams and let people know it's OK to stand up and say: 'You know what? That call bothered me and I'm suffering, I'm losing sleep, I'm getting anxiety, I'm getting nightmares,' and then steering them to qualified people who can help them handle it."

One of the NVFC's chief partners is the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF), which hosts the fire service's periodic Life Safety Summits. Just over a decade ago, the first summit produced 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives, each targeting a component of the fire and emergency services for change. The NFFF launched the Everyone Goes Home® program to help provide training, resources, and programs to help implement these 16 initiatives. The first Life Safety Initiative targeted – the issue summit participants felt was the most important – was cultural change.

With the help of a Fire Prevention and Safety grant, the NVFC has begun work on the development of a culture shift textbook, outlining how the fire service can implement institutional changes that will reduce fatalities, injuries, and sickness among emergency responders. "We're hoping to change some of the old ways of thinking," said Fontenot. "Things that were considered the norm are simply not the norm anymore." The new textbook will provide volunteer and combination departments nationwide with a rationale and concrete steps for making these changes – and ultimately for improving the quality of life for emergency responders, their families, and communities. ●

A New Generation of Volunteers

By Craig Collins

The tradition of volunteer fire and emergency service is strong in the United States – but few Americans realize just how important this tradition is to the nation’s response system. Some 69 percent of U.S. firefighters are volunteers, and most U.S. fire departments are all-volunteer or mostly volunteer. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) estimates that the time donated by these volunteers saves U.S. localities nearly \$140 billion annually.

The importance of these volunteers has grown in recent decades as they’ve assumed more varied and complex roles. Today volunteer firefighters are often the first line of defense not only for fires, but also for emergency medical incidents, natural disasters, hazardous materials incidents, water rescues, terrorist events, and other public service calls. Volunteers spend a significant – and increasing – amount of time training to prepare for these types of emergencies. At the same time, fire department call volumes have nearly tripled since the mid-1980s, according to the NFPA – from 11.9 million in 1986 to 31.6 million in 2013.

NFPA numbers also reveal that since the early 1980s, the number of volunteer firefighters in the United States has shrunk by about 12 percent. At the same time, the age of volunteer firefighters is increasing, with fewer younger volunteers stepping up to fill the gaps as the older generation looks toward retirement.

In 2007, the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) and U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) released the report *Retention and Recruitment for the Volunteer Emergency Services: Challenges and Solutions*. The document examined the most significant obstacles departments face in engaging and retaining volunteers, and outlined proven solutions to overcoming those obstacles.

Key challenges revealed in the report include time demands, increasing training requirements, and increasing call volume.

Time demands. Economic realities have made it more difficult for people to volunteer, particularly as time demands increase both in the workplace and in emergency service departments. In Ohio, where Candice McDonald manages to perform multiple roles – as a firefighter and EMS officer with the Winona Fire Department, a security specialist and contract officer for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and a leader for several regional, state, national, and international fire/EMS outreach advocacy groups – she’s seen firsthand how these time pressures have hurt the volunteer services.

“Job hours are longer,” she said. “People are traveling farther for their jobs, because at least in our area, most of the jobs have moved out. I drive an hour and a half to work every day. Before, the whistle would blow or the alarm would go off and people were able to leave their jobs to go on a call. With the way organizations are staffed now, you can’t do that anymore.”

Training requirements. Higher standards and new federal requirements mean it takes longer to become certified as a volunteer first responder. “It makes it difficult,” said McDonald, “because in most families now, you’ve got two people working outside of the home, and then you have the training hours at night.”

Eric Bernard, Executive Director of the Montgomery County (MD) Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association, advises 19 volunteer fire and rescue departments served by about 2,400 volunteers. He’s been involved in the volunteer fire service since 1982, and today he’s a member of the NVFC’s Recruitment and Retention Work Group. “When I joined the fire department,” he said, “they would tell you at your first meeting: ‘You’re a fireman.’ And you did all this on-the-job training where you got on a fire truck, you shared some boots and you shared a coat, and you were a firefighter. Now, when somebody is recruited, it takes over a year just to complete the minimum training before they can ride on a fire truck or an ambulance or paramedic unit.”

Increasing call volume. Today’s volunteers are called on to do much more than their predecessors. “All this new federally mandated training is good,” said Bernard, “because there’s really not a fire department anymore. We’re an all-hazards department. The police do law enforcement, and the fire department essentially does everything else, from hazmat to water rescue to high-angle rescue to EMS to street-corner psychiatry.”

Other challenges affecting recruitment and retention include younger people moving out of rural communities, leaving fewer people available to volunteer; outdated departmental leadership styles that don’t take these changes into account; increased legislative and regulatory burdens for departments; conflict between volunteer and career members in combination departments; and an aging American population.

With all of these challenges, volunteering in the fire service has grown increasingly complex. That’s both the good news and the bad news. As the NVFC/USFA report cautions, the emergency services are the most demanding of volunteer activities today. But the report



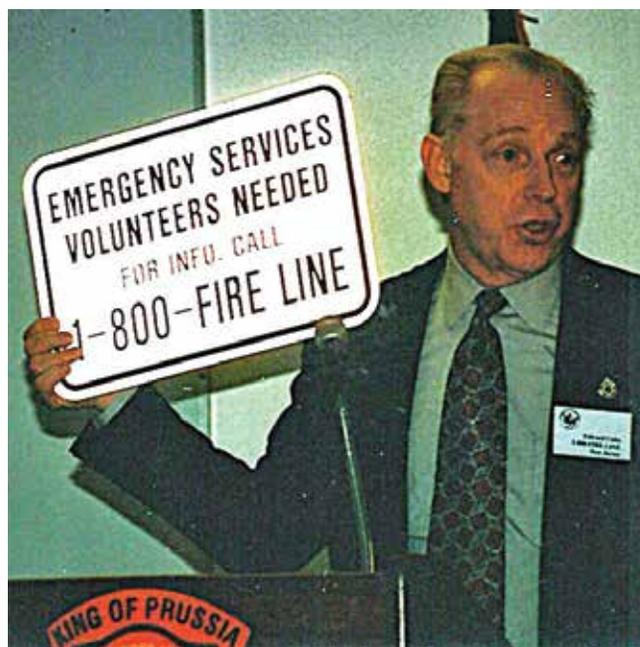
Above: Recruitment and retention has been an ongoing challenge for fire departments over the last few decades. **Right:** The NVFC implemented the national 1-800-FIRE-LINE initiative in the 1990s and early 2000s to help departments recruit new members.

also points out that many departments have succeeded in spite of these demands. Volunteer organizations that continue to actively seek solutions and adapt to today's changing personnel environment are more likely to attract people who find the rewards of volunteer service – the fun, the camaraderie, the pride, and the satisfaction – outweigh the costs.

REVERSING THE TREND: NVFC PROGRAMS

While the many reasons for declining volunteer numbers are well known, less obvious are the solutions. One thing that is clear is that there is no one-size-fits-all answer; solutions that work are tailored specifically to the communities and demographics they target. The recruitment and retention initiatives administered by the NVFC aim to integrate, adapt, and implement the lessons learned, as well as to discover more about public attitudes as they relate specifically to the volunteer fire and emergency services.

One of the first national recruitment campaigns administered by the NVFC was a toll-free number first established by New Jersey volunteer firefighters in the mid-1990s, 1-800-FIRE-LINE. The number connected interested citizens with volunteer emergency opportunities in their communities. Private-sector partners funded the creation of advertising materials and a professionally made recruitment video targeting students. While the program provided a no-cost means for departments to get the word out, it became obvious as the Internet grew in maturity and sophistication that



recruitment efforts could be more multifaceted, adaptable, and actively engaging.

Fire Corps, established in 2004 as a component of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Citizen Corps volunteer initiative and administered nationally by the NVFC, is an example of such an initiative. Often the greatest need at many volunteer departments isn't for another highly trained technician, but for a capable, dedicated person who can assist with all of the non-emergency tasks, such as administration, fundraising, fire prevention and life safety education, home safety checks, apparatus maintenance, and more. The contributions of Fire Corps volunteers allow first responders to focus

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on training and operational duties, thereby helping with key challenges to retention (the time commitment and increasing responsibilities) while still expanding the department's capacity and service options.

The cornerstone of the national Fire Corps initiative is the web site at www.firecorps.org, which provides a portal for information, resources, and networking opportunities, both for departments who want to launch their own Fire Corps program and citizens interested in volunteering.

In 2007, the NVFC tackled another challenge to volunteer recruitment and retention – the aging population of the volunteer fire service. Since 2000, there has been a 14.9 percent drop in the number of firefighters under the age of 40 in communities with 2,500 or fewer residents, which almost strictly rely on volunteer firefighters. The NVFC launched the National Junior Firefighter Program to help departments implement a local youth program. The web site at www.nvfc.org/juniors provides resources and tools to help departments start or expand a local program and to help youth participate in a local program.

Junior firefighter programs allow youth to learn about the volunteer emergency services, train, and assist their local departments with non-operational tasks. Many of these junior firefighters go on to become adult firefighters or EMTs.

That is what happened to Tim Turner, a volunteer EMT with the Forbush Volunteer Fire Department in Yadkinville, NC. He entered the fire service 33 years ago as a junior volunteer. His son also joined as a junior, at the age of 14. Today, they serve together at the Forbush department.

Turner now serves as the junior firefighter program advisor for his department. Forbush VFD, a small rural department with four junior volunteers, conducts its junior program in partnership with the neighboring Lewisville Fire Department, a larger department in the greater metropolitan Winston-Salem area. "They have a small number of volunteers," said Turner, "so we're working together, taking ideas from each other and combining them."

Turner has found inspiration and new training ideas by participating in the NVFC's National Junior Firefighter Academy, an all-day event that offers hands-on training in skills such as search and rescue, using

thermal imaging technology, and EMS techniques. The academy is made possible thanks to corporate supporters including Tyco, Scott Safety, Spartan Motors, and California Casualty.

Turner has been to five academies thus far. "It's a long day," he said, "but the kids really enjoy themselves.

"It's a challenge to really get young people involved nowadays," Turner noted. "But we're hoping that once we get them involved and they see what volunteering

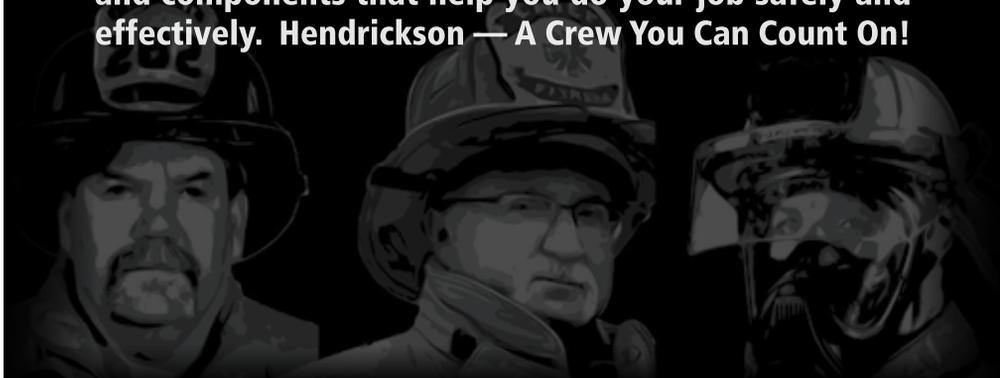
is, and how much fun it is, that they'll stay involved and spread the word."

In 2014, the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) awarded the NVFC a Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant to implement a nationwide recruitment and retention campaign aimed at increasing the number of trained firefighters and emergency responders in volunteer departments. With the help of behavior marketing firm Marketing for Change,



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Fire Corps members from across the nation attended the 2012 Fire Corps Training Summit in Denver, CO.

the NVFC first conducted a national survey to better understand levels of interest in volunteering and the public's pre-existing knowledge about emergency service volunteer opportunities.

The results of the survey were illuminating: Large numbers of Americans, men and women alike, of all ages and ethnicities, reported they were "definitely interested" or "might be interested" in volunteering as responders in the fire and emergency services. However, many Americans are unaware of the opportunities available to them: 41 percent of survey respondents were unsure if their local department was volunteer, combination, or career; and 79 percent didn't know if their department was seeking volunteers.

To close this gap between interest and awareness, the NVFC developed the Make Me A Firefighter campaign, which launched on December 1, 2015. The campaign includes a departmental portal at portal.nvfc.org, which enables departments to showcase their volunteer opportunities, customize campaign materials, access training and marketing resources, create invitations, plan sampling events, and track recruits. Those interested in volunteering can search for these local opportunities and learn more about being a fire service volunteer at the public web site, www.MakeMeAFirefighter.org.

Bernard describes the Make Me A Firefighter campaign – the first national volunteer fire service recruitment and retention campaign of its kind – as multifaceted. "It has every aspect of recruiting in a single package that any volunteer department can master themselves," he said. "It has all the pamphlets, all the posters, all the PSAs. The web site will allow departments to customize them with their number, with their department names. All the research is done. There's no questioning: 'Does this photo work? Is this a good line that people will remember?' It's already at their fingertips, all the research, all the materials, a great portal and a tracking system that functions like workforce man-

agement software, like salesforce.com, and allows you to track people online in the cloud."

Bernard sees the Make Me A Firefighter campaign as a tool of unprecedented power and reach – rather than, say, the power and reach of 15,000 different campaigns developed by states, regions, or individual departments. "It's a simple thing," he said, "but it hadn't been done before. It's been done at a county level, and at some state levels ... but this is the first time we've had this national campaign where we're all going to hang up that same shingle and use that same tagline and commercials and posters. If somebody hears about it in Iowa, but they live in Mississippi and they go to school in DC, they'll be able to see the same thing and find a department that needs them. The importance of that cannot be overstated."

RETAINING A MORE DIVERSE FIRE SERVICE

In "Recruiting a More Diverse Fire Service," an article published on the NVFC web site, McDonald – whose many roles include Fire Corps state advocate for Ohio – recounts the story of her grandmother, who was recruited into the fire service as a member of the Fire Corps in 2014 at the age of 73. In her grandmother's youth, McDonald wrote, the idea of women serving in the fire service wasn't promoted or even widely accepted.

"The fire service has been a male-dominated field for years," McDonald said, "so a lot of times you'll see generational traditions, where a volunteer's father and grandfather have both served. I think a lot of women don't know the opportunity is there for them to serve."

The NVFC survey results confirmed this lack of awareness – but they also reveal areas of particular opportunities exist among demographics currently underrepresented in the fire service, including women, millennials, and minorities. According to the survey:



Left: The National Junior Firefighter Program officially launched during Firehouse Expo in July 2007. **Right:** The No. 22 Shell Pennzoil Ford Fusion, driven by Joey Logano, sported the NVFC's Make Me A Firefighter campaign slogan and web site during a NASCAR race in September 2015.

- 29 percent of the U.S. population overall have an interest in volunteering as a responder in the fire and emergency services.
- 44 percent of millennials (defined as those between 18 and 34 years of age) have an interest.
- 36 percent of minorities are interested.
- Overall, women have about the same level of interest as men in volunteering as an emergency responder.

The Make Me A Firefighter campaign has targeted these groups – women, minorities, and millennials – given their professed interest and the fact that they are proportionally underrepresented in the fire service. For instance, 51 percent of Americans are women, but women make up just 7 percent of the fire service, according to the NFPA.

McDonald and other recruitment experts have outlined simple strategies for helping members of these target groups understand that the fire service is for them – for example, if recruitment teams are sent out to organizations such as schools for planned activities, those teams ought to include volunteers from these target groups, and the recruiters should use the term “firefighter” rather than “fireman” when talking about the profession. It may seem like common sense, but that doesn’t mean it always happens. McDonald also mentions the importance of approaching target groups such as millennials in their own communities and in environments that feel natural for them.

“Millennials are such a smart generation,” McDonald said. “They’re way smarter than we are. We had to go to the library to access information, and make copies from encyclopedias with nickels. This generation has information at their fingertips, and they know how to use it – and that can really benefit us. But we’ve got to be smart about how we reach them, and keep them engaged and make them feel valued.”

One tactic identified by the Make Me A Firefighter campaign as having a high rate of success for reaching new recruits is the invitation. People are much more likely to join an organization if they are personally invited, and then given the chance to experience a

sampling opportunity such as a ride-along or day at the fire station. An invitation generator and tips for sampling events are components that can be found in the campaign’s department portal.

Once new volunteers make the commitment to join, making them feel valued is one of the most important factors in whether a department is able to retain their services. As Bernard points out, volunteering isn’t getting less demanding. “This is not like volunteering at a soup kitchen,” he said. “In our county, a volunteer gives us 12 hours every week and is committed months in advance. We require our volunteers to start a shift at 5 p.m., and they don’t get off until 7 a.m. the next day.” The attrition rate for Montgomery County volunteers – the number of recruits they lose in a year – is about 40 percent. “We used to be around 60 percent,” said Bernard. “So we’ve improved. But we’re not where we want to be.”

Bernard thinks that given the interest and commitment already demonstrated by volunteers who enter the training phase, the emphasis for volunteer departments should be: “Retain first. Then recruit.”

Given the demands on people’s time, McDonald said, every retention strategy should begin with making volunteers feel welcome, valued, and respected. “People – millennials in particular – belong to more than one organization, and they have family commitments,” she said. “So it’s important to respect their time: starting meetings and training on time, having calendars scheduled out so that they can lock that stuff in. If you aren’t respecting their time and you’re constantly going over or starting late, you’re going to lose them, because they pack so much into their schedules.”

McDonald also points out that a focus on diversity in retention and recruitment isn’t about identity politics or political correctness; it’s a practical approach to ensuring the survival of an American cultural mainstay – about reaching untapped groups of recruits to maintain a strong, healthy volunteer fire service, a service that’s built to last and composed of talented, devoted people from the varied communities it serves. ●

Building Knowledge, Skills, and Commitment

By David A. Brown

Adapted from *A Proud Tradition: 275 Years of the American Volunteer Fire Service*

Kenn Fontenot has seen his share of curious onlookers impeding the progress of those responding to a fire. His advice to prospective volunteer firefighters: Don't join the crowd.

"If you show up to an emergency and you can't perform the service you're there to perform, then you're just a bystander," Fontenot said. "If you can't perform the EMS procedures the way you should because you haven't trained, or if you show up at a fire and you haven't put in the time and effort to become proficient at [firefighting], then you're just in the way."

Having served a dozen years as Regional Fire Training Coordinator for Louisiana State University Fire and Emergency Training Institute before retiring in early

2012, Fontenot is the Chair of the National Volunteer Fire Council's (NVFC) Health, Safety, and Training Committee and teaches various fire service training courses intended to make volunteers much more than bystanders. There are no shortcuts, he said. Rather, undertaking this training is a serious commitment to a serious task.

"Sitting through one class is not sufficient; you have to [train] until you are really, really good," Fontenot said. "I don't like the term 'expert,' but I do like 'competent' and 'proficient' a lot."

THE NEED TO KNOW

Ronny Coleman, National Fire Heritage Center President, retired California State fire marshal, and former NVFC board member, has seen numerous changes throughout the fire service since donning his first set of turnout gear in 1960. Better training, he said, stands out as one of the most significant improvements the profession has seen. Looking at today's fast-paced information society, Coleman notes that modern fire training imparts a deeper and more diverse body of knowledge. The product, he said, is firefighters who are better prepared to comprehend the job's various complexities and promptly respond to challenging situations requiring quick decisions.

"A kid coming out of a recruit academy at the end of 18 weeks probably knows more than a fire chief did in the 1800s," Coleman said. "It's the increasing complexity of modern society. It's the influx of EMS, it's the [changes] in the world of hazardous materials. The body of knowledge has changed significantly. I have training manuals out of the 1920s and I can go back and compare them [with modern manuals] topic for topic. What we expect our firefighters to know today is significantly different."

Changes in awareness, such as a broader regard for hazardous materials (hazmat) and more diversified duties, account for the training upturn. "Right now, the average fire department is looked at more as an EMS agency than a fire department. [Most] of the calls are going to be medical and some of those are not really serious emergencies, but everyone uses 911 to call us," Coleman said.

The NVFC is committed to ensuring that volunteer firefighters have an appropriate level of training to safely and effectively carry out their responsibilities.



Students from across the country attended NVFC courses in 2002.



Above: NVFC staff member Rachel Buczynski represented the NVFC during the weeklong Texas Annual Fire Training School session at Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service (TEEX) in July 2008. **Right:** NVFC Chairman Kevin D. Quinn (right) with Acting National Fire Academy Superintendent Kirby Kiefer at the Volunteer Incentive Program graduation in March 2016.

The Council recommends that all volunteer fire departments set a goal that personnel attain, at a minimum, a level of training that meets or exceeds the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) 1001 Standard, which is the Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications, or an equivalent state standard in order to engage in fire suppression.

The NFPA 1001 Standard does not distinguish between volunteer and career firefighters, and for good reason. On any given day, volunteers may be called upon to perform the same tasks with the same level of risk as their paid counterparts. In the face of emergency, neither is any more or less important and that's why the need for knowledge and basic skills remains universal.

REMAINING CURRENT

Continuing education (CE), an important element in a volunteer firefighter's ongoing service, varies based on where they serve. For example, Kentucky volunteers need 20 CE hours annually. Louisiana, on the other hand, has no set level for CE hours, but the Bayou State requires volunteers to renew their hazmat certification for the level at which they're currently working every year and their medical training every two years. Fontenot noted that in OSHA states, firefighters have several recurring classes such as blood-borne pathogens and infectious control.

In general, NFPA 1001 requires firefighters to have continuing education – knowledge and skills – that allows them to remain



competent to serve the public. However, needs and challenges differ greatly throughout the nation, so regional requirements reflect these localized expectations.

LEARNING OPTIONS

When making plans for their training, today's volunteer firefighters have options for where and how they train. Some participate in state-run training programs, while others turn to national opportunities such as the U.S. Fire Administration's National Fire Academy (NFA). Through its Volunteer Incentive Program, the NFA offers a time-effective version of the popular two-week courses it conducts year-round on its Emmitsburg, MD, campus. Considering that most volunteers would have difficulty committing to



Participants in the inaugural NVFC Training Summit in June 2014.

a 10- or 14-day stretch away from home, it offers an intensive six-day training option that compresses the schedule while maintaining quality and content. The NFA covers the cost of travel, lodging, and books.

The NVFC and other organizations also offer a variety of online and in-person courses to help enhance firefighters' knowledge and meet continuing education requirements. Many universities, such as Columbia Southern University and American Public University, offer online degree programs in fire science and related fields. Action Training Systems offers more than 200 interactive online courses for fire and EMS teaching to industry standards. Such flexible learning options help ease the schedule demands of volunteers who may also juggle family and career priorities. Opinions vary on when and how training is best accomplished, but versatility and convenience are fair expectations for the digital age. Online options offer a viable complement to in-person and hands-on training.

KEEP IT IN PERSPECTIVE

Regardless of how a volunteer learns or where they serve, they still have to "put the wet stuff on the red stuff." Whatever the cause of an emergency, all disasters begin and end locally. That's a pretty clear motivation for a community's volunteer firefighters to obtain the best training and preparation possible. The best way for firefighters and EMS personnel to protect their community is to be able to provide proper response in a safe, timely fashion.

Fontenot pulled no punches when he described the volunteer training process as "long." No sense sugarcoating the truth – this is definitely one of life's roads that will quickly weed out those with anything but profound resolve.

"By the time [a volunteer] completes the basic training process, it's pretty lengthy," Fontenot said. "It can go from 150 to 200 hours.

WORKING TO MEET THE TRAINING NEEDS OF VOLUNTEERS

The NVFC has partnered with many educational institutions to help volunteer firefighters, EMTs, and rescue providers get the education they need. These include the following training initiatives.

Virtual Classroom: The NVFC offers more than 50 courses through its online training platform. These courses are on-demand to best fit in with a volunteer's schedule. Topics cover a wide range of subjects, from health and safety, to leadership, to reputation management, and more. Many courses are eligible for continuing education credits, provided by Columbia Southern University.

National Fire & EMS Training Initiative: The NVFC partnered with Action Training Systems (ATS) to provide a discount and individual subscription option to NVFC members on one-year subscriptions to ATS online training catalogs. ATS offers interactive online fire and EMS training teaching to industry standards. Topics include Essentials of Fire Fighting, HAZMAT, Driver/Operator, Emergency Operations, Officer Development, Emergency Medical, and Industrial Fire Brigades.

Training Summit: The NVFC periodically hosts in-person Training Summits offering classroom education on topics such as health and safety, fire prevention, and recruitment and retention.

Education Discounts: The NVFC has partnered with several online universities to provide NVFC members and their families with a tuition discount to help them get their degrees while juggling a busy schedule. Partner schools include Columbia Southern University, Waldorf College, American Military University, and Trident University.

Volunteer Incentive Program: The NVFC has partnered with the National Fire Academy (NFA) to help raise awareness among fire and EMS personnel of the Volunteer Incentive Program opportunity. These condensed six-day courses taught at the NFA campus in Emmitsburg, MD, are specifically designed for volunteers. The NFA covers the cost of travel, lodging, and course materials.

I would certainly pass that along to new applicants. There is a time commitment up front to become certified."

For those willing to make the commitment, Fontenot frames up the bottom-line objective with this query to volunteer trainees: "I ask them, 'If you or a family member – mother, father, wife, husband, child – was involved in an emergency, what quality of firefighter would you expect to respond?' Then, I point out that they need to be the same quality when they go out and provide service to the public.

"This gets [volunteer trainees] in the mind-set of how valuable our service is. It's not a catch phrase; it's a philosophy that what we expect, we should become, if we're going to provide that service." ●

NVFC and Our Partners:

Working Together to Support the Fire and Emergency Services

By Kimberly Quiros

NVFC Chief of Communications



NVFC supporters Lee Bainbridge and Art Glatfelter of Glatfelter Insurance Group receive plaques of appreciation from Chairman Fred Allinson circa 1996.

Over the years, the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) has partnered with many corporations and organizations to implement special initiatives that promote the volunteer fire services or serve to enhance the safety, efficiency, and effectiveness of volunteers. A few of these partnerships are highlighted here.

The NVFC appreciates the support of these partners and all of the companies that have provided support throughout the years, including ESIP, Provident, and VFIS.

SOUNDING THE ALARM FOR HIGH CHOLESTEROL (2007)

Heart attack is the leading cause of on-duty firefighter deaths, and high cholesterol is a major risk factor for heart disease. To help raise awareness about heart disease, the NVFC partnered with Merck for the Sounding the Alarm for High Cholesterol campaign. The awareness program included outreach materials, an online quiz, and an updated edition of the NVFC's *Heart-Healthy Firefighter Resource Guide*.

Select counties also participated in the Heart-Healthy Challenge, where all departments in that county competed to earn the highest scores for the quiz. The winning 10 departments each received \$1,500 for their firehouse and tickets for department members and their families to attend a minor league baseball game.



Bernalillo County Fire & Rescue was recognized at a minor league baseball game as part of the Sounding the Alarm for High Cholesterol contest.

JUNIOR FIREFIGHTER SCHOLARSHIPS AND 31 CENT SCOOP NIGHT (2008-2009)

The Dunkin' Brands Community Foundation provided support to help launch the NVFC's National Junior Firefighter Program. In 2008-2009, they sponsored the national Junior Firefighter Grants and Scholarships Program. Through this initiative, a total of 20 junior firefighters received a \$5,000 educational scholarship and 20 departments received a \$5,000 grant to support their local junior firefighter program.



The Great Neck (NY) Alert Fire Company junior firefighter program participated in the 2009 31 Cent Scoop Night.

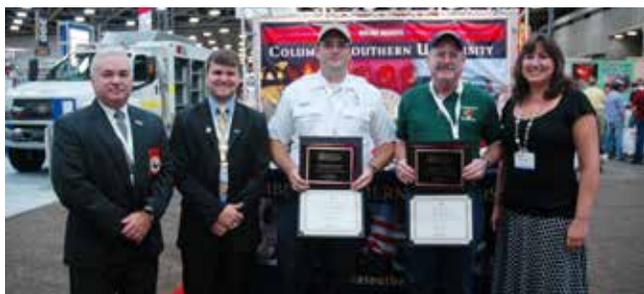
In addition, the NVFC partnered with Baskin-Robbins for 31 Cent Scoop Night, a local fundraiser for fire departments. For the event, stores lowered the price of ice cream scoops to 31 cents and enabled local fire departments and junior firefighter programs to use the opportunity to fundraise and raise awareness for their department.

NATIONAL PET FIRE SAFETY DAY (2008-2010)

ADT partnered with the NVFC and American Kennel Club to raise public awareness about how to prevent pets from starting home fires as well as how to keep pets safe in the event of an emergency. The campaign centered around National Pet Fire Safety Day, which was held July 15.

COLUMBIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIPS (2009-PRESENT)

Columbia Southern University (CSU) is an online university that offers degrees in fields including fire science. Beginning in 2009, CSU offers two annual scholarships to NVFC members to help them achieve their educational goals. The competitive scholarships cover up to three years toward any of the school’s online degrees. In addition, CSU offers all NVFC members and their families a 10 percent tuition discount and waived application fee.



NVFC members James Longbrake (center) and Brian McNevin (second from right) received the CSU scholarships in 2009.

BUCKET BRIGADE GRANTS (2009-PRESENT)

The NVFC helps with outreach for the Georgia-Pacific Bucket Brigade grant program. The program provides grants to fire departments located



The Baker Fire Department and Slaughter Volunteer Fire Department were among the recipients of the 2013 Georgia-Pacific Bucket Brigade grants.

within 30 miles of a Georgia-Pacific facility and is the company’s way of recognizing and supporting firefighters for their contributions in making their families, homes, and workplaces safer. The program supports firefighters through monetary grants for equipment, resources, and programming, as well as safety education materials for use in local schools. Since 2006, Georgia-Pacific has awarded more than \$1.25 million to rural and small-town fire departments.

SMOKE ALARM DONATION PROGRAM (2009-2014)

First Alert partnered with the NVFC to provide members of the Fire Corps program with free smoke alarms to install in their community. Fire Corps teams assist fire and EMS departments with nonoperational tasks, such as fire prevention education, home safety checks, and smoke alarm installations. Through the program, registered Fire Corps teams could apply for 12 dual sensor smoke alarms, or 24 photo smoke alarms, or 24 ion smoke alarms. A total of 7,140 smoke alarms were provided over six years.

PUT IT OUT CAMPAIGN (2009-2010)

Smoking increases the risk for many serious diseases, including heart disease, lung cancer, and emphysema. To help firefighters and emergency personnel quit and stay quit, the NVFC partnered with Pfizer for the Put It Out smoking cessation campaign. The campaign included tools and resources to help firefighters quit, to help family members support efforts to quit, and to help departments implement a no-smoking policy.

NATIONAL JUNIOR FIREFIGHTER ACADEMY (2010-PRESENT)

Tyco, Scott Safety, and Spartan Motors Inc., are longtime supporters of the NVFC’s National Junior Firefighter Program. This includes supporting the National Junior Firefighter Academy, a hands-on training event that provides a unique learning opportunity for aspiring firefighters as well as junior program advisors. The Academy has taken place in several locations, including the Scott Safety headquarters in Monroe, NC. To date, more than 540 junior firefighters and program advisers have been trained at the National Junior Firefighter Academy.



Participants in the National Junior Firefighter Academy at Scott Safety in 2011.

POWER THOSE WHO PROTECT US (2011)

Volunteer firefighters use batteries for a wide variety of devices. To help them power these devices, Duracell partnered with the NVFC to donate 20 million batteries to volunteer fire departments across the U.S.

GLOBE GEAR GIVEAWAY (2012-PRESENT)

Many volunteer departments struggle to provide the gear and equipment necessary to keep their personnel safe. Recognizing this need, Globe partnered with the NVFC and DuPont Protection Technologies in 2012 to hold the first Globe Gear Giveaway in honor of the company's 125th anniversary. The response was so overwhelming that the program has continued as an annual giveaway. Currently, 13 NVFC member departments are awarded four sets of gear each year. Globe helps departments meet the NVFC membership requirement by sponsoring memberships for the first 500 applicants. By the end of 2016, more than 300 sets of gear will have been awarded to 69 departments in need.



Koosharem Fire Rescue [pictured here with Tyler Dennison of LN Curtis & Sons] was a 2015 recipient in the Globe Gear Giveaway.

THANKS A MILLION CAMPAIGN (2013)

Through the "Thanks a Million" campaign, Ballistic Case Company donated \$2 million worth of durable iPhone cases to local volunteer fire departments in December 2014. Community members could nominate a department, submit a personal story, and say thank you to their local firefighters through the Facebook form, and volunteer firefighters could also sign up directly through the Facebook form to receive cases for their department.

HEART HEALTH CHAMPIONS CONTEST (2013)

Cardioviva and the NVFC partnered to raise heart health awareness in the fire and emergency services. This included the Search for Heart Health Champions contest, where three champions were chosen through a competitive application process to serve as motivators to the fire service to use diet and exercise to get healthy. The grand prize was \$10,000 for the department and a \$5,000 firehouse fitness/nutrition makeover. In addition, two first place winners received \$5,000 for the department and a \$2,500 firehouse fitness/nutrition makeover.

SALUTE TO LOCAL HEROES (2013-2014)

Sears Hometown and Outlet Stores, Inc. partnered with the NVFC to raise money for local volunteer fire departments. Through the Salute to Local Heroes program, customers and company employees at all Sears Hometown and Outlet stores had the opportunity to make a donation to their local fire department while making a purchase. All contributed funds went directly to a local fire station for that store's community. The campaign raised more than \$293,000 for local departments.

TRAINING GIVEAWAY AND NATIONAL FIRE & EMS TRAINING INITIATIVE (2014-PRESENT)

In 2014, the NVFC partnered with Action Training Systems for the ATS/NVFC \$250K Training Giveaway. Through the program, 50 volunteer fire departments were awarded an ATS training package that allowed 20 department members access to the online Essentials of Fire Fighting training, which teaches Firefighter I & II skills and prerequisite knowledge.

After the success of the program and to enable more departments to access affordable, flexible training, ATS and the NVFC launched the National Fire & EMS Training initiative in 2015. Through this partnership, all NVFC members receive a 10 percent discount on ATS training subscriptions. Four catalog options are available: Fire, EMS, Fire + EMS, and Junior Firefighter. More than 150 online courses are available, teaching to industry standards. In addition, ATS donates a portion of the purchase price back to the NVFC to support the organization's initiatives.

RAIL RESPONSE TRAINING (LAUNCHING IN 2016)

CSX Corporation has partnered with the NVFC to offer training to departments located along CSX rail lines on how to safely respond to incidents involving CSX railroad property and equipment. In addition, CSX is providing scholarships to enable firefighters to attend the CSX training center in Atlanta.

GRANT PROGRAM (LAUNCHING IN 2016)

The grandfather of the owner of wine producer Josh Cellars was a volunteer firefighter. To give back to those who serve, the company has partnered with the NVFC to offer a grant program to volunteer departments and to aid the NVFC with its training offerings. ●



MEMBERSHIP

You're striving to be the best first responder you can be. We're here for you every step of the way. The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) is the only organization created solely to support volunteer firefighters, EMTs, and rescue personnel through a wide range of programs and benefits.

JOIN THE NVFC

As a member of the volunteer emergency services, you understand the challenges and issues facing today's first responders. The NVFC understands them too. We are dedicated to giving our nation's volunteer fire and EMS departments everything they need to support their personnel. Help us fulfill our mission by joining today. Together we allow the voice of the nation's more than 788,000 volunteers to be heard.

MEMBERSHIP TYPE

Individual

This membership is for individual firefighters, EMTs, and rescue providers. Get big savings if at least five members of the department join.

Department

This membership is for volunteer and combination fire and EMS departments.

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

- \$10,000 Accidental Death & Dismemberment policy through Provident; doubles to \$20,000 if LODD
- Subscription to e-newsletters
- Tuition discounts through education partners
- Discount offers on products and services such as training, background screenings, equipment, trade shows, magazine subscriptions, shopping, and more
- Eligibility to apply for gear giveaways, educational scholarships
- Eligibility for membership in FASNY Federal Credit Union
- And more!



JOIN TODAY AT
WWW.NVFC.ORG/BEYOURBEST

VOICES OF OUR MEMBERS



Early version of the NVFC's trade show display.

“My career is education, so I’m always looking for professional development to grow. And the Council just seemed to be a very natural place to look for that enrichment, direction, and leadership. [The Council] pushes me to take advantage of the training that the departments I work for offer. I’m never going to be a career firefighter, but when somebody calls the ambulance or the fire department, they don’t really care if you’re a career firefighter or EMT, or a volunteer. They just want you to fix the problem. So there’s a responsibility, I think, to try to learn as much as you can.”

– Dean Auriemma, ME

“I enjoy keeping up on the current topics that impact the volunteer fire service. From grant opportunities to legislation issues, I know the NVFC has my back and my best interest in mind.”

– Mike Harkey, OK

“I first became aware of the NVFC back in the late '70s. I recognized then that they had a very worthwhile mission. Volunteer firefighters deserved recognition and representation in Washington and the NVFC was there to provide that. Membership allows me to support those efforts.” – Ken Knipper, KY

“The information we receive is priceless. NVFC keeps us up to date on all the latest news in the fire service. They are also a strong promoter for the volunteers. We may be the largest group of firefighters in the nation, but we sometimes are overlooked since we are not paid. NVFC makes sure we aren’t overlooked.”

– Jennifer Williams, MS



NVFC Chairman Robert “Red” McKeon unveils a Benjamin Franklin coin. Funds raised from the sale of the coin supported the NVFC Foundation.

VOICES OF OUR MEMBERS

“The efforts NVFC makes to encourage, educate, and give volunteers a voice is showing and teaching leadership for current and future volunteers. Not just firefighters but all volunteer organizations.” – Bruce Cook, NC



Erron Kinney, then-NFL player for the Tennessee Titans and volunteer firefighter, signed footballs at the NVFC booth in 2006 to promote the Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program.

“The NVFC is a respected, active, and positive national voice for the volunteer fire service. Dedicated and knowledgeable people at the NVFC represent the interests and needs of the volunteers at the highest level where decisions are made that can affect every volunteer in the country.” – Ed Mund, WA

“So often we get wrapped up in our local and area training focusing on the immediate problems at hand. Too often we never see the larger picture – physical fitness, heart-healthy programs, readiness, etc. NVFC encompasses the big picture that we too often lose sight of.”

– Dave Spencer, NY

“I think it’s critically important that all volunteer firefighters belong to the National Volunteer Fire Council. If we could get more of our membership involved we could have a much stronger voice in supporting the efforts and needs of the American volunteer fire service.”

– Bobby Halton, OK



International relations has been a growing focus for the NVFC in recent years as idea-sharing, collaboration, and training benefit all. In 2014, Kevin D. Quinn represented the NVFC at an international search and rescue training event in Italy.

CELEBRATING



Waterous would like to give a special congratulations to The National Volunteer Fire Council on their 40 years of service.

Like the NVFC, Waterous is also celebrating an anniversary milestone, 130 years. In that 130 years Waterous continues to deliver fire suppression products, equipment and services that meet the demands of a hero.

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MOVING FORWARD.



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INFORM AND PROTECT™



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Versatile

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