

Volunteer & Combination

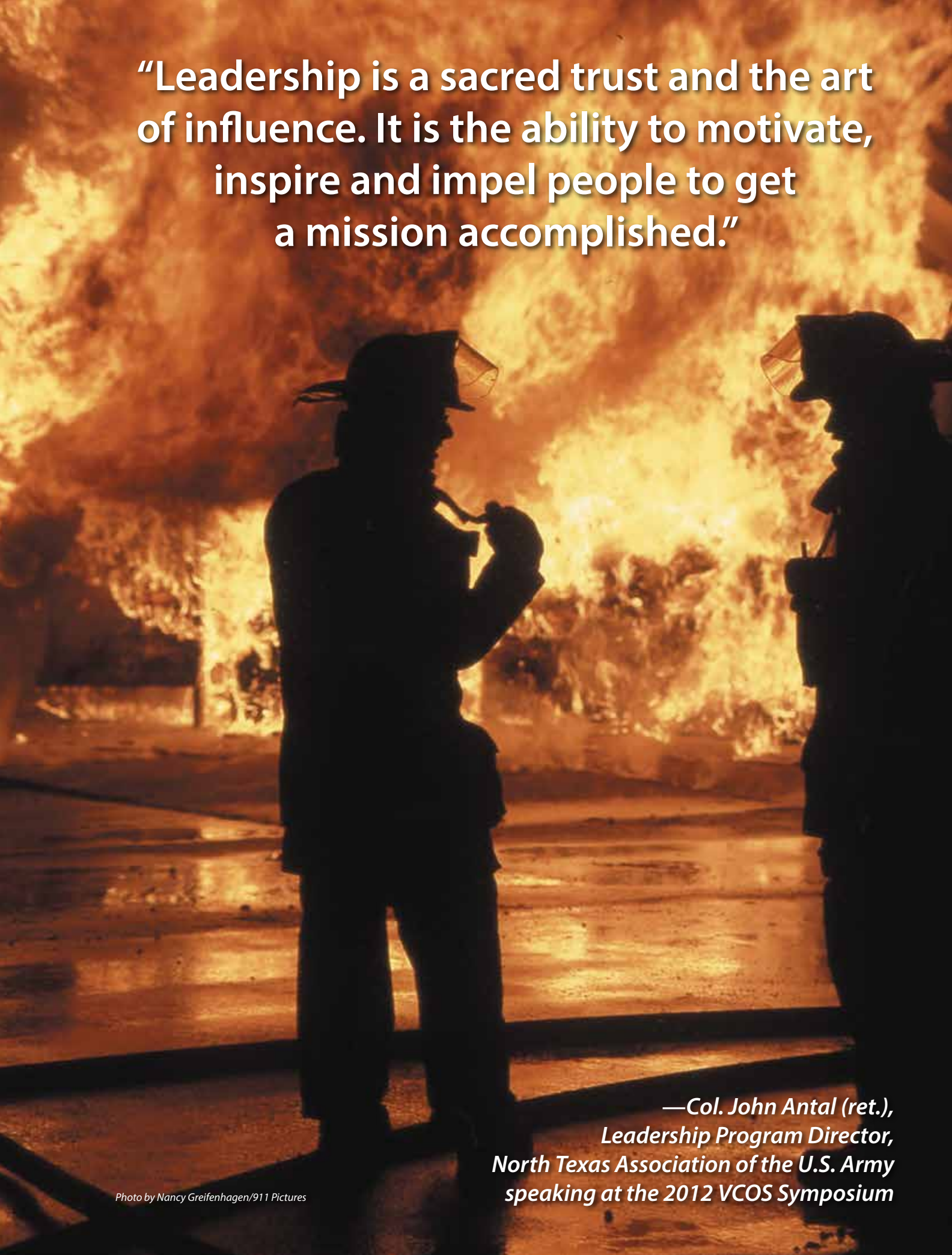


Officers Section



VCOS 20th Anniversary



A dramatic photograph showing the silhouettes of two firefighters in full protective gear, including helmets with face shields. They are standing in front of a massive, intense fire that fills the background with bright orange and yellow flames. The scene is backlit by the fire, creating a high-contrast, heroic atmosphere. The firefighters appear to be in conversation, with one holding a piece of equipment.

“Leadership is a sacred trust and the art of influence. It is the ability to motivate, inspire and impel people to get a mission accomplished.”

*—Col. John Antal (ret.),
Leadership Program Director,
North Texas Association of the U.S. Army
speaking at the 2012 VCOS Symposium*

DEDICATION

This publication is dedicated to the men and women throughout the world who donate their time and expertise to their local communities as volunteer members of the fire and emergency services. These individuals are willing to put their lives on the line on a daily basis to help their fellow citizens, and the members of the Volunteer & Combination Officers Section of the International Association of Fire Chiefs salute you.

Without volunteers, many small and rural fire and emergency services agencies would not be able to respond to the needs of their residents in a timely manner. Without volunteers, many communities would not be able to bear the financial burden of protecting their citizens. Without volunteers, many community safety tasks would be left undone.

We hope that the VCOS has assisted in the increased visibility and professionalism of the volunteer fire service and in the attraction of qualified, dedicated men and women to the service. It has been our mission for the past 20 years to educate those involved with the fire service—volunteer and career alike—and to bring about increased understanding between both groups.

This publication is also dedicated to the “Founding Fathers” of this organization, including chiefs Billy Goldfeder, John Buckman, Fred Windisch and Robert Bettenhausen, as well as those who have served as section chairs, including chiefs Pete McMahon, Michael Chiamonte, Larry Curl and Timothy Wall. We thank you for your commitment, and for your countless hours of effort on behalf of the fire and emergency services in general, and our organization in particular. Without you, the VCOS would not be as strong as it is today.

Finally, we dedicate this 20th anniversary publication to all who have contributed to this great organization and call on each of you to consider adding your name to our growing list of leaders by running for the VCOS board of directors, or by involving yourself in some of the many activities that benefit our members and the fire service. Won't you be among the next generation of visionaries who will continue to build our legacy for the next 20 years?

October 2014





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“If you empower the people you lead, they will back you forever.” —Col. John Antal, U.S. Army



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Born to represent the interests of volunteer firefighters, this section survived a tumultuous beginning and forever changed our beloved fire service.

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Changes in our industry encompass everything from science and technology to the political landscape and economy. Our profession, which is deeply steeped in tradition, needs to be grounded in reality as it scripts its future.

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The success of BH&H, a traveling NFA-level class, has spawned a new series of educational opportunities, including the intensive FROG (Fire Rescue Organizational Guidance).

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In a world with precious little black and white, VCOS leadership is continuously partnering with the IAFC Government Relations Department to protect rights, define roles and tailor laws for the safety and benefit of our entire industry.



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What began in 2004 as a special report to help ensure the future of the volunteer fire service turned into an array of publications for which the VCOS has become known.



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In 2011, the VCOS raised the bar again, hosting a national summit to put the most glaring industry problems under the microscope. That was only the beginning.



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If you want to stay connected to your community and the rising workforce, you'd better be working to stay ahead of the ever-changing world of technology. We are.

44 Turning the Page

The VCOS has been active with nearly every industry publication, writing stories, columns and editorials in order to disseminate important information for the masses. Here, our good friend Janet Wilmoth offers her take as a life-long pundit of our industry.

46 Handing Out the Hardware

In an industry where we get criticized for what went wrong way more than we get praised for what went right, the VCOS and its partners are proud to recognize outstanding accomplishments annually.



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A look back at some of the names and faces who have made this section what it is today.

51 The Volunteer Firefighters' Bill of Rights

More than a decade ago, Chief John Leahy penned these truths. They should be self-evident, but sadly often are not.



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“You can be a passive victim of circumstance or an active hero of opportunities.”

—Kelvin Cochran, Chief, Atlanta FD



Thoughts from Past VCOS Chairs

John Buckman

When I became chair, I envisioned an organization that would help chiefs of volunteer departments become better leaders. One of our first projects was to research volunteer leadership training throughout the country, and we found very little available. That's when we developed our leadership course, which is still delivered to this day.

We also spent considerable time at board meetings to see how the IAFC worked and quickly realized that if we were going to be effective, we needed to establish ourselves as a section. We were successful in motivating attendees at the St. Louis Fire-Rescue International to sign our petition and attend our very first meeting. The room was overflowing! The crowd was loud and boisterous, and I am forever indebted to Mike Chiaramonte for coming forward and restoring order.

I really enjoyed my tenure as chairman and still look at the VCOS board of directors with a tremendous amount of pride in what they are doing to help the volunteer and combination leadership.

Fred Windisch

During the formative years of my chairmanship, we had a lot of focus on bylaws, organizational procedures and our attempts to "nationalize" the VCOS. I remember the support given by the IAFC board of directors and staff. We understood we were still new, but that constant support helped guide us through the hard times. I also remember discussing with John Buckman two dreams: The first one was the development of a leadership course, and the second was the Symposium. That leadership course became a reality when we approached Pierce Manufacturing and asked what they could do to help educate the volunteer fire service. Thanks in large part to their support, we have developed an incredibly successful program to help educate our peers.

The Symposium started as a "what if" question, but soon there we were, hosting one. The rest is history, and I believe symposium attendees will attest

to our success. The VCOS is truly an organization of dynamics. The commitment of our past, present and future board members, along with a strong membership base, will certainly benefit our nation's volunteer and combination fire service.

Mike Chiaramonte

At the time of my chairmanship, the VCOS had few funds, and we needed to communicate with our members. We obtained sponsorship to print a quarterly newsletter and developed a website. New board members joined us and used their talents to advance our mission. We were at the beginning of being recognized as the voice of the volunteers. We changed our name from the Volunteer Chief Officers Section to the Volunteer & Combination Officers Section, recognizing the ever-growing trend in the industry. We worked closely with the National Fire Academy to help more of our members attend VIP courses. In fact, we worked with the academy to increase the number of VIP courses as well. Overall, it was certainly a productive and exciting time in the history of the VCOS.

Larry Curl

When I stepped into this position, my first reaction was fear. I was truly fearful of not being able to lead such a terrific organization as well as my predecessors had done. I worked very closely with our executive committee, and in partnership the organization enjoyed success and put down a strong foundation on which to build. In my time, we had some of the finest fire service leadership join our board and assist in the overall development and management of the VCOS, strengthened our leadership programs, turned the Symposium into the finest educational opportunity available, established a strategic plan, and assembled a group of partners more valuable to us than gold. I would never say all the successes we enjoyed were a direct result of my being chair, but I am forever proud of all we, collectively, accomplished in that time. 

In putting this publication together, we planned to have a section dedicated to thanking all of the companies, large and small, with whom we have proudly partnered over the years. The problem was, once we started listing them, we literally topped 100 companies who have contributed to our success, and thus we didn't feel right singling one out if we couldn't individually thank them all. So, let us say, on behalf of each chairperson, officer, board member and VCOS member, thank you from the bottom of our collective heart to each person and company who has supported us over the last 20 years. We truly—*truly*—would not be here today without your support, guidance and camaraderie. —**Tim Wall**



Volunteer & Combination Officers Section of The International Association of Fire Chiefs



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A little more than 20 years ago, a small group of dedicated chief officers started getting together with the huge goals of protecting and fostering the volunteer fire service that so many of us had grown up with. The group was making progress, gathering support and trying to become a section within the IAFC when the bad news was relayed that we couldn't be a section without a paid membership. Upon hearing that, Chief Warren Savage pulled \$10 out of his pocket, handed it to Chief John Buckman, and said, "Here are my dues. I guess we're a section now."

Now it certainly wasn't that easy, but I can't think of a story more representative of the VCOS than that. Problem identified, problem solved. For the last 20 years, the VCOS has prided itself on doing just that: solving problems for those we represent. Some are simple and straightforward, while others took 15 years, thousands of volunteer hours and (literally) an act of Congress.

From the beginning, we have been an organization of action. We never professed to have all the answers, but collectively we know a lot. Our board has more than 200 years of experience in the industry, but more than that, we have an active and outgoing membership that is never satisfied with the status quo and is always looking to do better and help one another. We, as an organization, are constantly interacting with our members so we can stay ahead of the issues and identify challenges before they become problems. Our Symposium is the best event in the fire service, we put out white papers and ribbon reports, we offer NFA-level traveling educational classes, we bridge gaps, and we cross borders. We get things done. Our work takes us from the smallest firehouse to the White House.

I've been honored to be part of the organization from the beginning, and I've had the privilege of chairing the section for the last 10 years. I'm proud that so many of my brothers and sisters who joined our cause in the early days are still around and active with us today, and I'm exhilarated that so many young, up-and-coming stars within the emergency services sector are choosing to join us. I'm appreciative of everyone who has made this section what it is today (not the least of which are the many companies who partnered with us and supported us) and who helped us better our beloved fire service.

In the coming pages, we're going to take a look back at the first 20 years of the VCOS and the people who made it great. This publication is equal parts tribute, history book and marketing device. We want you to see some of the faces and hear some of the stories that helped change the industry, and we want you to get excited about where this organization came from and where it is going. Remember, both the VCOS and the IAFC are driven by membership, but it's not just your dues that we need—it's your involvement. There is strength in numbers. So I encourage you, if you're not already a member, join us. Over the last 20 years, we've made the difficult look easy and the impossible look manageable, and we're not even close to being done yet. With your help, we can make great things happen.

I hope you enjoy this look back.

Stay safe, my friends,

Timothy S. Wall, Chief,
North Farms (Conn.) VFD

We are **THE IAFC**



Chief Deborah Pendergast
IAFC Member since 2005
Laconia, NH



Captain Demond Simmons
IAFC Member since 2012
Oakland, CA



Lieutenant Joseph Brown
IAFC Member since 2013
Hampton, VA



Fire Marshal Rudy Ruiz
IAFC Member since 2013
Sandusky, OH

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VCOS Membership:

The Volunteer & Combination Officers Section's 20th anniversary is really a 20-year beginning. Your organization began because a group was needed to represent volunteers at the chief level in order to give them a voice, which was quickly followed by the proliferation of combination systems, and in both cases people needed somewhere to turn for answers. The VCOS filled those voids, and you should celebrate this important milestone while rejuvenating so you can continue to sustain and expand your various programs. The challenges for volunteer and combination departments are well known, but with focus and hard work they will diminish, and the VCOS needs to continue to be there for support and guidance.

The VCOS has done so much to further the mission of the International Association of Fire Chiefs and to better the fire and emergency service as a whole—doing so by focusing on its mission and its members. Your organization exemplifies the service part of an association and brings great value to its members and to the IAFC. You continually reinvest in the organization, and when any of your programs are profitable, without exception, that money is used for additional programs to help the fire service. The VCOS doesn't just talk—they steadily produce with their boundless energy, they never hesitate to step up to the plate and they inspire others.

So, congratulations to the VCOS on their first 20 years! I challenge you to stay one step ahead and to continue looking five years out and predicting what members are going to need before they even know they need it. The IAFC, likewise, always strives to stay ahead of the curve, and we want people to immediately think of the IAFC and the VCOS as go-to resources.

What will be the next major challenge for volunteer and combination departments? How will the VCOS create a solution? I know this organization will never rest on its successes, but instead will continue to gain momentum and determine who the next VCOS leaders are that will ensure they stay on the cutting edge. I look forward to working with you into the future and seeing what the VCOS's next big projects entail.

Congratulations, again, on behalf of myself and the IAFC Board of Directors—and thanks for all that you do!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark W. Light".

Mark W. Light, CAE,
IAFC Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director



In 2008, when the IAFC's Global Public Safety Solutions (GPSS) first began, we had a tabletop display at the VCOS Symposium in the Sun. It overlapped Halloween night, and the hotel and exhibitors for the VCOS went out and got costumes and candy for all of the children staying in the hotel. We then stayed late, and there was a little parade of kids who came by the booths looking for their loot. Over the past six and a half years, the Symposium was always my favorite event to attend.

Shawn Kelley
IAFC Staff

If you're looking for great information and available contacts, the VCOS is your stopping point. You can find chiefs, officers and/or departments that have been through what you are currently hitting head on, and the section as a whole is a great resource for information. The VCOS Symposium in the Sun is always the best event going because it has great speakers, current topics and great interaction with fellow fire service personnel. I've also had the opportunity to take part in webinars and have been honored to be part of delivery teams for Beyond Hoses & Helmets and the transitioning course. Every educational opportunity offered by the VCOS has proven to be excellent, and I am proud to have remained active and involved with this first-class organization.

Jim Grady III, Chief
Frankfort (Ill.) FPD

In the early '90s, I had the opportunity to be in a pilot leadership class for volunteer/combination departments at the National Fire Academy. Among those in the class were chiefs John Buckman and Fred Windisch. Little did I know the influence these gentlemen would have on other volunteer fire chiefs such as myself, as well as the fire service in general. I thank you both for all you have done.

The week was memorable for numerous reasons. First, it snowed all week. Travel was limited to dorm, dining hall and classroom. This turned out to be a blessing because each evening we had nothing to do but go back and review more leadership materials the course developers had collected. Ideas and plans rolled out, and we all left feeling better about the future of the volunteer fire service. And soon after that, the VCOS was born.

I really can't recall all the players in the conception of the VCOS, but chiefs Buckman, Windisch and (Billy) Goldfeder were major players. I thank all three of them for encouraging me to stay engaged. And that brings me to my point: We as members (or potential members) of the VCOS need to encourage other chief officers to be engaged, just as the original leaders did. There is a lot we can do to make our responders and communities safer, but it will not happen if we don't engage and encourage other leaders to do the same. That is why I joined.

Chief Tim Wall and our current board of directors can't do it alone. Let's all get more engaged! Being engaged made the VCOS successful in its first 20 years and will make it even more successful in the next 20!

Melvin Byrne, MS, EFO
Division 7 Chief
Virginia Department
of Fire Programs

The VCOS is the largest section of the IAFC. This speaks volumes as to the success of the VCOS's many accomplishments since 1994. The VCOS has worked hard to bring a national voice to the volunteer fire service. It has reached out to find the top talent within the volunteer community, bringing credibility and cutting-edge leadership to better represent its membership. I've been involved with numerous projects and boards with the VCOS, most notably Beyond Hoses & Helmets. All VCOS programs are designed and delivered to the largest segment (approximately 75 percent) of the fire service in the U.S., many of whom do not have the financial resources available to attend national conferences or seminars in order to learn how to better their departments. The VCOS brings these programs to their front doors (or backyards) in order to promote professionalism, safety and leadership to the volunteer and combination fire service.

Greg L. Render, EFO
Administrator/Chief
Signal Hill (Ill.) FD



Everything they do has great value, from the educational opportunities, such as Beyond Hoses & Helmets and the Symposium in the Sun, to all of the ribbon reports and representation on Capitol Hill. The IAFC and its board of directors truly trust and appreciate the advice and counsel of the VCOS.

Mark Light
IAFC CEO and Executive Director

From No Respect to Most Respected

"I don't get no respect" was comedian Rodney Dangerfield's famous line.

Mirroring that quote, the volunteer committee that formed in the mid '80s felt that volunteer fire chiefs, and the volunteer fire service in general, didn't get enough respect or recognition from the IAFC. While the largest segment of fire departments in the U.S. were (and are) volunteer or combination departments, there were few volunteer chiefs elected as principle officers of the IAFC, and rarely did the IAFC address issues that were of significance to the volunteer fire service. This perceived lack of respect and recognition had been simmering within the IAFC for years, and it boiled over at the 1985 annual conference in New Orleans.

I became the IAFC's executive director in May 1985. The IAFC was in turmoil, and I was dealing with an organizational survival crisis. The annual conference was just months away, but the educational program was nonexistent, the exhibits were in total disarray, members had not been invoiced for their annual dues, no registrations had been received, and the organization was on the brink of bankruptcy. Then I received a call from the volunteer committee asking me to attend their upcoming meeting in New Orleans. Coming from a volunteer/combination background in Florida, I accepted, marked my calendar and returned to trying to save a sinking ship.

Honestly, I didn't think much about it again until months later when I was walking to the meeting in the Superdome. As I walked down the curved hallway toward the meeting room, the sounds of what appeared to be some

type of fight got louder and louder. I didn't understand what was happening until I walked into the room and someone said, "Look, there's the new guy!" The shouting stopped, and everyone turned and looked at me, and I could feel the eyes following me as I walked to the front of the room.

I listened and listened and listened. The meeting was scheduled for one hour but lasted more than three—and then continued into the hallways and the hospitality suites. Many emotional and sincere words were spoken—some in anger, most in frustration—with the underlying issues surrounding their desire for respect and recognition. The concerns were accurate. The feelings of "junior status" were deeply held. The participants' commitment to the volunteer fire service was honorable and genuine. And the criticism for the perceived lack of respect for the volunteer fire service within the IAFC was appropriate. The contribution of the volunteer and combination fire service to the nation, and the importance to the IAFC as a leadership organization, required the IAFC to place a different priority on this essential component of the fire service.

Over the years, while the IAFC rebuilt itself into a creditable leadership organization with a solid financial foundation, the volunteer committee took the initiative and began the evolution that resulted in the IAFC's most successful section: the VCOS. It's easy to look at the VCOS today and assume that that success came easily or quickly. No organization changes easily (the IAFC was no different) but change was underway and could not be stopped. The VCOS's success was not instant, but came as a

result of hard work, commitment and the tenacity of its members and leaders. The VCOS is an ever-evolving organization that identifies issues of importance to its members and to the volunteer and combination fire service—and then does something to address those issues. The ribbon reports, educational classes, symposium and, now, engagement with the IAFF concerning labor management relations in combination departments are all prime examples.

A successful organization is a mixture of several things: sound business sense, sheer hard work, anticipation of issues and good preparation. A successful organization needs to have unique products that address the concerns and questions of its members. But most of all, success requires deeply committed leadership. And the VCOS has committed leaders! With all those characteristics and more, the VCOS has moved adroitly and consistently. The VCOS embodies the concept of "servant leadership," where the servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform fully. While this phrase is usually used to describe individual leadership characteristics, the VCOS has integrated servant leadership as its organizational doctrine.

So please don't gripe that the VCOS is so successful, because you're seeing a snapshot of what it takes to be a successful organization in today's world. The VCOS has earned both recognition and respect and should celebrate—but not too long, because there's more work to be done.

Thank you, Rodney.

Garry Briese,

IAFC Executive Director (1985–2007)

Garry's story brings back significant memories of my involvement with the IAFC and VCOS. The year 1985 contained many firsts for me: It was my first FRI; it is when I joined the IAFC and it was my first year as fire chief. I believed I needed to be involved in something—to get out of my own kingdom, to potentially learn and to participate. So Klein (Texas) VFD Chief "Cootie" McNulty and I ventured to New Orleans. I had the op-

portunity to sit on the bumper of a Pierce engine with Dennis Van Daalwyck spec'ing our first heavy rescue. To be on the floor of the Superdome at my "young" age was a thrill in itself, and little did I know that weekend was the launching pad—the catalyst to release cloaked desires. Yes, it took a couple of years to fire that rocket, but it is still burning! The moral to this story: Get involved and stay involved! —**Chief Fred Windisch**

QUOTES OVER THE YEARS

"You don't get anywhere in this business unless you are surrounded by great people. You can't do these things alone."
—*John Bales, Chief, Golden (Colo.) FD*

"We have to empower thinking. Teach them how to make the right decisions."
—*Shane Ray, S.C. State Fire Marshal
NFSA Executive Vice President*

"We get impatient about young people because they aren't exactly like we are. But change is coming. Don't be afraid to let young people make mistakes. We were young once too."
—*John Buckman, Indiana State Fire Training Director*

"We [fire chiefs] need to stop telling and start asking and listening with every person that works for us, with us and above us."
—*Howard Cross, Boss, Howard Cross & Associates*

"Sometimes you have to do what you have to do. Adapt and overcome is what we're good at."
—*Ken Bouvier, Chief, Monsanto (La.) Fire Company*

"It's the person who has the most influence over a certain situation at a certain time that is the leader. If you have to hit your badge and say you're in charge ... you're not really in charge."
—*Donna Forgy, President, Proskills Inc.*

"I can't tell you how to change somebody's attitude. But I found out that if you change somebody's behavior, over a period of time, their attitude will change."
—*Alan Brunancini, Fire Chief (ret.) Phoenix FD*

"You need to make sure you create a controlled environment that is safe—from the training ground all the way to the incident scene."
—*Duane Dodwell, Deputy Fire Chief,
Fairfax County (Va.) Fire & Rescue*

"The difference between an alienated follower and an effective follower is that the alienated follower had his heart broken. Maybe things aren't happening the way he thinks they should, or he feels that he's being treated unfairly. The good news is that he still cares. Once he stops caring, you've lost him for good."
—*Eddie Buchanan, Division Chief, Hanover County (Va.) FD*

"Authentic leaders are compassionate and competent. They lead with their hearts and their heads. Authentic leaders are always in the process of conforming. They are always a continuous work in progress."
—*Kelvin Cochran, Chief,
Atlanta Fire Rescue Department*

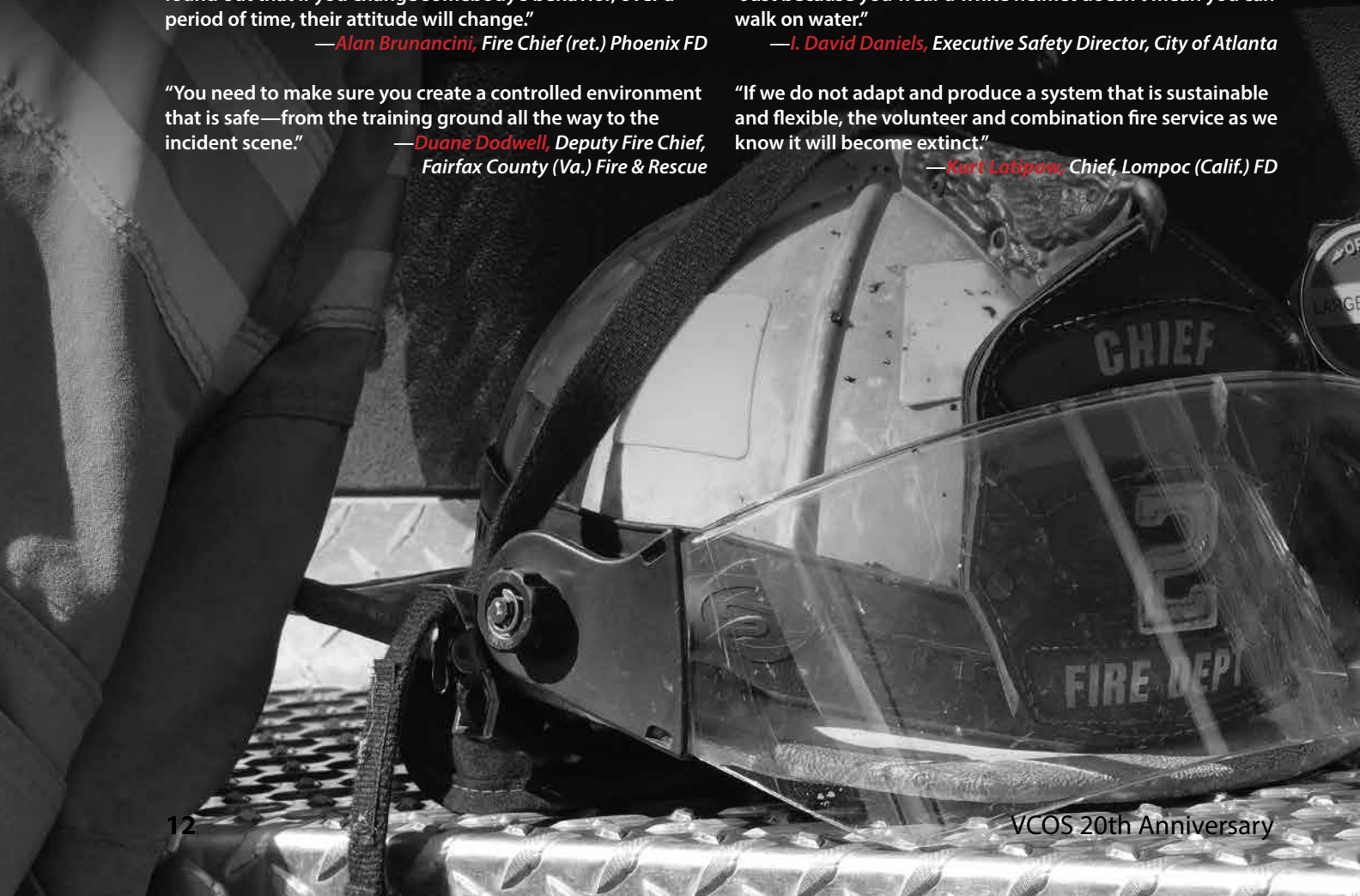
"Be able to flawlessly execute the basics of your job."
—*Dennis Rubin, Consultant, DL Rubin & Associates*

"If you see something that's being done improperly but don't say anything to correct it, you are saying that it's OK for them to do it."
—*John Salka, Battalion Chief, New York City FD*

"We can sit back and see what the change does to us, or we can be proactive and make the change work for us."
—*Jack Snook, President,
Emergency Services Consulting International*

"Just because you wear a white helmet doesn't mean you can walk on water."
—*I. David Daniels, Executive Safety Director, City of Atlanta*

"If we do not adapt and produce a system that is sustainable and flexible, the volunteer and combination fire service as we know it will become extinct."
—*Kurt Latipow, Chief, Lompoc (Calif.) FD*



THEN & NOW



The top show in 1994 was about nothing. Watching TV 20 years later, little has changed.

What	1994	2014
Average Prices	New home: \$119,000 Gallon of gas: \$1.59 Movie ticket: \$4.08 TIC: \$25K to \$50K or more!	New home: \$331,000 Gallon of gas: \$3.50 Movie ticket: \$8.35 TIC: \$5,000
Fire Department Calls <small>(* 2012 is the latest data)</small>	Total: 16.13 million Fire: 2.05 million EMS: 9.19 million Mutual Aid: 586,500	Total: 31.85 million* Fire: 1.38 million* EMS: 21.71 million* Mutual Aid: 1.33 million*
Word Meanings	Web: Where a spider lives Virus: Someone is sick App: Something to fill out for a job	Web: Where all the world's information is stored Virus: You visited a site you shouldn't have App: A shortcut created because taking 10 seconds to do something would be too long
People Use Phones To 	Call	Call, text, email, search the Internet, check the time, check the calendar, take photos, watch television, calculate numbers, see in the dark, take videos, play music, get driving directions, play games, check the weather, make lists, pay bills, trade stocks, cash checks ...
John Buckman and Fred Windisch		
Tailboard Riding	Yeah, a few still did.	No way, no how.
Most Talked About Wedding	Michael Jackson and Lisa Marie Presley	Kanye West and one of the Kardashians. Not sure which one.
Olympic Athletes Who Used Pipes		
Famous Deaths	Kurt Cobain, John Candy, Richard Nixon, Burt Lancaster, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis	Robin Williams, Joan Rivers, Shirley Temple, Maya Angelou, Mickey Rooney, Casey Kasem
Most Famous Bronco		
World Series Matchup	For the first time since 1904, the World Series was not played due to a players' strike.	Kansas City Royals vs. San Francisco Giants
Fire Department Expenditures <small>(* 2011 is the latest data)</small>	\$24.8 billion	\$42.3 billion*

Photo by John Lemieux

Photo by Craig Hawkins



HISTORY OF THE VOLUNTEER FIRE SERVICE

By Mike Macdonald

Any civilization that relied on open fires for cooking and heating most likely didn't take long to adopt some type of planned response to combat flames that jumped containment, so it would be all but impossible to pinpoint exactly when "the fire service" truly began. In the United States, various organized groups of fire patrollers and responders can be traced back to the 1600s, but generally speaking, the "modern" fire service as we know it began in the mid-1700s, and historical icon Benjamin Franklin is most often credited as being its founding father. Many famous colonists served as firefighters, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Alexander Hamilton, Paul Revere and Aaron Burr, but it was Franklin who first went about officially organizing his department into something similar to what we have today, and he also invented and advanced so many concepts and procedures that would go on to become part of the foundation of the industry.



America's early cities were similar in that homes and structures were built in close proximity to one another, often using cheap (read: combustible) materials. Therefore, when a fire did start, it quickly threatened to wipe out entire blocks of homes. Boston is one such city with an unfortunate history of conflagrations, suffering major destruction in 1653, 1676 and 1711. The last on that list destroyed 110 homes and was witnessed by a 6-year-old Franklin, who, as the story goes, was struck by the sudden and utter devastation fires could wreak. Thus, as Franklin grew up and put his stamp on so many facets of American history—as an inventor, scientist, statesman, diplomat, postmaster, journalist, publisher, civic leader, businessman and pundit, among the many titles he could be granted—it is understandable that so much of his effort went toward firefighting—or, better yet, fire prevention.

In 1736, in his new home in Philadelphia, Franklin founded the Union Fire Company, an all-volunteer organization that would be around for more than 80 years. Whereas previously residents and business owners would subscribe to a local fire society—that is, they would prepay for firefighting services with one of the competing companies, which would then extinguish a blaze providing the proper fire mark was affixed to the structure (or let the building burn should it not be)—the Union Fire Company established a geographical area it could realistically reach and then attempted to protect

all the people, property and structures located within. The company capped its membership at 30 volunteers, who were required to attend regular meetings and training sessions and even began fundraising initiatives so the cash-strapped department could purchase the equipment it needed. Sound familiar?

Following Franklin's Union model, similar volunteer departments began popping up around Philadelphia and then in other East Coast cities. Naturally, larger cities needed multiple departments to cover larger areas, which predictably led to conflict as departments competed to get paid for their efforts. Conflict, of course, is nothing new to the fire service and apparently has been around since the beginning. These volunteer departments often became very good at handling fires, but because they operated independently, not surprisingly problems such as internal dissension, power struggles, rowdiness and competition among rival departments started to negatively impact their effectiveness and all too often spilled into public view.

Ensuring by Insuring

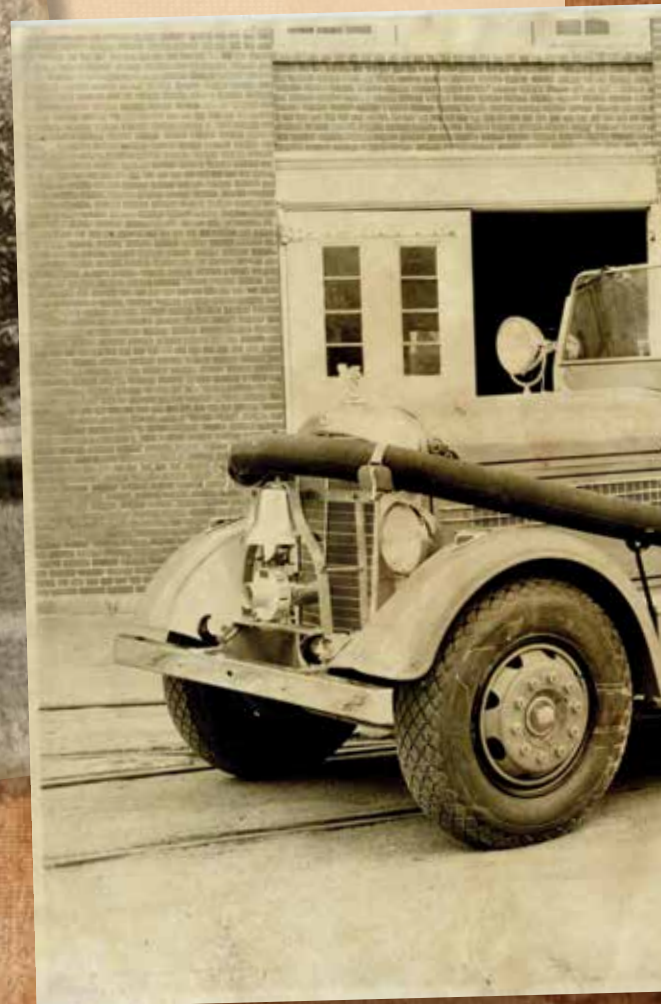
In addition to insisting his firefighters train often and be skilled in tactics involving axes and hooks, Franklin realized the best way to limit fire damage was to prevent fires. He pushed legislation that would change building codes, forcing builders to use less combustible materials, and fought to have trees and "overgrown" vegetation removed from city streets. ►

Franklin invented a safer stove that could be used for cooking and heating, and he implored people to remove wooden objects from around fireplaces, clean their chimneys and take extra precautions when smoking and using bed warmers (metal boxes filled with embers). Ever the businessman, Franklin didn't invent the first insurance company, but he did reconfigure the model in what proved to be yet another very successful venture. In 1752, he established the Philadelphia Contributionship for the Insurance of Houses from the Loss of Fire, which, because of its fire mark (emblem), became known as Hand-in-Hand or Four Hands United insurance. Soon other insurance companies began popping up, competing with one another by offering different rates and coverages and eventually morphing into today's insurance industry.

Insurance companies lose money when they have to pay out claims; thus they have always been invested in preventing and limiting the events they cover. When large city departments became more interested in defending their turf from one another than protecting it from fire, insurance companies and political leaders pointed to increasing populations and

escalating fire risks among the reasons for needing to replace volunteers with paid, professional firefighters. To this day, however, a paycheck has never been the determining factor that separates good firefighters from bad firefighters or good departments from bad departments, but the power of pay has always helped ensure a constant and consistent labor force, training and educational opportunities and discipline. While Boston had several paid firefighters as early as 1676, Cincinnati officially instituted the first paid department in 1853, followed by New York in 1865 and Philadelphia in 1871.

Parallel to the trend of paying firefighters, riding the wave from the American Industrial Revolution, many inventions and innovations were adapted to greatly help improve the performance of fire departments in the 19th century. In 1832, a New York volunteer company purchased a horse to pull its engine, significantly increasing its coverage area. In 1841, a self-propelled steam fire engine was put into service in New York (although firefighters refused to use it). In 1852, Dr. William Channing used recently developed telegraph technology to create the first fire alarm box system in Boston.




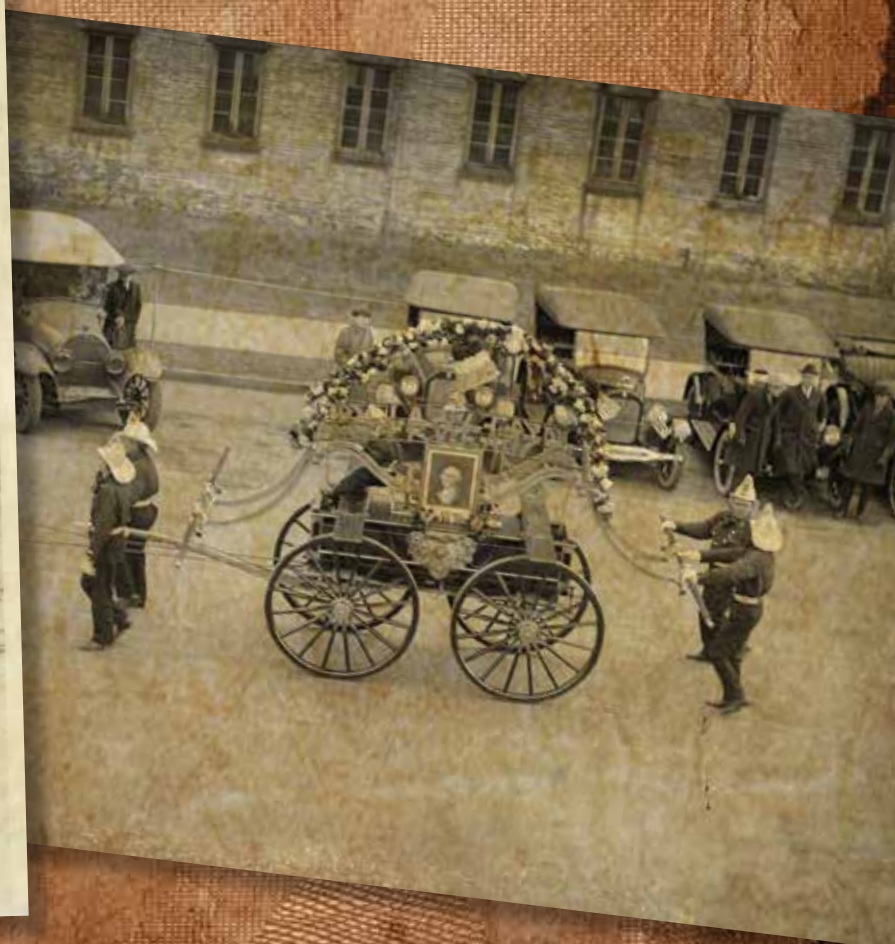
Yesterday and Today

Even as the country continued to grow, outside of the big cities, fire departments were few and far between, and many got their start after a major incident caught residents off guard with disastrous consequences. Unlike the bigger city departments, humbler volunteer stations didn't have flashy equipment at first, and they made do with whatever they could get their hands on. In time, as municipalities developed and national standards increased, all fire departments were brought up to speed, and modern volunteer departments are often just as trained, experienced and professional as their paid career counterparts.

Twentieth century innovations like the internal combustion engine forever changed the fire service (and the world in general), along with items such as radio communications, SCBAs and thermal imaging cameras. However, many of the problems facing the industry today are distressingly similar to those faced by our forefathers: Not all departments are equipped with the gear needed to protect staff and property; risky behaviors are often tolerated

as part of our culture; recruiting and retaining members remains a challenge; and, while it may not present itself as obviously as fistfights outside a burning structure as rival departments look to get hooked to the water source first and thus get paid, departments are still forced to battle one another for limited funding.

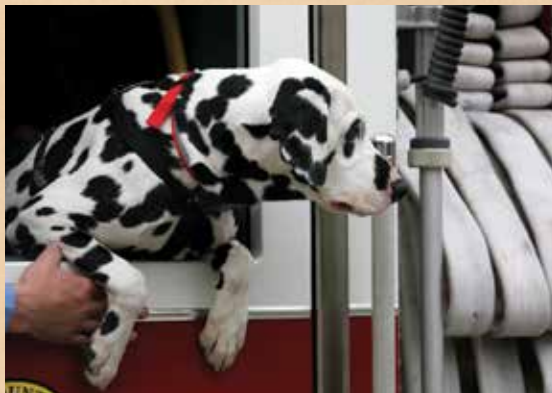
And yet with all that, the American fire service continues to serve as a beacon of integrity, bravery and professionalism. Today, the American fire service consists of more than 30,000 different departments with nearly 1.2 million members—about 75 percent of whom are still volunteers. Combined, they respond to nearly 32 million calls each year, consisting of much more than simple fire runs—nowadays, calls range from medical emergencies to hazmat calls to high-angle rescues. Even though each station and each area has its own unique history, all departments share the common bond of forming in a time of need, when concerned citizens chose to set aside their own welfare for the good of their families and friends so their communities could stay safe and protected. 





EVER WONDER WHY ...

HORSES BECAME SUCH A BIG PART OF THE FIRE SERVICE? Records show that “modern” fire engines came to the United States in 1731—engines that were pushed to the fires by the firefighters themselves. Why it took so long for someone to hitch the engine to a horse team is a mystery, but it wasn't until 1832 that the New York Mutual Hook and Ladder Company No. 1 volunteers became the first department to purchase a horse to pull their engine. Besides being tired of pushing that heavy rig themselves, the move was likely necessitated by a yellow fever epidemic that caused a shortage of available firefighters. The idea caught on fast, though, and soon beloved fire horses were trained to move from their stalls to the front of the apparatus at the sound of a bell all around the country.



DALMATIANS BECAME THE DOG OF CHOICE? Dalmatians are quick, agile and have great endurance. But, while they are good at catching rats, they are not good hunting dogs. As a result, Dalmatians were kept at the stables of aristocrats, and over time the breed built a bond with horses. So when horses were brought into the fire service to pull equipment, Dalmatians

soon followed, serving as companions to the horses, guards of the station and fleet-footed sirens who would charge out in advance and warn people of the impending horse-drawn wagons.

CHIEF OFFICERS ARE DENOTED WITH BUGLES? For more than 100 years, fireground orders were relayed to the troops with a speaking trumpet (think megaphone) that was commonly referred to as a bugle. Officers were easily identified because they were the ones wearing bugles around their necks. This understandably morphed into bugle-shaped pins being used on dress uniforms. The more bugles on the collar, the higher the rank.



Our Maltese Cross



Traditional Maltese Cross

THE MALTESE CROSS BECAME AN EMBLEM FOR FIREFIGHTING?

This one's a little po-tate-o, po-tot-o. Technically, the emblem on most firefighting uniforms that we refer to as a Maltese cross could more accurately be referred to as a Florian cross. A Maltese cross is modeled after a French cross pattée, only with eight points (representing loyalty, piety, frankness, bravery, glory and honor, contempt of death, assistance to the poor and the sick, and respect for the church), which was given to members of the Knights of St. John who bravely protected the island of Malta from attack in 1095. Today's typical firefighting emblem more resembles the mark of St. Florian, the patron saint of firefighters, a Christian who rose through the ranks of the Roman army and was in charge of the fire brigade before he was brutally executed for his beliefs.

WE USE BAGPIPES? In the mid-1800s, after the great potato famine, Irish (and Scottish) immigrants began flooding to the United States—only to find most businesses would not hire them. As a result, many were relegated to dirty and dangerous civil service jobs that no one wanted, such as being police officers and firefighters. Not surprisingly, many Irish traditions were brought into those professions, including the playing of mournful pipes for the fallen, as was done at traditional Celtic funerals. Because Scottish highland bagpipes are louder than Irish uilleann pipes, they became more common and are still used today for various ceremonies and occasions.



MOST FIRE TRUCKS ARE RED? In the 1800s, when there was much competition between rival fire brigades, each wanted to have the most impressive rig and thus decked them out in brass and red paint, which was considered a regal color and at the time the most expensive paint you could buy. That color was later cemented in the 1920s when Henry Ford built cars as inexpensively as he could, using black paint. Thus, the red fire engines truly stood out.

WE WEAR LEATHER HELMETS? For centuries, leather was used for hundreds of everyday purposes. In 1740, New York firefighter Jacobus Turk (or Turck) invented a leather stovepipe cap to protect crews from radiant heat. In 1836, Henry Gratacap, another volunteer firefighter who was a luggage maker, decided to use the specially treated leather that had proven to be water- and weather-resistant for ocean-going luggage for a new purpose. He combined eight sections with raised stitches to form a strong protective barrier above the head, and then upturned the front and side edges of the brim and elongated and downturned the back of the brim to keep water and ash away from the firefighter's face and collar. Manufacturers tried to replace the leather with aluminum, a lighter and cheaper material, but there was something about the way metal conducts heat and electricity that made that choice less than ideal. Today, fiberglass and composite helmets are available, but many departments choose to remain with the old standby.



WE NEED TO USE OUR TRADITION AS A LAUNCHING PAD, NOT AN ANCHOR.

—JACK SNOOK, PRESIDENT,
EMERGENCY SERVICES
CONSULTING INTERNATIONAL





THE Birth OF A SECTION

By Chief Jim Wilson, (ret.) Mariposa County (Calif.) FD

Most successful organizations can trace their birth to a particular point in time. In the case of the Volunteer & Combination Officers Section of the International Association of Fire Chiefs, that date was Aug. 30, 1994, and the place was St. Louis, Mo. With the VCOS, however—which, at the time, stood for Volunteer Chief Officers Section—its actual conception occurred several years earlier, in 1989, when a handful of volunteer fire chiefs petitioned and were granted “committee” status by the IAFC. Primary among that group were chiefs John Buckman III, Billy Goldfeder, Warren Savage, Fred Windisch and Robert Bettenhausen. These visionary leaders all recognized a need for an advocacy group within the IAFC that would address the leadership, representation and educational needs of volunteer fire service organizations and their leaders.

History tells us our great nation was born during the Constitutional Convention, not out of harmony, but from tumult among those original representatives, and the Constitution was not produced with accord and total agreement. It was the product of acrimony, disagreement and compromise. Through that compromise, though, was born the most successful form of governance in human history. Likewise, many young organizations experience rough patches during their embryonic years, and the VCOS was certainly no different.

Our early VCOS leaders knew well that the volunteer fire service needed effective representation, but for every founding member there were divergent opinions on how best to accomplish that goal. Between 1989 and 1993, whenever two or more of the volunteer committee members got together at conferences, seminars, meetings or even over cocktails, meaningful debate occurred over how best to provide that needed representation. Goals were abundant, ideas flowed during every meeting, and projects were too numerous to count. The needs were great, but the resources to meet those needs were extremely limited. There was a relatively large group that agreed something needed to be done, but only a small nucleus of motivated founders willing to actually do the work. In addition, funding was nearly nonexistent. After much arm twisting and cajoling, the committee “banked” slightly more than \$2,000 seed money with the IAFC treasurer. Still, even though there was some limited funding, most of the early expenses incurred by that group came out of members’ own pockets.

Through all the early conversations, debates and discussions emerged a central theme: The volunteer committee needed more influence and more recognition within the IAFC than the “committee” structure could provide. In early 1993, the original founding group began lobbying its parent organization to recognize it as a “section.” But what was a section? Metro Chiefs was already a viable section within the IAFC, and its membership was defined by the population served. Our volunteer group was still working to be recognized, but that finally came with the inaugural Volunteer Chief Officers Section meeting in St. Louis, where the fledgling group ratified section bylaws and elected officers and directors. Chief Buckman was elected as the section’s first chair, while Chief Goldfeder was elected vice chair and Chief Bettenhausen was elected secretary/treasurer. Chief Windisch was elected an at-large director, along with chiefs Timothy Wall, Gary Scott, Frank Pocica and Neil Good.

The first order of business was to draft a mission statement that memorialized and formalized all of the work done to that point by the volunteer committee over five years. That original mission statement read, “The mission of the IAFC Volunteer Section is to provide chief officers who manage volunteers within the fire/rescue EMS delivery system with information, education, services and representation to enhance their professionalism and capabilities.” While it has been tweaked over the last 20 years, the body of today’s VCOS mission statement remains very similar to the original and can be found on page 49. ▶



**“A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.”
—Mahatma Gandhi**

That mission statement has inspired and motivated VCOS leadership from the organization's inception. It has been the foundation and guiding spirit for every position statement, white paper, ribbon report, seminar and conference sponsored by the section.

In his opening remarks as chair, Chief Buckman said, "It is the intent of the IAFC Volunteer Section to become a voice within the IAFC. The IAFC Volunteer Section desires to represent the chief officer who manages or directs volunteers within their delivery system. The IAFC Volunteer Section also strives to become a voice on national issues that impact the volunteer fire service. Each of you as members need to become an active voice within the divisions and at the IAFC headquarters. The IAFC is doing the things that they think need to be done. If you don't like what is being done, then you need to become involved with the sections and divisions."

For want of a formal vision statement, the VCOS executive committee and board were guided through the early times by that proclamation. Ultimately, the vision statement we adopted

is, "To represent the interests of all volunteer and combination fire/rescue/EMS agencies. We will be a dynamic organization characterized by our integrity, customer focus and membership development, with value placed on people and superior utilization of technology. We will excel

by creating educational programs, through unrivaled networking, and by helping VCOS members further their success and reach their potential."

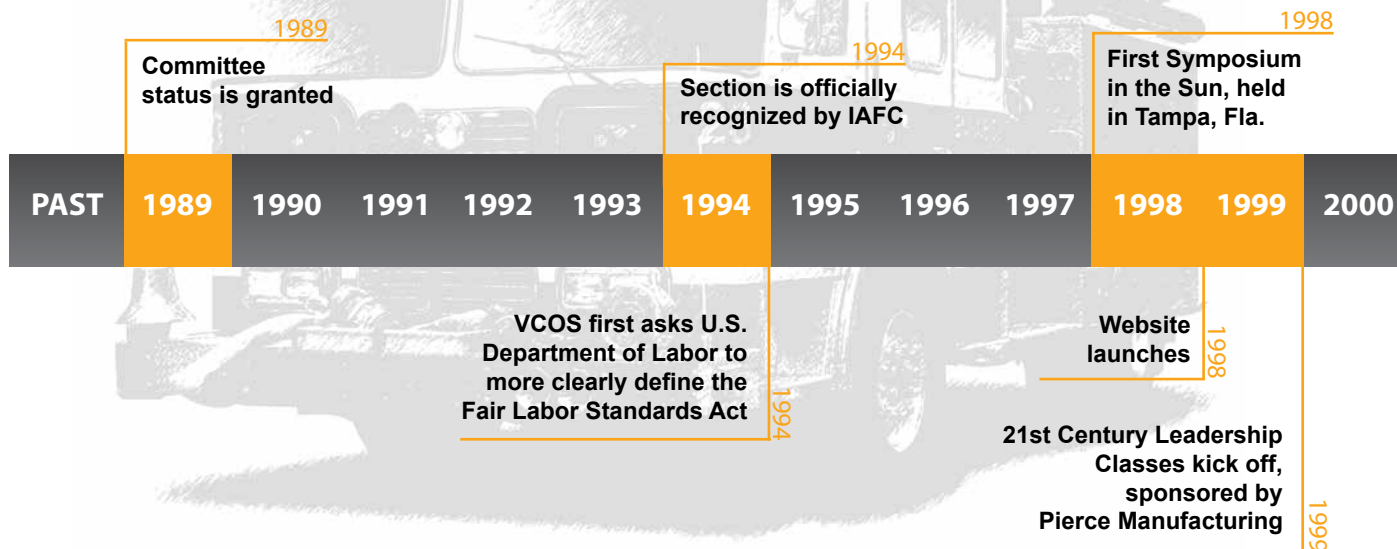


Making it Official

For most of the volunteer committee meetings, there were rarely more than 10 attendees. However, more than 275 volunteer chief officers attended that inaugural section meeting. During the secretary/treasurer report, Chief Bettenhausen announced that we had amazingly gathered 492 section members. That \$2,000 seed money was transferred from the committee to the section, and Volunteer Firemen's Insurance Services (today's VFIS) donated another \$3,000.

Staying true to Chief Buckman's earlier statement, a number of concerns were raised challenging the IAFC to produce changes and

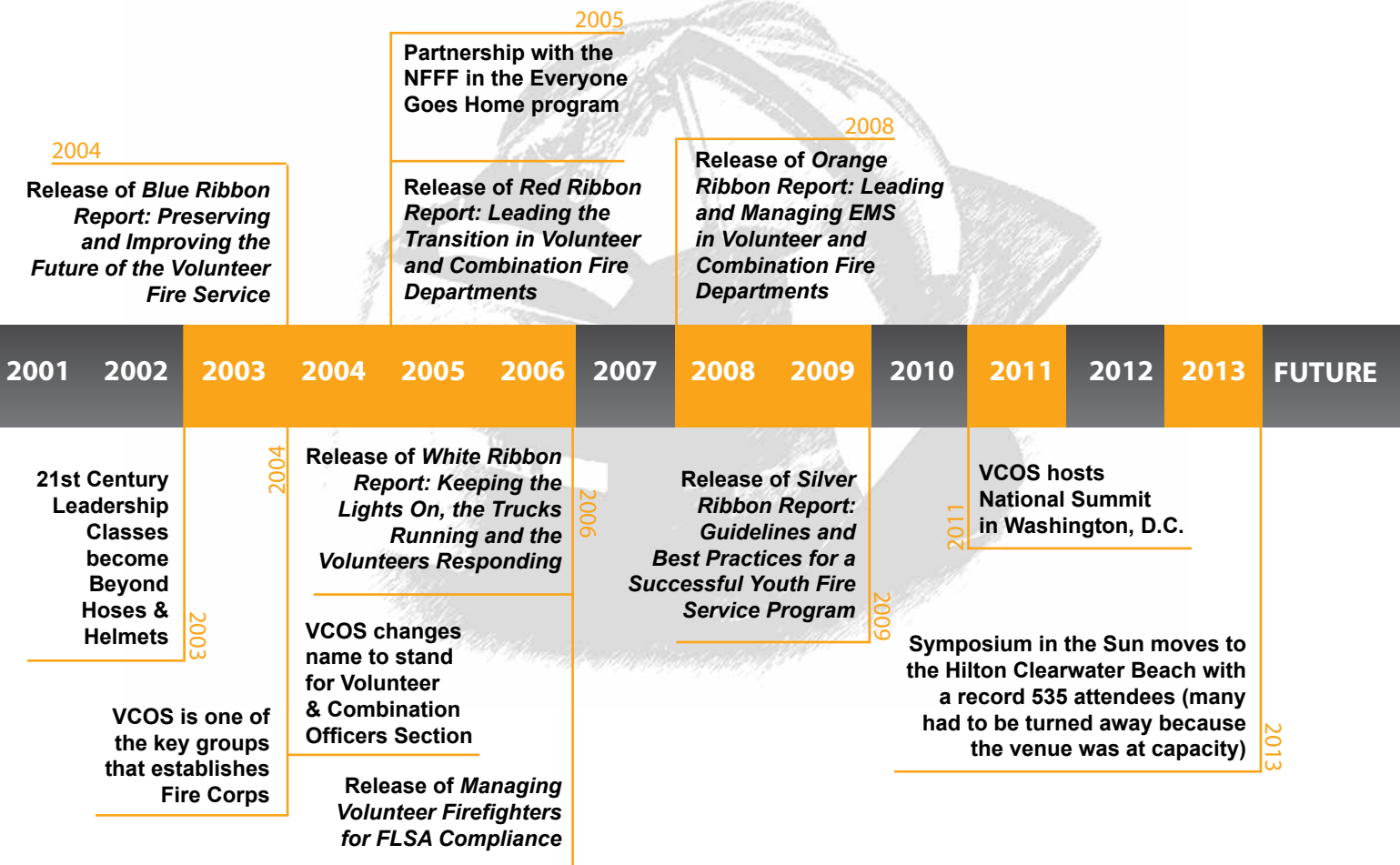
Timeline of important VCOS events





procedures that would accommodate volunteer departments. Formal motions were ratified by attendees requesting section representation on the IAFC board of directors; requesting IAFC board review and re-evaluation of the rotation of cities where Fire Rescue International was held to better accommodate volunteer officer attendance; changing IAFC voting rules to allow members to vote without being registered for

the annual conference; and requesting the IAFC lobby OSHA to moderate the OSHA Reform Act of 1993 and work with the U.S. Department of Labor to more clearly define the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) so volunteers were treated equitably. Also discussed at that first meeting were the efforts to increase membership and establish a section scholarship so volunteer chiefs would be better able to participate in the National





“Whenever a new liaison is assigned to the VCOS, I can see how nervous they are at first. They worry about whether they can keep up with the rigorous pace of all of the projects. However, they immediately love working with them, and if other opportunities arise within the organization, they never want to lose the opportunity to continue working with the VCOS. It is pretty amazing.”

—Mark Light,
IAFC CEO and
Executive Director

Fire Academy Executive Fire Officer program.

In addition to the topics that were supported by formal motions and votes, many more issues affecting volunteer fire departments were discussed, debated and added to the to-do list. There were dozens of great ideas brainstormed throughout the first few months and years. Many of those ideas became member-centered projects that have now spanned two decades. In reality, though, in spite of great ideas and big dreams, as Chief Windisch says, “In the beginning, we were just hanging on and trying to become something. It wasn’t until the second year we slowly organized and became effective.”

Ready to Grow

“Organized and effective” soon became quite an understatement. Leading the slate of tasks and products was an evolving list of position statements and white papers. These formal statements identified immediate problems faced by volunteer and combination leaders, brought them to the forefront and recommended changes that would help resolve the issues. And no group was spared the focus of these statements and

recommendations. Government agencies, industry leaders, national organizations, manufacturers and other chief officers benefited from the VCOS position statements and white papers. As a need or issue arose, position papers continued to be issued. (Today, they have been collected and archived and can be found on the VCOS website.)

Over time, however, it became obvious to the VCOS leadership that brief statements weren’t always sufficient to address some of the more complex and vexing issues that faced the volunteer fire service. In 2004, the future of volunteers as a viable option to small and rural communities came under question, and from that debate evolved the concept of extended reports. Under the leadership of Chief Buckman, the 20-page *Blue Ribbon Report: Preserving and Improving the Future of the Volunteer Fire Service* was published, with 15,000 copies quickly finding places in chief officers’ hands across the U.S. and Canada. As word spread of its existence, this report quickly became the go-to reference for fire chiefs. Based on this success, four other ribbon reports eventually followed (see page 38). An additional expanded report was published

The Secret’s Out

I remember meeting John Buckman for the first time. He was just a snot-nosed kid (haha!) who attended one of our IAFC volunteer committees. John asked how he could get involved, so we opened the doors and the rest is history. John has made such a positive difference.

Starting the IAFC volunteer committee, you would assume that the battles would have been career versus volunteer issues—but nothing could be further from the truth. Sure, there were local issues and a few national issues we had to tackle, but the bigger issues were volunteer committee members fighting with one another (it was really quite brutal). Clearly, there was a loss of focus on the mission, which led to some leadership changes.

I was appointed by IAFC President Warren Isman to chair the volunteer committee and really enjoyed it. But after a few years, and setting new directions, it was time for change. Working with people like John Buckman and Fred Windisch, we petitioned the IAFC membership for signatures so we could form a



new section. I remember sitting with John and others as we worked on the name for this new group, and so the VCOS was born.

If I were to look back and point to my best accomplishment while leading the old volunteer committee, it would be that I got most of the “old guard” to stop fighting about stupid stuff all the time and to get focused on the true needs of the volunteer and combination fire officers. I served as the last chair of that volunteer committee, and I’m glad to have helped pass it on to those who brought the VCOS to where it is today!

—Billy Goldfeder, EFO,
Loveland-Symmes (Ohio) FD



“All of the VCOS’s initiatives to better the fire and emergency services are truly inspiring. I’m honored to work with such a passionate and dedicated group and look forward to many more milestones and accomplishments. The work and people of the VCOS motivate me every day.”

*—Kelly Ameen,
VCOS Staff Liaison*



in 2006, fulfilling one of the original identified projects from that inaugural meeting in 1994. After 12 years of diligent work and many thousands of dollars in IAFC-sponsored staff and legal fees, *Managing Volunteer Firefighters for FLSA Compliance: A Guide for Fire Chiefs and Community Leaders* was published to great acclaim.

Also in 2004, the VCOS changed its name to the Volunteer & Combination Officers Section to recognize and be more inclusive of the ever-growing number of combination agencies the section represented. While the name may have changed, its mission and vision have never wavered. Education has always been one of the primary elements of the VCOS and quickly became the focal point of its leadership. In 1998, the Symposium in the Sun debuted in Tampa, Fla., welcoming about 75 volunteer and combination officers to the Airport Hilton for a rich learning environment that was aimed toward the very specific needs of the attendees. The Symposium in the Sun was later held in Orlando before finding its permanent home in Clearwater Beach, Fla. (For more about the Symposium in the Sun,

which has turned into the must-attend event in the emergency services sector, see page 30.)

In addition to the Symposium in the Sun, the VCOS has also created several unique outreach educational courses, national awards and scholarships and hosted a national summit (details of all can be found throughout this book). Its membership has grown to about 2,500, and with that backing, it has become the largest and most active IAFC section and is one of the most progressive, dedicated and prolific leadership organizations in the fire service. The VCOS has worked tirelessly to transform the quality of leadership and community service for departments who otherwise would not have the resources to match those of larger suburban and urban departments. Over its first two decades, the VCOS has met and exceeded the expectations of its founding fathers. Today’s fire service needs are complex and numerous, but they are not insurmountable. Those needs, however, require visionaries to step up and do the work. The groundwork has been laid; it is now up to the next generation of volunteer and combination leaders to step up and continue the progress. 🇺🇸

Where we are ... and Beyond

By Chief Shane Crutcher, Rineyville (Ky.) FD

A challenge every organization experiences at some point in time is the active engagement of its membership. The fire service, some would argue, is able to use its traditions and pomp to sell itself to the on-the-fence person as to whether this profession is right for him or her. We use over-the-top photos from the once-in-a-career fire and feats of extreme valor; we show videos of fires from helmet cameras; we have websites dedicated to 24-hour fire coverage, as well as blogs and other social and traditional media outlets that talk about how glamorous the firefighter's life is; and we convince folks this is what we do every day. We utilize these and many other means to lure people in the door, and I will say that it has a level of effectiveness. However, the difficult part is keeping them—not only physically having them as a valued asset, but equally important is keeping them passionate about what they do. Those challenges are no different for a national organization.

As our industry has witnessed great changes due to science and technology, so, too, does our political landscape change, as organizations like the VCOS learn to coexist and partner with other groups that have different agendas but vie for the same limited resources. For our profession, which is deeply steeped in tradition and admittedly reluctant to change, we have to balance reality with fantasy. Our work environment has changed; we have to change with it. A fine line must be walked at times. In my organization, we have struggled to find the right fit at times and convey the passion we all have. Passion is not a measurable thing. I believe you either have it or you don't. The challenge in recruiting the next generation of leaders is really no different.

The VCOS began 20 years ago with the desire of a small group of professionals wanting to organize themselves to better represent their passion. They wanted a voice at the national level. Over time, that has seen the empowerment of folks at all levels to make change and be heard. The VCOS encourages individuals and organizations to expand education and recognize both individual accomplishments and departmental successes. The VCOS not only publishes its own newsletter, but it also regularly contributes to *IAFC On Scene* and


authors articles for most industry publications. We have our own website packed with information, but we're also active with social media, and we engage with other organizations through that means. We produce the best leadership symposium in the business, but we also attend countless other shows, classes, meetings and conferences. We created traveling training classes that bring NFA-level educational opportunities to your door. We have cultivated relationships with organizations like the NVFC, iWomen, ISFSI, NFFF, CFSI and many more, and we have representation on every major fire service committee (this year, that included four board members engaged in the Tampa2 summit).

There are collaborative efforts with other sections within the IAFC to stand united with a common voice for change, which are committed to the development of a safer and smarter leader. While every relationship suits each involved party in some way, the VCOS has always steadfastly considered the end recipient. Collaboration is the future of our industry. Fewer volunteers, municipalities' tightened budgets, fiscal restraint and family commitments are all factors in reduced involvement. No matter how fast we try to deliver information, it is never fast enough. We must challenge each other to think in unfamiliar places and ask the difficult questions. We need to have a clear and concise message. Daily, there are talented people rising up to energize the base and introduce creative thinking and new perspectives. We must embrace the new ideas and be receptive to change. I often find myself in the room surrounded by people who have influenced monumental change in our business, and I wonder what I am doing there. How did I get involved in this organization, and why did I think it would help? What I came to realize is that anyone could be in my shoes and have the opportunity to engage. I offered to be more than a spectator. I am passionate about what I do, and I will be equally passionate 20 years from now. But I also realize that I don't want to be in the way when my time has passed, when the next young company officer or chief officer with the desire to change steps up and wants to lead.



"If we're not changing, if we're not constantly keeping abreast of technology, we're going to become stagnant."

—Greg Render, Chief,
Signal Hill (Ill.) FD

Our future will be a diverse one, and avenues of communication will be unlike anything we have experienced. The recruitment of young leaders and development of their skills will take the forefront. The foundation of every organization relies on the active engagement of our membership. Currently, the VCOS boasts about 2,500 members, but when you look at the fire service in its totality and the number of volunteer and combination officers, we're barely getting to even the tip of the iceberg. We need to make every attempt to increase those numbers, but just as importantly, we need to challenge those we do reach to become more active. Cultivation of the personal relationships between organization and individuals will define our future success. I challenge you to engage at a higher level, step out of your comfort zone and introduce young leaders in your organization to the VCOS. Pass your commitment to the VCOS forward to the next generation; your positive personal experiences are the traditions that will keep this section relevant—and always looking to the future. 





Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives

1. Define and advocate the need for a cultural change within the fire service relating to safety and incorporating leadership, management, supervision, accountability and personal responsibility.
2. Enhance the personal and organizational accountability for health and safety throughout the fire service.
3. Focus greater attention on the integration of risk management with incident management at all levels, including strategic, tactical and planning responsibilities.
4. All firefighters must be empowered to stop unsafe practices.
5. Develop and implement national standards for training, qualifications and certification (including regular recertification) that are equally applicable to all firefighters, based on the duties they are expected to perform.
6. Develop and implement national medical and physical fitness standards that are equally applicable to all firefighters, based on the duties they are expected to perform.
7. Create a national research agenda and data-collection system that relates to the initiatives.
8. Utilize available technology wherever it can produce higher levels of health and safety.
9. Thoroughly investigate all firefighter fatalities, injuries and near misses.
10. Grant programs should support the implementation of safe practices and/or mandate safe practices as an eligibility requirement.
11. National standards for emergency response policies and procedures should be developed and championed.
12. National protocols for response to violent incidents should be developed and championed.
13. Firefighters and their families must have access to counseling and psychological support.
14. Public education must receive more resources and be championed as a critical fire and life safety program.
15. Advocacy must be strengthened for the enforcement of codes and the installation of home fire sprinklers.
16. Safety must be a primary consideration in the design of apparatus and equipment.



A Decade of Better Decisions

By Ron Siarnicki, Executive Director, National Fallen Firefighters Foundation

In March 2004, more than 200 leaders from the emergency response sector gathered in Tampa, Fla., to address the troubling question of how to reduce the 100-plus line-of-duty deaths that were plaguing the profession each year. The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation hosted this Life Safety Summit and, in cooperation with the U.S. Fire Administration, set some lofty goals. It was clear that the American fire service was ready to tackle the problem of firefighter line-of-duty deaths head on.


The major output from that meeting was the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives (FLSI), and from that came the Everyone Goes Home® (EGH) program. The 16 FLSI, in my opinion, have become the foundation for the vast acceptance and embracing of the idea that every firefighter should return home after every shift—and at the end of his/her career—uninjured and healthy. The initiatives themselves have been adopted (in whole or in part) by countless departments that have built their programs to reflect the values established by the initiatives. Several states have even adopted the 16 initiatives as guiding principles for all fire service activities. The 16 FLSI have performed spectacularly—beyond our expectations. I believe lives have been saved because of their impact.

The culture of the fire service is influenced as people in the industry change their behaviors based on evidence that doing so would result in better outcomes. In this case, firefighters see every day will have a better outcome if, for instance, they wear their seatbelts, watch their diet, exercise and, in general, make safety their No. 1 priority. It was never the intention of the 16 FLSI or the EGH program to change the culture of the fire service,

but rather it was to fortify those aspects that will help us reduce injuries and save lives. To that extent, I think we have been extremely successful. It is now widely accepted, I think, that we have an obligation to our families and colleagues to make good decisions—decisions that keep us in the game in the safest manner possible.

The International Association of Fire Chiefs, and in particular its VCOS and other sections, has been an invaluable partner to the EGH program. The IAFC was at the table in Tampa in 2004 and was an important contributor to the initiatives. This past March, at the Tampa2 Summit, the IAFC was again present, and its members made fantastic and important contributions.

The particular issue of leadership in volunteer and combination departments has been assisted by the architecture of the 16 FLSI and how they are scalable for any type of volunteer or combination department. Over the last decade, the VCOS leadership has developed a progression of volunteer and combination department programs that reinforce the ethos of the 16 FLSI and the EGH program.

The VCOS has been important in implementing these initiatives and promoting safety among its members, and in raising awareness for the foundation's mission by supporting efforts such as the Whistle-Stop Tour, 9/11 Memorial Stair Climbs and the aforementioned Tampa2. Likewise, the VCOS members are boots on the ground for us and are critical for alerting EGH leadership to emerging issues. I am very proud of the work the VCOS has accomplished in the field of community risk reduction, and I look forward to our continued partnership as we help to ensure everyone goes home. 



“Five of the nine killed in roadway wrecks were not wearing seat belts ...”

“Six personnel lost their lives after being hit by vehicles at incident scenes ...”

“Seven were killed during training exercises ...”

“The 27 on-duty firefighter heart attack deaths were the lowest number since the study began ...”

A photograph of a fire truck's side compartment. A tan fire jacket with reflective yellow stripes and a yellow letter 'S' on the sleeve is hanging from a metal bar. To the right, various pieces of fire equipment, including hoses and nozzles, are visible. The truck's body is made of diamond-plate metal.

THE ULTIMATE

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

By Chief John M. Buckman III
German Township (Ind.) VFD

I was asked to put an article together talking about the VCOS Symposium in the Sun. As we're looking back at the VCOS's accomplishments to this point, certainly the symposium has to be at or near the top in terms of projects of which we are most proud. On these pages, I've been asked to talk about the history of the symposium and how it all got started. I love history, and I believe we should remember it and learn from it, but normally I don't like to talk about it, as I always find it much more constructive to talk about the future. But I'll make an exception in this case.



The first thing you need to know is that the mission of the VCOS is all about education. It is our job to help train and educate the leaders and future leaders of the emergency services so they can create organizations that meet the needs of their communities now and in the years to come. That's what we focus our time on.

Years ago, I was attending a show in Florida, sitting around with Chief Fred Windisch and some guys from *Responder Magazine*. I always liked them because they were think-outside-the-box people. We started talking about how there was an educational gap that existed, and that turned into talks about hosting a conference for chief officers. The next year, in 1998, we welcomed about 75 volunteer and combination officers to the Tampa Hilton for the first-ever Symposium in the Sun. The rest is history.

Now, since the people putting this publication together won't let me get off that easy, there are a few more things I'll touch on. First, the idea of having a conference in Florida in November sounds pretty darn good, especially for us folks traveling in from cold-weather states. But let me tell you, for an unknown event, it wasn't an easy sell. Sure, the chief officers were anxious to travel down, but the people holding the purse strings were more than skeptical about sending people down for a "firefighting conference" in Florida in winter. But with each passing year, the symposium got a little better and more than proved its value.

We started alternating venues between Orlando and Clearwater Beach, but then we realized the whole Orlando scene was too much. There were attractions and distractions, and attendees who traveled down with their families weren't getting all they could out of the event. But then there was Clearwater Beach. Beautiful, quiet, isolated Clearwater Beach. We had the run of a gorgeous resort, and it was perfect. Everyone worked hard during business hours, but then when there was downtime, relaxation



was 10 steps away by the pool on the beach.

So, choosing to just keep it in Clearwater, we then had the setting down. What was 100 times more important to us, though, wasn't the 80-degree weather and palm trees; it was the meat of the conference. The speakers, the networking, the educational opportunities. That's where we poured all our efforts and resources. At the first Symposium, we didn't even have official speakers. We just had VCOS board members getting up and leading discussions. It was worthwhile, though, because we were able to interact with attendees and get some great discussions going. We shared our experiences and expertise, and they shared theirs. Seventeen years later, I'm proud to say that even though our audience has grown, the interactive part hasn't changed. In fact, it's only gotten better.

Over the years, our speakers have been a who's who from the fire service. I won't mention anyone by name because if I mention one I'd have to mention 50, but we've had former and soon-to-be IAFC presidents speak to us, we've had legendary personalities from the industry, up-and-coming leaders, leaders from other sections and organizations, and chiefs—practitioners—from the smallest volunteer departments all the way up to those who ran the nation's largest career departments. And in between we had professional motivational speakers, government officials, college professors, military officers and more. If someone had something of value to share that our members could take home and build with, we were interested. And we still are. Our goal is to provide a rich learning environment that is aimed toward the very specific needs of our attendees. The people who speak at the symposium are practitioners. Our students can relate to them. I was once at a show where they had a speaker from a big-city department talking to volunteers, and he was bragging about three-minute response times. Who cares? That's not what I do in my department. That's not something

"It sounds strange, but we should stop referring to ourselves as first responders. We're last responders. We have public education, smoke detectors, building codes. Everything fails in the fire protection system and then they call us"

—Alan Brunancini,
Fire Chief (ret.),
Phoenix FD

"This whole country is in a paradigm shift. We need to stop kidding ourselves. The people paying the bills—the taxpayers—are pissed. We all need to rethink what we've been doing all these years."

—Open Forum

"If you're thinking about trying to change the culture of your organization, you often have to change the culture of the entire area or region that you live in. And then you may also face the prospect of having to change the culture that is prevalent in the fire service throughout the United States."

—Chuck Burkell,
Executive Development
Program, FEMA/NFA

"Before risking anything, calculate the odds to determine if the potential gains or benefits are worth the possible cost of failure. That's the fundamental rule of risk taking."

—Greg Myers,
Managing Director,
Myers Solutions Group

"It's refreshing to have a chance to spend time here and see where the real issues are here in the fire service. When you hear 'Symposium in the Sun,' you think it's going to be more social and slack, but you come down here and you need to be ready to learn and participate in some robust discussions." —Dennis Rubin, Chief (ret.), Consultant, DL Rubin & Associates

"We really need to figure out a way to come up with a better funding mechanism. We can't be expected to keep doing more with less."

—Open Forum

"If we are going to lead, we must have vision. If we are going to have vision, we must be informed. Becoming informed takes place at gatherings such as this."

—Glenn Gaines, Deputy U.S. Fire Administrator

"When I was a frontline firefighter, no decision was made without going across the chief's desk. We can't do that anymore. There's just too much to do. I trust my people to make decisions on their own level. We trust them to take our \$300,000 apparatus and go save lives, don't we? We have to empower them to make critical decisions."

—David See, Chief (ret.), Salisbury (Md.) FD

"Sometimes being an optimist can be as damaging as being a pessimist. I like to look for the good stuff too, but you can't just ignore the facts if things are bad."

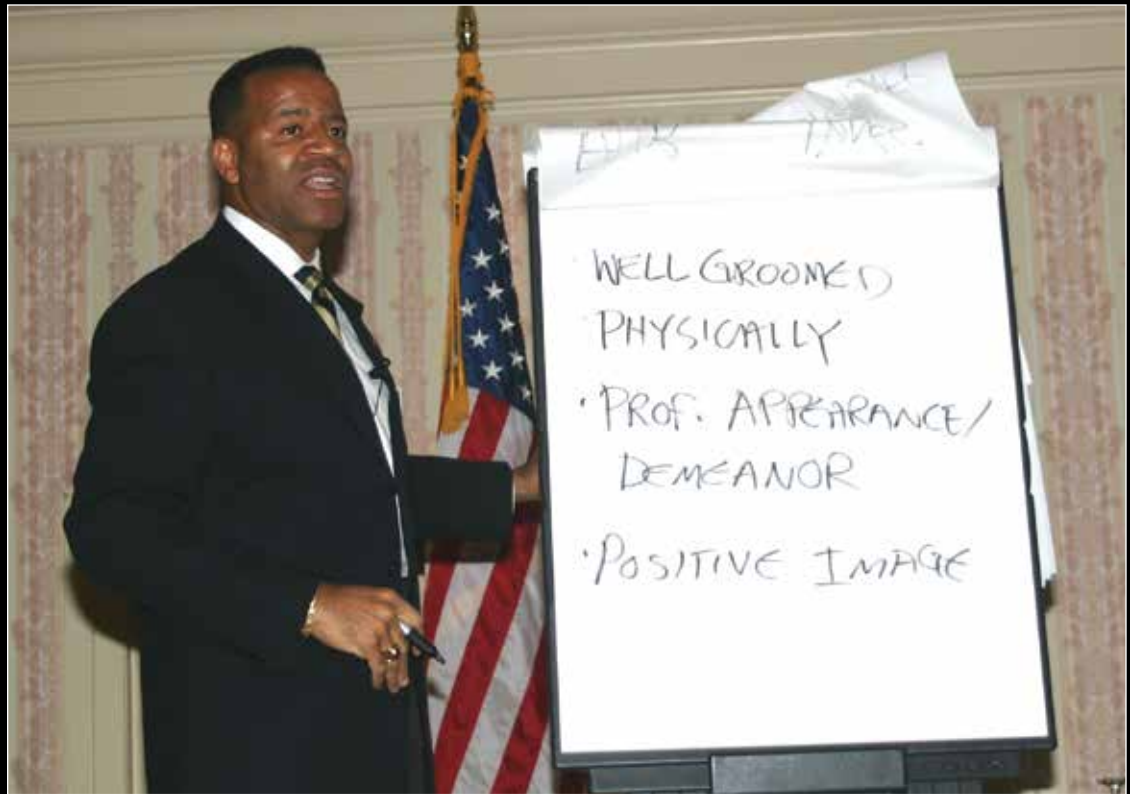
—Mike Morgan, Chief, Colorado River FR

"Why would firefighters without the right amount of staffing show up and try to put out a fire? Because that's what we train them to do. We train them to put the fire out. But we train in ways that are not realistic, so basically we're training to fail!"

—Dr. Rich Gasaway, Chief, Roseville (Minn.) FD

"I do not have all your answers, but what I do have is a lot of information that says things are different from what they used to be."

—Shane Ray, S.C. State Fire Marshal, NFSA Executive V.P.



anyone in the audience could do. Our presenters are just like our audience. As a matter of fact, just about every year I'm approached by someone from the audience who wants to present at the next symposium. I say "great" and have him or her go through the proper channels and submit a presentation. I can't tell you how many people we've brought on board that way.

And the end result speaks for itself. We recently had to switch from the resort in Clearwater Beach that we loved to a larger venue down the street. For years, we'd been artificially holding the number of attendees down to keep it intimate, but it was the right time to expand a little, and we sold out and had 535 people in attendance last year. We know that events like this have a shelf life and eventually run their course, but after 17 years, the Symposium in the Sun is bigger and better than ever, and there are no signs of that slowing down anytime soon.

The formula really couldn't be any simpler. We have quality presenters who are practitioners—who walk the walk—and then we have a great social aspect with the location and networking that is truly second to none. That part right there, the networking, may be the hidden secret. Nowhere else can you find networking opportunities like we offer with the symposium. Four full days surrounded by your peers, surrounded by people who are facing—or who have faced—the exact same circumstances, problems and challenges that are causing you to lose sleep at night.

Will you find one person who has all the answers you need? Probably not. But if you keep your ears open and network, odds are you'll find bits and pieces that help you puzzle together an answer that you can bring home to work for your individual situation. And once you shake hands with someone and share some meaningful dialogue, that person becomes a friend—a resource—for life. I learn by listening to those around me, I learn by reading, and I learn by attending conferences and shows, but I learn a lot more by picking up the phone and talking to people I've met along the way who share the same background, challenges and resources. And with each symposium, I have the opportunity to meet literally hundreds of new people who can fit that bill.

So, I'm sorry I don't have any dark secrets or magical insights to share about the creation of this event. We promise a good product and always deliver. And when we make money, we put it right back into the symposium or come up with a project or initiative that helps us reach more people. As long as we continue to meet the needs of our attendees, we feel confident that they'll keep coming back for more. Then once we get them here, we educate them the best we can, motivate them, help invigorate them so they can recharge their batteries and then send them back home, ready to share what they've learned and collaborate with others, and ready to make a difference within their own departments, communities and regions.



“People are generally happy with us as long as the fire is put out roughly that same day. Unless it’s their fire—then we can never do it fast enough, but the average person doesn’t understand when we’ve been successful.”

—Adam Thiel,
Virginia Deputy Secretary
of Veterans Affairs and
Homeland Security

“A lot of new recruits come in and ask what the minimum requirements are so they can ride a firetruck. You have to impress upon them the importance—and teach them what’s behind—the certification that they need to earn.”

—Shawn Stokes,
IAFC Assistant Director
of Programs and
Technology

“I tell people I’m not a firefighter anymore. I loved it, had fun riding on the truck, but that’s not what I do anymore.

I can’t think like a firefighter every day. I’m the chief; I need to think like an administrator.”

—I. David Daniels,
Executive Safety Director,
City of Atlanta

“When it comes to competency-based training in your department, you have to be committed to the process, make sure everyone follows the same rules, choose the NFPA standards you wish to address, write your own [job performance requirements] based on local needs, be realistic in setting your standards and always be fair!”

—Mike Weider,
Senior Publications Editor,
Oklahoma State University





Leaping to **FROG** and *Beyond*

By Chief Norvin Collins, Sauvie Island (Ore.) Fire District

One of the things the VCOS takes the most pride in is being aware of and responsive to its members' needs. For years, we watched chief officers of small and mid-sized departments struggle with similar issues. Frustratingly, help was available, but for most it remained out of reach. We all know the great work done by the National Fire Academy, and those of us fortunate enough to have attended classes there truly comprehend the enormity of that opportunity. But let's face it: If you're struggling just to keep the doors open, the time commitment and other factors associated with sending someone to Emmitsburg, Md.—however valuable the experience—are probably too prohibitive for the majority of departments.



The solution to this dilemma could not have been simpler (although the execution of the solution presented more hurdles and challenges than rolling up to a working house fire with no available water supply). If you can't bring people to the classroom, bring the classroom to the people. The VCOS enlisted the help of the U.S. Fire Administration and the National Emergency Training Center and in 1999 launched its 21st Century Leadership classes (renamed Beyond Hoses & Helmets [BH&H] in 2003). These classes—presented in eight-, 12- or 16-hour blocks—were designed for chief officers, directors and commissioners of organizations that are staffed by volunteer, part-time, paid on-call and/or career personnel. The classes present best practices and guidelines for effectively leading and managing volunteer departments, and they are led by trained instructors/practitioners who provide NFA-level instruction—that gets tailored to local and/or regional needs—at a fraction of the cost. Departments need only pay for the instructors' travel expenses and often split those costs by inviting neighboring departments to attend.

From the beginning, Pierce Manufacturing has been an integral partner in this endeavor, donating money to an endowment for the cause each time it sells an apparatus to a volunteer or combination agency to further help offset the costs involved with putting on these classes.

Finding New Pads


The concept behind BH&H proved to be so successful over the years (with more than 7,000 participants) that it has been copied and expanded several times over. First, BH&H was given in its entirety to the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs, where a nearly exact replica was successfully put into place, benefiting our neighbors to the north as much as it has here in the United States. Next, two similar courses were launched following the BH&H model. You and ISO explains what chief officers should know about the relationship between ISO and its community, including the ISO rating system,



classification program, myths, best practices and more. Leading the Transition from Volunteer to Combination (LTC) has been benefiting departments around the country that are transitioning from all-volunteer or all-career to some sort of combination system since it was launched in 2012.

The latest offering is called Fire Rescue Organizational Guidance for Volunteer Leaders and is better known as FROG. FROG is basically a graduate-level class that picks up where BH&H leaves off. This course is an intensive, two and a half days of hands-on education, where participants work together to develop solutions to common leadership challenges through scenarios and facilitated discussions. Topics include analyzing and understanding the fire department's people, processes and culture.

At the conclusion of the FROG course, as with all courses offered by the VCOS, participants will leave with practical guidance that is customized to their organization and can be immediately implemented.

Additional information on all of these courses is available at www.vcos.org/education. 

BH&H offers instruction on:

- Problem-solving
- Marketing
- Recruitment
- Retention
- Leadership
- Team building
- Training development
- Conflict resolution
- Principles of negotiation
- Verbal communications



“You might cut my budget. I might have to do more with less, but I took an oath to protect the people and property in my community. We’re the fire department, and there’s nothing you can do to keep me from helping our citizens.”

*—Eddie Buchanan,
Division Chief,
Hanover County (Va.) FD*



Taking it to the Hill

By Evan Davis,
IAFC staff

From the floors of Congress, the mysterious hallways of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and even the White House itself, the VCOS has been answering the call to help the fire service at the federal level since its inception 20 years ago. Throughout the past two decades, the VCOS has been one of the most active and effective IAFC sections in terms of getting results from Congress and the various presidential administrations. The VCOS's track record of success over that time spans a wide range of issues and includes a lengthy battle with the Department of Labor, taxation of incentives for volunteers, inclusion of all-volunteer firefighters and EMTs in the public safety officers' benefits program, and truly countless other issues.

Most recently, in 2013, the IRS began interpreting a provision of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) to mean that volunteer and combination fire departments would have to offer health insurance to their volunteer members. This potential requirement threatened the ability of many fire departments to continue recruiting and retaining personnel. Rather than sit on the sidelines, the VCOS's membership led the charge in explaining the significance of this issue to Congress and the administration. After more than a year of work and dozens of letters to the IRS and Congress, the IRS reinterpreted the Employer Shared Responsibility Provision to exempt volunteers in fire departments. While this solution sounds like a no-brainer, achieving it was nothing short of extraordinary. Many on Capitol Hill were doubtful of the chances for success on such a high-profile and controversial issue as the PPACA; however, the VCOS's passion

and perseverance enabled the victory.

Perhaps congressional members knew it was better to concede on this topic (that was the right thing to do anyway), rather than get into a long, drawn-out battle with an organization known for its unwavering endurance and steadfastness. That was a lesson learned several years ago, on a topic that was actually one of the first the VCOS addressed when it initially formed. For decades, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938 created confusion among departments with volunteers on staff, as local administrators and legal counsel were left to interpret whether certain individuals would be allowed to volunteer. Conflicting local and regional interpretations of how the law's provisions applied to firefighters were having a deep impact on volunteer fire departments, as everyone seemed to be doing something different.

It took more than 10 years, but eventually the persistence of the VCOS board and its members, in conjunction with the IAFC leadership and staff, paid off. At the center of the battle was the definition of a "volunteer firefighter." The VCOS and IAFC representatives worked with the U.S. Department of Labor to create that definition and clear up almost all the issues involving the law that were causing volunteer and combination departments angst. Culminating with a 72-page report titled *Managing Volunteer Firefighters for FLSA Compliance: A Guide for Fire Chiefs and Community Leaders* that the VCOS published, it was an emotionally charged topic with valid points on both sides and lots of gray areas, but in the end we came up solutions that we could all live with, which greatly improved the national atmosphere for volunteer firefighters.



“Homeland security starts right around the corner, at the local fire station.”


—Glenn Gaines,
Deputy U.S. Fire
Administrator

And while some initiatives involved significant planning and analysis, and years of fighting, others happened relatively quickly and organically. When the September 11 attacks occurred, the VCOS had its own “founding father,” John Buckman, serving as president of the IAFC. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, officials from numerous government agencies scrambled together and tried to come up with fixes—both quick and long term—to protect our nation in what was suddenly (to the average bystander) a new and dangerous world. Six items came out immediately, mainly focusing on terrorism and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. Chief Buckman looked at those six items and decided there needed to be one more, and, for the only time in his tenure, played the “presidential trump card.” He said the federal government *had* to fund grants so departments could hire salaried firefighters. This was perhaps an unusual move coming from someone who was known to be one of the main voices of an organization that starts with the word *volunteer*.

After initial resistance, on May 22, 2003, Chief Buckman’s mandate was signed into law, referred to as the SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) Grants, which today have pumped billions of dollars into the fire service to bolster staffing for struggling departments. The SAFER Grants provide funding directly to

departments to help increase the number of trained, “frontline” firefighters available to protect communities. In addition, the grants also help fund the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters, thus allowing small and medium-sized communities alike to be better staffed, trained and ready for unforeseen emergencies.

For these reasons and many others, the IAFC Government Relations Department has enjoyed working with the VCOS because of the strong sense of enthusiasm and involvement that reaches all members of the VCOS. Whether it’s a specific member of Congress who might need a nudge of support on a bill from his or her hometown fire chief, or an all-out push from the 2,500 or so VCOS members contacting their senators and representatives, the VCOS has always been at the ready. The secret to this successful advocacy is the VCOS’s ability to rally each and every member to answer the call for help.

In just 20 years, the VCOS has created and delivered many policy solutions that have helped address problems facing volunteer and combination fire departments. The Government Relations Department is looking forward to continuing this incredible partnership for another 20 years and seeing what other achievements and victories the VCOS can accomplish—on behalf of its members and the entire fire service. 

Coloring the Spectrum

By Division Chief Eddie Buchanan, Hanover (Va.) Fire & EMS

As a frequent attendee of (and presenter at) the VCOS Symposium in the Sun, one of my favorite quotes that I often hear during the opening ceremonies is the speaker saying, “I may not have all the answers, but together, we know a lot.” As someone who has spent his career promoting education and coercing collaboration, I certainly appreciate that sentiment.

In 2004, the VCOS produced an extremely important document titled *Preserving and Improving the Future of the Volunteer Fire Service*, which was designed to help emergency service leaders relate with elected officials in order to identify the needs and promote the critical mission of volunteer fire departments. While it was being worked on, it got dubbed *The Blue Ribbon Report*, and thus was born the whole colored-ribbon report repertoire for which the VCOS has become known. With the success of the first publication, it became clear our industry needed more reports—similar in content, tone and practicality—and thus more offerings came, with the first three colors naturally being red, white and blue.

The VCOS has produced five ribbon reports over the years—adding orange and silver to the rainbow—and I have had the privilege of being asked to help pen three of them. And although a few individual authors have been asked to participate on more than one project, it's never the same set of authors sitting around preaching one particular point of view. Each time such a group gathers, it is completely different: a different group with different interests, different backgrounds, different experiences and different reasons for contributing, all of which help to keep each new offering fresh and relevant.

Each time we've gone to write a report, we ask who within the VCOS's own inner circle knows the most about the particular topic. Then we ask who else we can reach out to in order to make a positive contribution. And we've proven we're not afraid to step out of the organization, or even our industry, in order to collaborate and bring forth the best information possible. We make sure the people writing the report don't just have a theoretical knowledge of the subject matter, but that they are practitioners who each bring a wide breadth of experience and knowledge, so that collectively we can approach each challenge and each solution (or solutions) from every possible angle. The authors, as well as the full report team that may be involved, understand that our goal each time is to study the problem at hand, draw on our own experiences, do research and reach out to other experts so that we may have as much useful information as possible. It is then our job to sort through that information, remove that which is not helpful, boil down what remains and present concise, easily understood, realistic and implementable options that can potentially help improve individual situations for as many departments as possible. We don't tell you how you *should* be doing things, but instead we present the facts, make you aware of potential pitfalls and then present a guide loaded with advice and best practices that can help you determine your own best solution.

The VCOS report teams enter each project with the goal of improving our nation's emergency service organizations. We try to create new—and better—tools for your toolbox. Please go online and download any of our previous offerings, or contact us and let us know if you see a need for a new report.

“The VCOS ribbon reports are outstanding, helpful handbooks that people use often. They are key resources that volunteer and combination department chiefs and officers can turn to for answers to some difficult questions.”

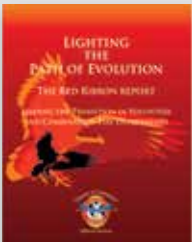
—Mark Light, IAFC Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director



**The Blue Ribbon Report
Preserving and Improving the
Future of the Volunteer Fire Service**

In 2004, the VCOS released the document that has served as a blueprint for improving the volunteer fire service that is essential to our nation—a service that too often finds itself underfunded

and ill-equipped. America's volunteer fire service has faithfully served our nation for more than 300 years, protecting our communities with dedication and enthusiasm as we save local communities more than \$40 billion per year. Yet lack of cohesive leadership nationally and fragmented support locally has created countless superfluous challenges. This report outlines specific recommendations to generate support and continuity on the local, state and federal levels in order to help create the necessary atmosphere of stability that will allow volunteer emergency services departments to meet the new expectations and challenges of the 21st century.



**The Red Ribbon Report
Leading the Transition in
Volunteer and Combination
Fire Departments**

A natural evolution for a volunteer department is the growth in services and added responsibilities as the demographics of the community change.

When the system develops problems, people generally know about them long before they are willing to admit that they need serious attention. For emergency services managers and local government leaders, it is critical that they recognize the signs of problems ahead and prepare for change before it is forced on them by external circumstances. Released in 2005, the goal of this report was to call attention to some of the strategies and options available to fire service and community leaders who are looking to do just that.



**The White Ribbon Report
Managing the Business of the
Fire Department**

Published in 2006, this report was a response to changes within the American fire and rescue service that have created new needs and challenges to leaders on the local

level. The fire chief, generally, is the one mostly held accountable and responsible by the public for mistakes, poor performance or slow response times. Leaders, we know, must make things happen. This report offers creative solutions and concepts on the management and operation of small to medium-sized fire departments that are staffed with volunteers.



**The Orange Ribbon Report
Leading and Managing EMS in
Volunteer and Combination Fire
Departments**

The most common long-term challenges most volunteer and combination fire departments face—recruitment and retention, funding, increased service demands—aren't going away. One popular option has become the merger of services and/or agencies, such as merging fire and EMS departments to form a full-service organization. This resource—a joint venture with the IAFC's Emergency Medical Services Section, published in 2008—was developed to help departments successfully navigate through the complex but rewarding process of integrating EMS and fire suppression.



**The Silver Ribbon Report
Opening New Doors: Guidelines
and Best Practices for a Successful
Youth Fire Service Program**

Most emergency response departments are eager to engage young people, especially those who indicate they are interested in being of service. The VCOS, however, recognized that there was no national-level guidance on how to effectively form and operate such youth programs. Stepping outside the fire service and learning from a national youth organization, this report, published in 2009, delivered a comprehensive list of best practices for mentoring youth in the fire and emergency services, along with a step-by-step guide for initiating a youth program, as well as tips for improving existing programs.

Emergency service departments can access and download these documents free of charge at www.vcos.org.

The VISION from the *Summit*

By Chief Randy Parr, Tomball (Texas) FD

For decades, leaders in the emergency sector observed and bemoaned the growing sets of problems that are common to virtually all departments from coast to coast, but whose solutions are unique and individualized. Parallel to this, the VCOS had been growing in size and stature for the last 20 years, solidifying its financial base and expanding its ability to impact and influence the industry. VCOS leaders, never content to rest on their laurels or sit idly by, for years wanted to host a new, national event that would have teeth—one that would set goals, establish deadlines and make an actual impact on the industry.

Year after year, they held off, though, not wanting to imitate so many well-intentioned ventures that hit with a splash but then went nowhere.

After much deliberating, planning and input, the VCOS finally put the wheels in motion for what it hoped would be an industry-changing event, hosting its National Summit in March 2011 in Washington, D.C. Invited were 150 of the industry's most dynamic leaders, a carefully designed mix of the "old guard," ripe with experience and knowledge, and the up-and-coming leaders, enthusiastic and ready to think outside the box.

Leading up to the Summit, the challenges and

problems most often identified in the industry were broken down, categorized and then turned into challenge statements—one for each workgroup to spend the entire event addressing. Each group examined its statement and identified specific initiatives that would deal with each challenge, and then developed a list of critical tasks that would accompany those initiatives, as well as a list of tangible outcomes that would measure the progress being made against each problem. By the end, participants were spent, but the anticipation was palpable.

Following the Summit, various workgroups and committees worked hard to keep the momentum going, taking the information and findings gleaned from the Summit groups, organizing them and refining them into attainable and tangible action items. Group leaders were assigned and tasked with keeping group members invested, reaching out to others with pertinent information and compiling volumes of protocols and best practices.

The continuation and compilation of all that work became known as the VISION (the VCOS International Strategic Initiative Online Network) Project, which has come to focus on areas of organizational management that were identified as obstacles to creating and sustaining viable emergency response programs in order to



“If you expect people to change, how can you elicit their support unless you are leading by example? Gandhi said, ‘Be the change you wish to see.’”

—Chuck Burkell,
FEMA/NFA

develop long-term strategic methods that address the critical challenges faced by emergency service organizations. And we want to thank Emergency Services Consulting International, and its president, Jack Snook, for lending its facility and expertise in developing the strategic plan that became the framework of each challenge and issue.

The VISION Project isn't about all the sexy stuff; it's about all the behind-the-scenes things that need to happen to carry our emergency services sector forward. It's our future, and if we don't do the hard work right now, we will be forever facing the same problems. We have more than 30,000 emergency service organizations in the United States, and more than 92 percent of them rely on a volunteer component. Volunteers are the backbone of the emergency services sector. Everyone understands this, which is why we've been able to garner the support of every major fire service organization across the board. We're also working closely with each of the IAFC's divisions to eliminate geographical biases and ensure this project is meaningful to everyone regardless of where they are located. This project is applicable to everyone—including career departments—and has a hometown feel that makes it pertinent to each and every department, so it can be seamlessly implemented at the local level.

As we continue this project, we hope to have taken mountains of best-practice models from around the country and boiled down the information so we can have it available on a readily accessible, easy-to-use website that will serve as a central repository. The information contained on the site will be continuously reviewed and updated as new ideas are brought forth from the leadership in emergency response.

It certainly hasn't been easy to this point, and we don't foresee that changing anytime soon, but the prize at the end we have our collective eye on is a vastly improved emergency services sector: One that is safer for its members and more efficient for its customers. One that advances technology and honors tradition. One that is fiscally responsible and politically active. One that is fully trained and professionally staffed regardless of compensation. One that rejects infighting and works together for the betterment of all.

The VCOS wasn't about to throw another tired event into an already overcrowded circuit. And it didn't. The 2011 National Summit produced the framework to assist communities and emergency service leaders in creating and maintaining dynamic organizations, and the VISION Project is an ever-evolving tool that needs to be championed and properly utilized.

VISION Project Challenges

- Challenge 1:** Capabilities and Competencies
- Challenge 2:** Community Relations
- Challenge 3:** Recruitment
- Challenge 4:** Retention of Organizational Members
- Challenge 5:** Organizational Structure, Strategic and Financial Planning
- Challenge 6:** Legislation and Regulations
- Challenge 7:** Reputation Management
- Challenge 8:** Fire-based Emergency Medical Services

For more, visit www.vcos.org/vision.

SYNCING UP

By Chief J. Dan Eggleston, Albemarle County (Va.) FR

Several years ago at the Symposium in the Sun, one of the topics addressed some of the new challenges associated with recruiting and received several unimpressed grunts and eye-rolls as the crowd was informed that technology wasn't going away, and that if chief officers wanted to successfully tap into the younger generations, it was they, the leadership, who were going to have to change their ways.



“Laptops, cellphones, texting, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter ...,” we were told. “That’s just how it is for this generation. That’s all they know. Those things are no more ‘technology’ for them than a rotary-dial telephone was for us growing up.”

Point taken. Thankfully, the IAFC recognized that fact long ago and invested the resources needed to stay on the front end of this never-ending technological trek. And the VCOS, specifically, has focused sizable efforts in not only commissioning speakers who talk about bridging the technology gap, but in leading by example as well. The VCOS proudly launched its own website in the late 1990s and has been updating, populating, tweaking and archiving ever since. In fact, an influx of young talent on the VCOS board of directors has helped the section’s online presence grow exponentially in just the last few years. We even have an app now!

If you visit www.vcos.org, you will currently find educational opportunities that include e-learning classes, webinars and podcasts; sample SOPs/SOGs regarding administrative policies, standards of cover, LODD guidelines and operational guidelines; daily breaking news from the industry; full-blown ribbon reports covering a wide range of topics; past newsletters; proven management practice examples; and more.


But all that is just the beginning, and where we’re going is anybody’s guess. And thanks to the constant influx of smart, innovative and creative talent that is our membership, we’re confident that we’ll be able to adapt and perform with the best of them. In fact, right now we’re exploring the idea of creating something similar to the TED Talks (standing for Technology, Entertainment, Design—a collection

of speeches/conferences/talks that are available online, covering hundreds of topics, and have been viewed by 50 million people).

The VCOS is also incredibly active on social media through Facebook and Twitter and is the first and only IAFC section to have its own discussion forum on the IAFC’s KnowledgeNet.

We realize that if the VCOS is truly going to impact the volunteer/combo service, we’ve got to look at cutting-edge technology to deliver our message and training. Sometimes we have to be somewhat controversial and buck the normal way of doing things.

The VCOS has to be creative in getting the word out on training leaders for emergency services management. We have to stretch their minds, challenge fire chiefs to go beyond the status quo.

And we have the leaders—we have the members—to do just that. 



“Just wanted to let you know how great the VCOS website is for resources for our department. The resources are second to none and have been my go-to site for the information we need to become a best-practices fire department. Thanks for all the VCOS’s hard work.”

**—Tony L. Watson,
Fire Chief, City
of Pigeon Forge
(Tenn.) FD**

Opportunities Galore

In addition to all the digital stuff you can look through and download on the VCOS website, you’ll also find numerous other resources.

The VCOS awards two \$1,500 scholarships to attend Fire-Rescue International each year, a program developed to promote leadership through learning among volunteer and combination officers. It also awards two \$1,500 scholarships to attend Symposium in the Sun. These VCOS-sponsored scholarship programs were developed to assist chief officers from volunteer and combination departments that lack the financial resources to offer professional development to their leaders.

In addition to the scholarships awarded by the VCOS, one of our great, generous friends, Dr. Richard B. Gasaway, offers the Emerging Leader scholarship through the Gasaway Consulting Group, awarding \$1,500 to assist with registration and travel expenses for the Symposium in the Sun.

Turning the Page

By Janet Wilmoth, former Editorial Director, *Fire Chief Magazine*

Buffaloes: That's the name the new full-time firefighters used to call the volunteer firefighters at my dad's fire department. I'm not sure if it was because they would soon be extinct or because they weren't nimble and couldn't easily change directions.

The transition from an all-volunteer to combination fire department was not as smooth as the new, paid fire chief had hoped, but it was as bad as the volunteers predicted. Even with many of the new career firefighters coming from the ranks of the volunteers, it was still a rocky transition. "Ours" versus "theirs" and "new rules" versus "few rules" were the basis for just some of the conflicts. There certainly was a good share of "young" versus "old" conflicts too.

I've always had a special place in my heart for volunteer departments. Maybe because I saw the passion for helping others that my dad and my brothers had. I saw the time commitment required from volunteers for training, raising money for equipment and fighting fires until morning—and then going to their day jobs. I also had the opportunity to help start the fire department's women's auxiliary and make coffee for middle-of-the-night fires or meals after the Fourth of July parade.

The nation has changed a lot in the 50 years since my dad was a volunteer firefighter. Technology and electronics promised time savings, but, in fact, have left many with less time. The economy demands two-income families; fathers are more involved in raising kids; and new hazards and responsibilities demand more education, training and certification of firefighters.

The International Association of Fire Chiefs' Volunteer Chief Officers Section was formed in 1994 to provide much-needed support to the unique and changing role of volunteer fire chiefs. Subsequently, the name was changed to the Volunteer & Combination Officers Section to adapt to the changing role of fire departments in transition.

In 1996, *Fire Chief Magazine* created the Chief of the Year Awards, naming one career and one volunteer chief to recognize the distinct roles of career and volunteer fire chiefs. Chief John Buckman, of the German Township (Ind.) Fire Department, and first section chair of the VCOS, was the first Volunteer Fire Chief of the Year. Since then, a succession of 18 volunteer/combination chiefs have been recognized.



Over the years, I have watched the VCOS grow and secure support for many of its educational programs through partnerships, particularly with Pierce Manufacturing, a leader in fire and emergency apparatus. Pierce donated \$100 for every truck it sold to a volunteer or combination department in order to support the VCOS's Beyond Hoses & Helmets leadership training programs. The VCOS represents all that is good about volunteerism in America—commitment and dedication to helping others, with no expectations or fanfare.

With each Symposium in the Sun I attend, I am continually blown away by the straightforward, hard-hitting programs. With vendors at tabletop displays readily available to answer questions, and a unique selection of programs on the latest trends and updates, the entire conference consists of packed rooms and riveting presenters. Most of the attendees are there on their own dime, and it's money invested with results. I have never hesitated to tell volunteer fire chiefs that if they can afford only one fire event, the Symposium in the Sun is the one to attend.

Perhaps the most impressive part of the conference is that on Saturday night, instead of bar

hopping, virtually all the attendees gather around tables for an informal sharing of ideas, problems and talk. It's not unlike a massive "kitchen table" discussion that you don't want to end.

The VCOS works because there are no egos involved. It is the best of volunteers and combination departments investing the time to help make the fire and emergency services better across the country.

I think the VCOS has done an amazing job of working—*volunteering!*—to bring professionalism through education and networking to the thousands of small and medium-sized fire departments that are dedicated to serving their communities the best they possibly can.

By the way, last week, I read an article about a group in Illinois that is bringing buffaloes back to newly developed prairie lands in the western part of that state. The article detailed the value and contribution of these fine animals that once dominated the American Plains and made me believe the value of buffaloes is being recognized and, rightly so, restored.

Volunteers are a rich part of our American heritage. Thank you, VCOS, for 20 years of enriching the fire and emergency services in America.



"I feel like if we could get the instructors to get the company officers to change the conversations at the kitchen tables, we could make some progress."

—Shane Ray, S.C.
State Fire Marshal,
NFSA Executive V.P.



Handing Out the Hardware

By Chief Fred Windisch, Ponderosa (Texas) FD

Years ago, when I was rising through the ranks, a friend told me to keep a running list of my accomplishments and to be proud of them, but not to expect anyone to thank me for what I'd done. Compliments, as we know, tend not to run uphill, so if you're in charge . . .


Well, I don't think any of us got into the business for accolades, fame or fortune. We, of course, got involved because riding a rig is fun, and when we were young we looked damn good in that uniform. Some of us still do.

We've all heard the expression that it's lonely at the top, and being in charge means that you often have to make decisions—the best decisions possible using the information available—but, unfortunately, generally the only time we get feedback on those decisions is when they don't turn out as well as we hoped. As I led with above, don't expect a lot of thanks. As a matter of fact, a few years ago at the Symposium in the Sun, Howard Cross, who has been teaching at the National Fire Academy since 1987, summed it up pretty well when he said, "It's in our nature to do the actions and let others take the glory."

That's not how it should be, though. In fact, the VCOS leadership has always strongly believed that recognition for excellence is supremely important. Such recognition both rewards those doing an outstanding job and raises the performance standards for everyone

else. And that's what the VCOS is all about. As such, we take time out of our program every year at the symposium to recognize some of the folks out there who are doing it the right way, pushing the envelope and/or leading by example. It started off as wanting to basically do a tip of the cap, but then some of our great friends and supporters got involved, and soon we had fancy hardware and scholarships being handed out, and the rest is history.

As with anything the VCOS involves itself with, we will only associate ourselves with something that is great and meaningful, and I'm proud to say that everyone who has been involved with the awards—as far as creating them, naming them, defining them, awarding them and receiving them—has done so with dignity and class, and has been worthy of being involved with such prestigious honors. And as proud as these men, women and departments are to be receiving these awards, the VCOS is even more proud to be represented by such impressive people.

To everyone who has received a VCOS-associated award in the past, I once again say congratulations. And for those of you who have been busting your butts to do things the right way and improve your circumstances and surroundings, I encourage you to visit our website and learn more about applying for some of these awards. 



“As leaders, we make a choice as to whether to grow or stay status quo.”
—Vickie Pritchett, National Fire Sprinkler Association

Through the generous support of several VCOS sponsors, specific awards are presented to deserving individuals and organizations at the symposium each year. Those awards are:

The Chairman’s Award

Presented to an individual and/or organization who has demonstrated extraordinary accomplishment toward both the VCOS and the entire fire service.

- 2007 – **Mike Macdonald**, *National Fire & Rescue*
- 2008 – **Bill Jenaway**, King of Prussia (Pa.), CFSI
- 2009 – **Bill Webb**, CFSI
- 2010 – **Joelle Fishkin**, IAFC
- 2011 – **Janet Wilmoth**, *Fire Chief Magazine*
- 2012 – **Ron Siarnicki**, NFFF
- 2013 – **Larry Curl**, Wayne Township (Ind.) FD
- 2014 – **Pierce Manufacturing**

John M. Buckman III Leadership Award

Sponsored by Provident Insurance, this award is named for the VCOS’s first chair and founding father and is presented to an agency leader who demonstrates the highest qualities of leadership and organization.

- 2007 – **Jeff Cash**, Cherryville (N.C.) FD
- 2008 – **David L. Stokes Sr.**, Anne Arundel County (Md.) FD
- 2009 – **Randall Parr**, Tomball (Texas) FD
- 2010 – **John E. Bales**, Golden (Colo.) FD
- 2011 – **Christopher Jones**, Mount Carmel (Tenn.) FD
- 2012 – **Christopher Barron**, Manchaca (Texas) Fire/Rescue
- 2013 – **Charles Addington**, Wolfforth (Texas) Fire & EMS
- 2014 – **Mike Morgan**, Colorado River Fire Rescue

Vehicle Safe Operations Initiative Achievement Award

Sponsored by VFIS, this award is presented to an organization that demonstrates the ability to operate emergency response vehicles safely and efficiently through a systemwide program using new, unique and best practices.

- 2007 – **Staunton (Ill.) FPD**
- 2008 – **Wethersfield (Conn.) FD**
- 2009 – **King Township (Ontario, Canada) FD**
- 2010 – **DuBoistown (Pa.) FD**
- 2011 – **Ponderosa (Texas) VFD**
- 2012 – **Coventry (Conn.) FD**
- 2013 – **Oshtemo Township (Mich.) FD**
- 2014 – **Rineyville (Ky.) VFD**

Recruitment and Retention Award

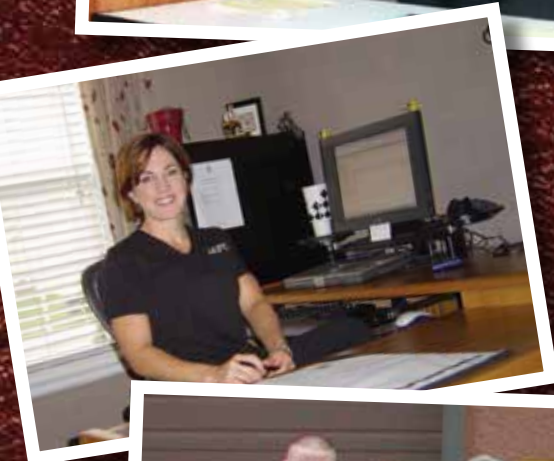
Sponsored by VFIS, this award is presented to an organization that develops and practices a thorough and well-rounded program of recruiting and retaining members.

- 2008 – **Golden (Colo.) FD**
- 2009 – **Worthington (Ky.) FR**
- 2010 – **Montgomery County (Md.) VFR**
- 2011 – **Manchaca (Texas) Volunteer FD**
- 2012 – **Manlius (N.Y.) FD**
- 2013 – **Abingdon (Md.) FC**
- 2014 – **Seymour (Tenn.) VFD**

Training Officer Award

Sponsored by Target Solutions, this award is presented to an individual training officer who has demonstrated unique abilities to create a training program that stimulates learning and safety in compliance with agency- and industry-adopted standards.

- 2011 – **Sheri R. Bemis**, Oxford (Mass.) Fire-EMS
- 2014 – **Chip Everertt**, Oshtemo (Mich.) FD



"Cloning successful leaders from history will not ensure successful leaders in the future. Our focus in mentoring should be to break out the full potential of our protégés and to maximize their strengths, not cloning ourselves."
—Kelvin Cochran, Chief, Atlanta FRD





All-Time Roll Call for VCOS LEADERSHIP

Chairs

John Buckman (1994–1997)
Fred Windisch (1997–1999)
Pete McMahon (1999–2000)
Mike Chiamonte (2000–2002)
Larry Curl (2002–2005)
Tim Wall (2005–present)

Vice Chairs

Billy Goldfeder (1994–1995)
Fred Windisch (1995–1996)
Garry Scott (1996–1997)
Pete McMahon (1997–1999)
Tim Wall (1999–2005)
Steve Miller (2005–2008)
Dave Fulmer (2008–2010, 2011–2013)
Brett Waters (2010–2011)
Jim Wilson (2013–2014)
Shane Crutcher (2014–present)

Secretary/Treasurers

Robert Bettenhausen (1994–2008)
Joe Florentino (2008–2012)
Fred Windisch (2012–present)

International Directors

John Buckman (1996–1999)
Fred Windisch (1999–2010)
Shane Ray (2010–2013)
Dan Eggleston (2013–present)

At-Large Board/Officers

Edward Arrants (1995–1996, 1998–1999)
Eddie Buchanan (2003–2005)
Jason Catrambone (2014–present)
Mike Chiamonte (1994–2003)
Norvin Collins (2014–present)
Alan Corner (1997–1999)
Fred Crosby (2010–2013)
Shane Crutcher (2013–present)
Larry Curl (1996–1998, 2001–2008)
Dan Eggleston (2008–present)
Joe Florentino (2004–2012)
Charles Flynn (2014–present)
Neil Good (1994–1997)
John Heath (2001–2004)
Kyle Ienn (2011–2012)
Thomas Kuntz (2001–2004)
Randy Larson (2013–present)

John Leahy (2001–2008)
Mike Lee (2007–2011)
Ted Lowden (2012–2014)
Ed Mann (2005–2007)
Pete McMahon (1995–2002)
Steve Miller (2002–2011)
Frank Pocica (1994–1995)
Gary Scott (1994–2002)
James Seavey (2012–present)
Dave See (2007–2010, 2011–2012)
Byron Stahla (1997–1999)
Mike Vaughn (2012–present)
Tim Wall (1994–present)
Brett Waters (2004–2011)
Jim Wilson (2002–2007, 2008–2014)
Fred Windisch (1994–present)

IAFC Staff Liaisons

Jennifer Schottke (1994–1995)
Tiffany Royce (1995–1996)
Sacha Dick (1996–2002)
Amber Wells (2003–2004)
Joelle Fishkin (2005–2014)
Kelly Ameen (2014–present)

VCOS Mission

To provide chiefs and chief officers who manage volunteers within a volunteer or combination fire, rescue or EMS delivery system with information, education, services and representation to enhance their professionalism.

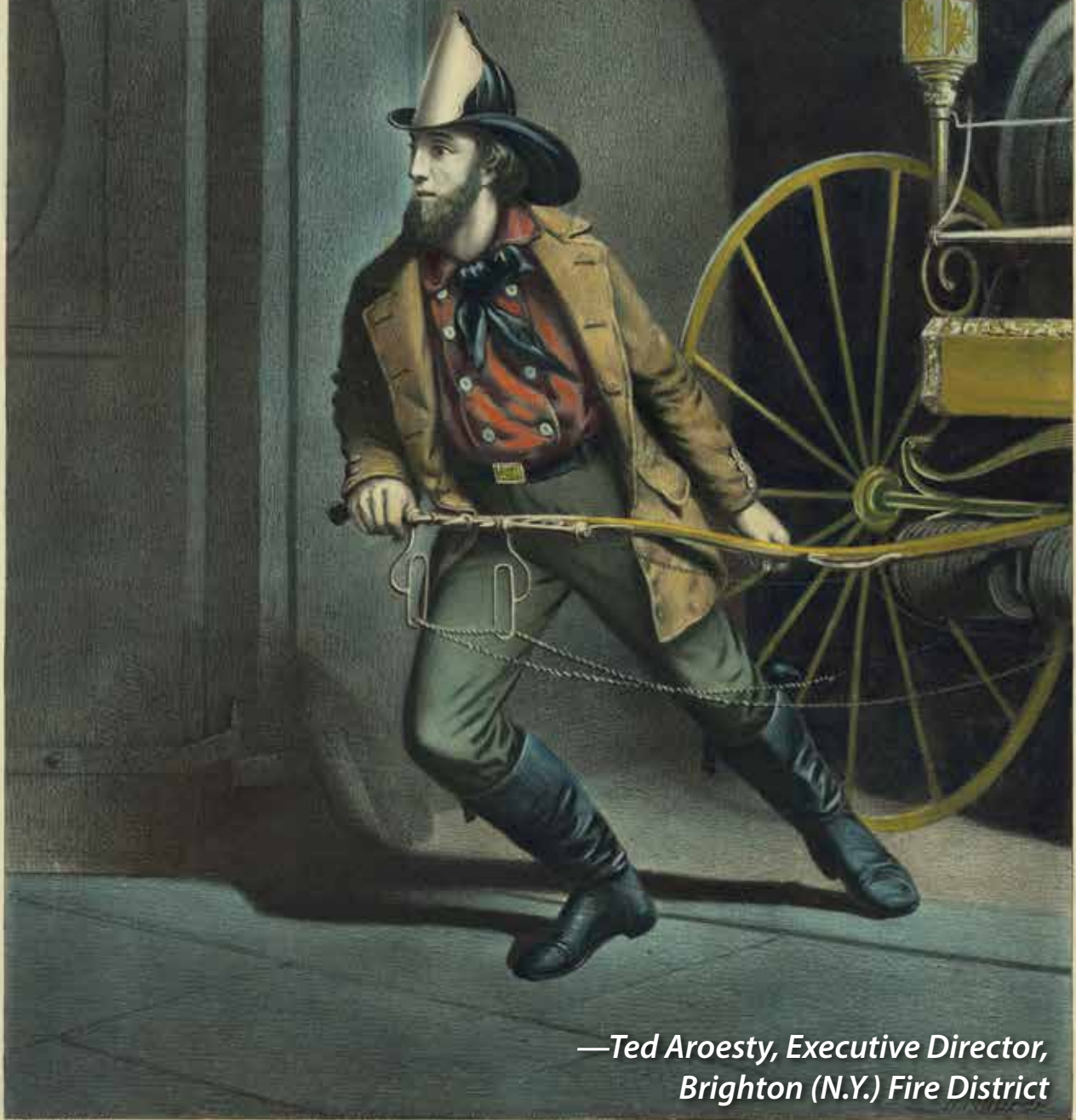
VCOS Vision

To represent the interests of all volunteer and combination fire/rescue/EMS agencies. We will be a dynamic organization, characterized by our integrity, customer focus and membership development, with value placed on people and the superior utilization of technology. We will excel by creating educational programs through unrivaled networking and by helping VCOS members further their success and reach their potential.



The information above was gathered to the best of our ability with the resources we have available. If you see a mistake or omission, contact the VCOS through its website.

"A career firefighter gets paid for what he does, while a volunteer doesn't. When a call comes in the middle of the night, a career firefighter has to get up, while a volunteer can make a choice not to answer the call. Don't pretend there aren't differences; celebrate them."



*—Ted Aroesty, Executive Director,
Brighton (N.Y.) Fire District*

THE AMERICAN FIREMAN.
Always Ready.

The Volunteer Firefighters'

Bill of Rights

As a volunteer firefighter, you have the right to:

- 1. An environment in which the volunteer is treated as a professional and as a valued asset—not just free labor*
- 2. Receive respect, recognition and reward for attitude and performance*
- 3. Know as much as possible about the organization, policies, people and programs*
- 4. Sound guidance, supervision and direction, with a job description clearly defined*
- 5. Suitable assignments according to your abilities, knowledge, location, experience and desires*
- 6. Opportunities for participation, development, advancement and varied experiences*
- 7. Quality training commensurate with agency, local, county, state and national standards and appropriate to your assignment*
- 8. Be heard and participate in planning*
- 9. Receive periodic evaluations and feedback*
- 10. Frequent expressions of appreciation from other volunteers and the community*

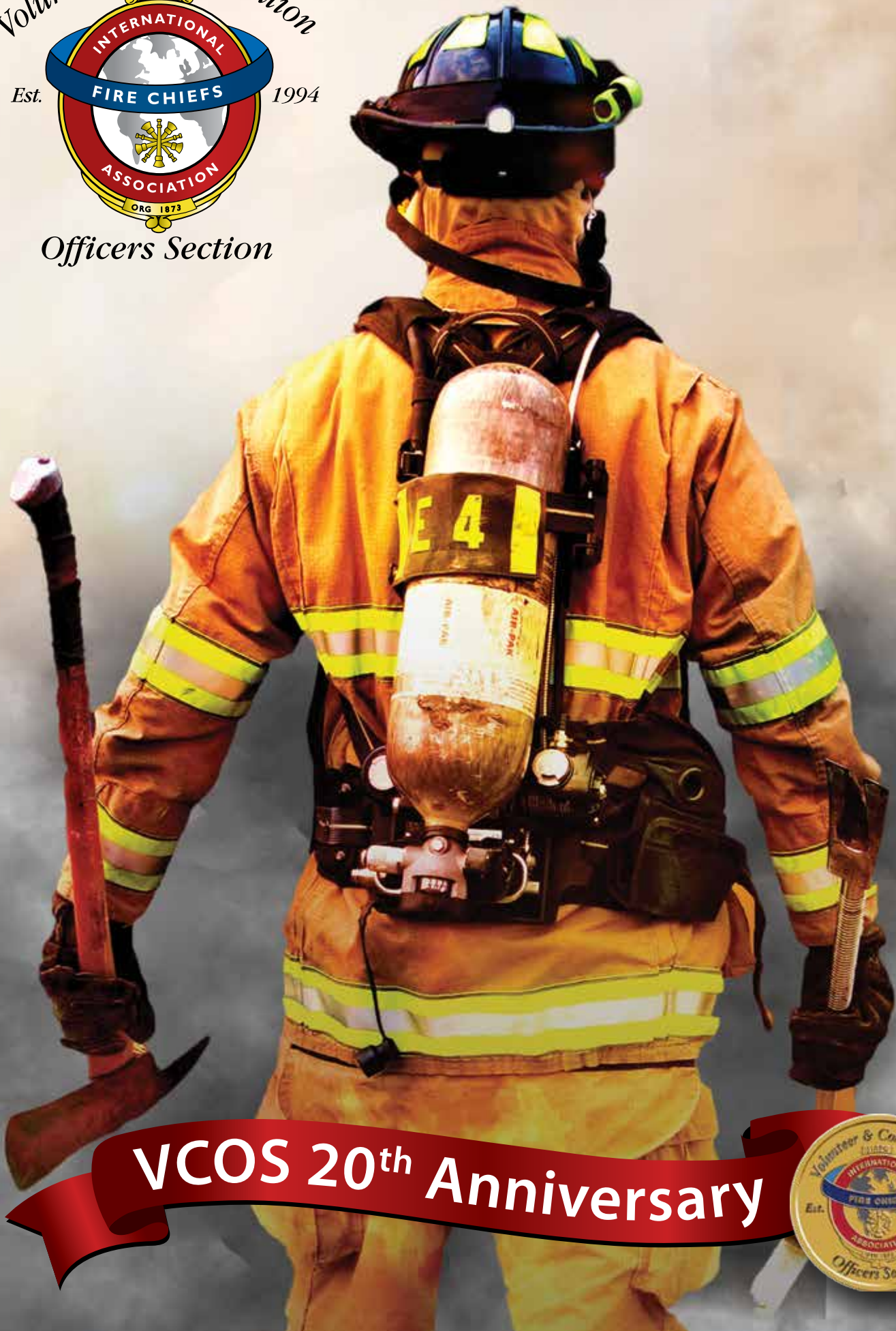


By Chief John R. Leahy Jr., 2003

Volunteer & Combination



Officers Section



VCOS 20th Anniversary

