



VCOS VCOS NEWS

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

Spring 2017

CHAIR'S CORNER

Putting Your Interests to Work

By Chief Timothy S. Wall, North Farms (Conn.) Volunteer Fire Department

This spring, we were amazed to learn that 17 VCOS members were interested in running for a position on the VCOS Board of Directors. Amazed and pleased! That is the largest number of board candidates since our inception in 1994. It indicates several things to me: 1) we have an impressive number of members who are willing to invest their time into improving our organization; 2) we have at least 17 members who have strongly-held ideas and want to share these ideas with the fire service; 3) we remain a vital, energetic organization with enthusiastic members who seek involvement.

Well, you all know that there are only 3 open seats on the board this spring.... But did you know that we have many other open positions for committee leaders, committee members, and other equally vital volunteer opportunities?

For those fourteen board candidates who do not get elected this year, I will welcome hearing from you and discussing other opportunities which suit your talents and interests and our needs. For those who did not toss your hat into the ring this year, I welcome your call as well. Let me know what you're good at!

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Does Brotherhood Really Exist?

By John S. D'Alessandro, Association Secretary, FASNY

I love being a firefighter. Let's get that straight from the beginning. Aside from my marriage and the birth of my children, it is my greatest accomplishment. But despite the personal satisfaction it has given me, I have often been frustrated with the lack of brotherhood and respect we sometimes show towards each other. I don't mean the "support your brother or sister firefighter without question - right, wrong or indifferent" kind of false brotherhood. What I'm talking about is the true "we have a special connection and are part of something bigger than ourselves" brotherhood that the fire service is built upon.

Admittedly, I'm kind of old fashioned. I believe that being a firefighter is a noble calling. I believe that it is not simply something you do but it is a part of who you are as a person. And I also believe that it is the responsibility of experienced firefighters to impart the importance of respecting each other to every young firefighter. That does not mean we are better people than anyone else. That does not mean that we are part of an elite group. It just means that we are ordinary men and women who have made a solemn commitment to respond when called upon because all lives matter.

Almost five years ago, members of my department were deployed to the other end of our state to assist in the recovery efforts after a natural disaster. I remember when we arrived at our assignment and walked into the firehouse

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VCOS Election

There are 17 candidates running for the three open VCOS at-large director positions. The VCOS election is being conducted in conjunction with the IAFC election; online voting will open on April 27 and close on June 8. You'll receive one email with voting instructions for all IAFC and section elections on April 27.

Please read the candidate statements and other election information on the VCOS election page (under "About VCOS").

Note that the VCOS Board of Directors voted to endorse Chief Dan Eggleston, our VCOS International Director, for IAFC second vice president.

Featured Board Member – Chief Donna Black, Southeastern Division

Chief Donna Black has been active in the fire service for over 20 years, starting her career in 1997 as a volunteer and working her way up through the ranks until she was selected in 2006 as the Fire Chief for the Town of Duck, North Carolina, a position she continues to hold today.

Chief Black earned her Bachelor of Science degree from Ithaca College, N.Y. and a Master of Arts from the University of Georgia. She graduated from the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer (EFO) Program in 2011. She later obtained a post-graduate Certificate in Community Preparedness and Disaster Management from the Gillings School of Public Health at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

The Duck Fire Department, established in 1982, is a combination department providing fire suppression, EMT first response, response to motor vehicle collisions and weather-related emergencies, assistance to surf rescue and law enforcement, and numerous other public service calls. The department currently has 35 members, 8 full-time career firefighters, 5 part-time and 22 volunteers. Duck Fire responds to 550-600 calls for service per year; the department has a mutual aid agreement with the entirety of Dare County which stretches along almost 110 miles of shoreline known as the Outer Banks along the Atlantic seaboard and with Currituck County beaches to the north.

I see that you received your college degree in upstate New York and then worked in the area for 8 years in the medical field. How did you end up as a firefighter on the Outer Banks of North Carolina?

I was born and raised in Rochester, N.Y. and became aware of the field of sports medicine while I was in high school. Upon graduation from Ithaca College, I spent the next 8 years as a Clinical Exercise Specialist, conducting diagnostic testing and fitness evaluations, designing and supervising exercise programs for cardiac, high-risk, as well as healthy populations. One of my jobs had me working in a wing next to the emergency room and I was frequently wandering over there to see what was going on. Little did I know that would lead me to my true passion, the fire service.

In 1994, I took a vacation to North Carolina, where my Dad was originally from, and totally fell in love with the Outer

Banks. Within a year, I was living there, and somehow became the co-owner of a B&B on the beach!

Sometime after that, one of the local firefighters recruited me to join. I thought it would be fun to be an EMT and then early on they had a live burn training.... And that day changed me forever! Owning my own business allowed me the flexibility to train and respond with Duck Fire.

When did you move from being a volunteer to being paid?

I was a volunteer firefighter at Duck Fire from 1997 to 2005. During that period, I worked my way up to Volunteer Deputy Chief and also served as Interim Fire Chief. In 2005, I was recruited as a career firefighter/EMT for the Nags Head Fire Department and finally made the decision to focus on a fire career. Then, in 2006, I was selected as the career Chief of the Duck Fire Department.

With such a relatively small department, are your job responsibilities more varied than a chief from a larger department?

No, not really. A chief is a chief. I once had a seasoned, well-respected chief ask me if the population of my town was on my patch. When I answered "no," he said "Exactly! We all have the same responsibilities." The main difference is the span of control and the scope of work.

One thing that helped me grow professionally was that a few years after I took the job as fire chief, I had the opportunity to attend the Executive Fire Officer (EFO) training program at the National Fire Academy. While there, I focused my studies on evaluating and improving the operations of my own department. After collaborating with the town manager, and educating both

the town council and the community about fire operations, I was then able to justify the necessity of procuring several career firefighter positions. This helped me tremendously to increase the level of service and to shape the Duck Fire Department into a thriving combination department. I recognize that my situation was not unique; many departments are facing the same challenges of providing services with increasing demands on our volunteers – we must all find the best solutions possible for our own community.



Chief Donna Black and Deputy Chief Bill Walker attend a routine training session with their members.

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Currently, we're looking for people to serve on the Communications Committee, rustling up articles for the VCOS newsletter, for On Scene magazine, and for the VCOS website. If you're a good writer yourself, we'll publish your articles. If you're more of an author wrangler, we could use your assistance with that task. We could also use some people who would have fun working on the VCOS Facebook page. You already know that VCOS is the go-to section for information, so there are many opportunities for people who have good communication skills or know others who do.

We're also looking for volunteers to get involved with the VCOS webinar series. This is one of our most popular educational tools and it's been managed for a number of years by Chief John Oprandy. John has expressed an interest in working with some volunteers as a prelude to "succession planning" down the road.

We could use a few additional good photographers to send us interesting shots which would be appropriate for our newsletter or website and draws attention to all the activities of the volunteer and combination fire service.

Many other opportunities exist, too numerous to name in this

VCOS Awards

Information on these 4 awards can be found on the VCOS website under "About VCOS."

Training Officer Award. This award is sponsored by TargetSolutions, which will pay the winner's travel and lodging expenses to attend Fire-Rescue International in Charlotte, N.C. in July this year. VCOS will donate free registration to the award recipient. The application deadline is May 31.

John M. Buckman III Award. This award is sponsored by Provident Insurance, which will pay the winner's travel and lodging expenses to attend the VCOS Symposium in the Sun in Clearwater Beach, Florida. VCOS will donate free registration to the award recipient. The application deadline is August 31.

The Illness & Injury Prevention Award and the Recruitment-Retention Award. Both these awards are sponsored by VFIS. For both awards, VFIS pays the winner's travel and lodging expenses to attend the VCOS Symposium in the Sun in Clearwater Beach, Florida. VCOS will donate free registration to the award recipients. The application deadline is August 31.

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VCOS Scholarships

Information on these 3 scholarships can be found on the VCOS website under "Education/Scholarships."

FRI Scholarships. VCOS sponsors two \$1500 scholarships to attend Fire-Rescue International each year. The application deadline is May 31.

Symposium in the Sun Scholarships. VCOS sponsors two \$1,500 scholarships to attend Symposium in the Sun each year. The application deadline is August 31.

Emerging Leader Scholarship. The Gasaway Consulting Group, LLC sponsors a \$1,500 scholarship to attend Symposium in the Sun each year. The application deadline is August 31.

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brief article, and probably some opportunities we haven't even thought of yet but you may have. If so, let me know!

Some of you may send in your name and then not be called into action for some time but we will keep your name and as a need arises, we will contact you. Some of our assignments come only once yearly, and some come as a one-time need directly from the IAFC, so we occasionally have to make assignments without much advance notice.

If you want to do something meaningful with your spare time, reach out to a board member from your division or look up their contact information on the VCOS website. Share your expertise with them and tell them what your availability is. Spring into action and keep us growing!

In summation, I want to give a Chief's Salute to everyone who is already serving this great organization or has done so in the past. Impossible to name all of you but suffice it to say that we wouldn't be what we are today without your caring and your generous gift of time and talent. I'm hoping by this call to action that we'll get you a few more brothers and sisters to share your efforts and so you can pass the torch when you're ready to do so.

Please remember to cast your vote in the VCOS and the IAFC election before the deadline of June 8. The VCOS Board of Directors has endorsed our own Chief Dan Eggleston of Albemarle County (Va.) Dept. of Fire Rescue for IAFC 2nd Vice President.

Stay safe out there!

Tim
firewallco7@sbcglobal.net

Featured Fire Department – Old Mystic, Connecticut

On May 1, 1837, a small group of dedicated, local townspeople had the foresight to recognize that a fire department was needed to protect the seaside village of Old Mystic, Connecticut and they formed the “Mystic Fire Engine Company.” The name was later changed to Reliance Fire Company No. 1, and later still, changed to the Old Mystic Fire Department (OMFD). Today, one hundred and eighty years later, the department and the community it serves has grown 100-fold; however, the department still has the same values held by its founding members: Integrity, Commitment, and Compassion.

The organization was strictly a volunteer organization until 1979, when Edwin Hanks, Jr. became the first paid fire chief. His steadfast motto for 26 years was “I’m a volunteer lucky enough to get paid.” Today, under the leadership of Chief Kenneth W. Richards, Jr., the 7 paid staff members are



*Regular training
keeps our members
sharp and confident
of their skills*

supported by a diverse volunteer base of over 35 members. With a call volume of just over 1300 calls last year, the department is heavily reliant on its volunteer members to support and cover the 26-square miles of the fire district.

Twenty-six square miles might not seem very large to some, but there is quite a bit packed into that area. With tourist attractions such as the Olde Mistick Village and the Mystic Aquarium at the heart of the district, the population doubles in the peak summer season. There is also a highly-travelled section of Interstate 95 that splits the district. Because of the varied needs of the area, OMFD has evolved its services to provide the highest level of emergency response. From fire, R-1, and Haz-Mat response to technical rescue, firefighter advanced survival techniques (FAST), and Dive team, OMFD is well-prepared and trained to cover any emergencies that arise.



What's it like running a department at a popular beach destination where the population swells exponentially during the summer season? How can you possibly plan for that?

By census, the Town of Duck has fewer than 500 year-round residents. During peak season, we host approximately 25,000 vacationers. In addition, because we're on a very long, narrow barrier island, the only route heading to the beaches north of us must accommodate 50,000 passenger cars during the summer months. Obviously call volume increases in the summer, but our bad emergency calls can happen in the dead of winter as well. One of our biggest threats is wind-driven fires - there is always a breeze blowing and our number one priority is big water quickly before a single house fire turns into a conflagration. Of course, being a long, linear set of islands, our response time is greatly affected by traffic so things become kind of dicey in the summer months.

The Outer Banks, like any tourist destination with extreme population shifts, has its challenges; we all rely on mutual aid from our neighboring departments and recruiting is a constant challenge. We have adapted, however, encouraging non-resident participation by pulling standby shifts. We're also anticipating the construction of a new facility in the near future which will open up more opportunities for creative staffing. And, of course, we live at the beach, so I'm planning to offer some beach time in exchange for fire time as a favorable incentive. It's difficult to staff a combination department to these population extremes but we continually strive to provide the best possible service to our communities.

What do you see as your goals for the Duck Fire Department

and your hopes for the fire service in general?

One of my primary aims is to advocate for a highly effective diverse volunteer and combination fire department, so I'm striving to demonstrate my commitment at my home organization. I believe that this is the only way we will be able to resolve the problem of retention and recruitment; we need to reach out to populations who haven't been among the "go-to" groups of the past and help them become a part of this great tradition of service. I was much honored to have been elected as a VCOS board member in 2015 because this organization has a national reputation and a national voice within the fire service and I'm proud and humbled to be able to contribute my ideas to the national dialog. I think the challenge confronting us is being open to changing the face of the fire service. Does every member need to be qualified to go into a burning building? Can we look at our call volume and justify recruiting staff with different skill sets to handle different types of emergencies, thus, easing the load on the interior volunteer firefighter?

With all the challenges facing smaller volunteer or combination departments, there is still something wonderful about serving smaller communities. Our best recruiting tools are our members who work and live in the community. Take our Chair, Miss Pat, who works at our very popular hardware/department store and serves as the department's spokesperson. Miss Pat embodies the values of what we're looking for in a Duck Fire volunteer; she's the kind of person every chief hopes to have involved in making the community a better place.

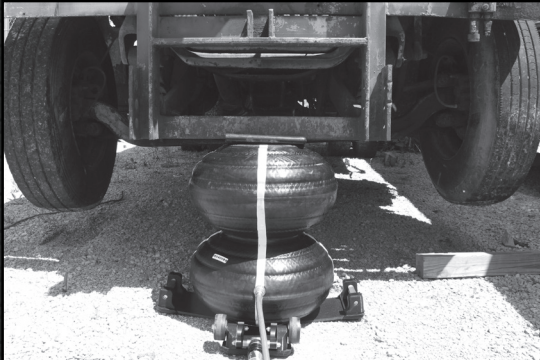
I look back on that fateful vacation in 1994 and am thankful every day. Not just because I just love leading the members of Duck Fire but because, well, living at the beach, that's not bad either!



From left to right: Dave Finger (NVFC), Chief Kevin Quinn (NVFC), Chief Timothy S. Wall (VCOS), Chief Ron Roy (NVFC), Evan Davis (IAFC)

Every year since 1989, approximately 2000 fire and emergency service leaders from across the nation travel to Washington, DC to attend the Congressional Fire Service Institute's (CFSI) National Fire and Emergency Services Dinner and Seminars Program and to conduct meetings with their members of Congress. This year, as they have in years past, the VCOS partnered with the IAFC and the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) to brief Capitol Hill staffers on important volunteer firefighter issues and legislation.

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as if it was yesterday. Our hosts were sitting in their ready room exhausted. When they looked up and saw us they immediately had that “you must have taken a very wrong turn off the highway” look on their faces. You see, the two groups of firefighters could not have been more culturally different if it had been planned. After a few minutes of introductions and strained small talk, we were off to our first joint call. And for the next five days we ate, slept, laughed and worked side by side. The people of that community were not our friends, family or neighbors but they became just as important to us. And even though we didn’t realize it in the moment, we became connected with those firefighters on some deeper level. The common purpose of helping people in need made us brothers forever.

Now don’t get me wrong. As the years pass by, we don’t exchange holiday cards or call each other twice a month to catch up. Occasionally, we connect on social media to say hello and see what’s going on. But for the most part the two groups continue to protect their communities and live their lives. Until that one day when we needed to be brothers again. You see, recently one of the members of this other department lost his spouse in a tragic way. In the midst of the chaos and extreme emotions they were going through, we received a call to tell us that they “needed their brothers” to be with them. Needless to say, several of us made the trip because that’s what you do for your brothers. That’s what you do for family. Even if it causes a temporary disruption in your own life.

When one analyzes why there might be diminished brotherhood and respect in the fire service, it’s easy to blame the other guy. Of course it’s the older, disgruntled member or the new recruits who think they know it all, or even the leadership who don’t really care about leading. While that may be occasionally true, the real blame lies within each of us: the firefighters who feel that we are “Special” to be part of an honorable profession. If we allow our frustration to render us silent then we have conceded defeat. And that is something that dedicated firefighters just do not do. We regroup, reassess and hit the problem from another direction. It is our responsibility to set the example of respecting those who did the job before us and to teach those who will do it after we are gone.

If you are a firefighter who feels that it’s just something you do, then I’m happy that it works for you. But I can’t help but believe that you are missing out on an invaluable personal benefit that comes from being a firefighter. I will, undoubtedly, continue to be frustrated by the way we sometimes treat each other. Yet, I refuse to abandon the belief that honor, loyalty and respect for each other are the foundation that enables us to serve our communities. And when I do get frustrated, I will fight that feeling by remembering that phone call asking for us, their brothers, to be with them in their hour of need.

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CONFERENCE: NOVEMBER 9-12, 2017
CLEARWATER BEACH, FL

VCOS Members make plans now to attend the 2017 Symposium in the Sun!

The VCOS Symposium addresses the unique needs of volunteer and combination departments including transitioning from a volunteer to a combination department, recruitment and retention, leadership and management, staffing and more.

IAFC.ORG/VCOSsymposium



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