



# VCOS VCOS NEWS

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

Winter 2017–2018

## CHAIR'S CORNER

### Succession Planning to Optimize Success

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

Once again, the VCOS put on an incredible Symposium in the Sun in November 2017. It was another sold-out event with 646 registrants, 51 exhibitors and 32 speakers and staff. Our most sincere thanks to all for coming! This particular Symposium had a special meaning for us as we dedicated it to Chief Alan Brunacini, Ret., a great man within the industry who passed away the month before the conference. Chief Brunacini made a number of appearances at the Symposium over the years. He was a great friend to VCOS and to the fire service and his wisdom and friendship will be sorely missed.

Those of you who couldn't make it to Clearwater Beach should make plans to attend Symposium in the West in Phoenix (May 3-5). The theme is "If not You, then Who? If not Now, then When?" The main topics will be Motivating Self-Growth, Leading the Team, and Recruitment & Retention. Keep an eye on our website to read about a brand-new scholarship which will be offered to two conference attendees.

I want to congratulate all the award winners and the scholarship winners who were honored for their achievements at the Symposium. As you may know, VCOS picks two deserving recipients for our \$1500 Symposium scholarships every year. What you don't know is the small number

*See 'Chair's Corner' on p. 6*

### Feeling Blessed to Pass the Torch

*Chief James Grady III, Ret.*

The American workforce is in the midst of a transition (some call it a crisis) as baby boomers—those born between 1946 and 1964—continue to retire at the unprecedented pace of 10,000 per day. Not only is the fire service not immune from this trend, but given the demographics, culture, and traditions that exist, we might be at even greater risk. Tomorrow's fire service leaders will not only be handling the routine needs of their department and dealing with an ever-changing industry but they'll also have to figure out how to replace their departing officers and how to pass on their vast depths of knowledge, experience, and wisdom across multiple levels of leadership before it is lost to retirement.

That's why we, the leaders whose careers are winding down, must prepare in advance to pass the torch. We have an entire generation of firefighters watching to see what happens next.

After more than 40 years of combined service, I recently retired as chief of the Frankfort (Ill.) Fire Protection District, and I'm proud to say the transition was successful beyond my expectations. Now, there were formal processes for succession planning that we had implemented over the last few years, but successful succession planning actually begins the first day you or anyone else walks into the fire department. In my career, I was fortunate to have had great bosses. They didn't micromanage. They taught, set expectations, and let us run with things. And that's what I tried to do when it was my turn to be the boss.

When you first take over as chief, you feel like you have

*See 'Feeling Blessed' on p. 10*

### VCOS 2018 Election

The deadline this year to put your name in as a candidate for the board of directors is March 3.

The election will include three seats for at-large board members with 3-year terms through 2021. Voting will be open on May 10 and ballots will be sent via email in conjunction with the IAFC election.

The VCOS website will be updated with all current election information. For specific questions, contact the Election Committee chair, Chief Joe Florentino, at [jflorentino@littleelm.org](mailto:jflorentino@littleelm.org).

# Training As If Your Life Depended On It!

By Chief Ed Rush, Hartsdale (N.Y.) Fire District, VCOS Board Member

“Let no man’s ghost return to say his training let him down.” These words appear on signs at many fire academy entrances and classroom walls. They are words to live by, literally. That simple phrase highlights the importance of training in the fire service. Career or volunteer, it doesn’t matter. The public and all our fellow firefighters are relying on us being 100% proficient, 100% of the time. The only way that happens is through training – every day, every shift, whenever and however you can. That is why we will be starting a regular training column in all our VCOS newsletters.

This initial column will look at more general ideas for supplying successful training for volunteer and combination fire departments. Future editions will focus on more specific programs and drill ideas that you can bring directly to your department. We hope that this feature will be interactive. We want to hear from our VCOS members about the ideas that are working for you. What have you been able to do to bring successful training to your volunteer or combination department? We would like you to write our next column. If you are interested, e-mail me at [erush@hartsdalefire.org](mailto:erush@hartsdalefire.org).

I wrote an article recently about the need to bring fun back to the firehouse. We are asking people to give up their time to do something that could potentially be harmful to their physical and mental health, and we are not paying them anything for it. One of the more important ways to bring back the fun is to make the training more enjoyable. Our firefighters must want to come to the station to participate, not look at it as a chore. Look at the demographics of your membership and see what they enjoy. Do you have a lot of the X-box generation? Incorporate more videos and gaming into your training. Do you have a lot of former athletes? Make your drills a little more competitive. Maybe get some local merchants to donate some gift certificates and hand out prizes to the winners. Are many of your members married, with kids? Invite the families to some of these competitive drills and let them observe, and maybe even judge. Of course, it can’t all be videos and games. We must practice the basics regularly: stretching lines, doing searches, getting dirty doing the hands-on stuff. Hopefully, if you are like me, that is the fun stuff.

Time is everyone’s most precious commodity. All our volunteers are very busy with work, family, and other commitments competing with the fire department for their time. Training should be done as efficiently as possible, so that our members do not feel their time is being wasted. Have a plan and stick to it when you plan your training. Be prepared, start on time, set a time limit for your drills and finish on time. Another way to best utilize your volunteers’ time is to combine training with other necessary firehouse functions. If you need to hang Christmas decorations or wash

windows – make it a ladder drill. If you need to wash down the parking lot – that’s a pump and hose line drill. If you are building a new storage closet – that’s small tools and building construction familiarization.

If you are a combination fire department, let the career and volunteer staff train together. It will help promote camaraderie, and you can use each other’s expertise to further everyone’s knowledge. If you have a firefighter who is an auto mechanic, get him to help with an extrication drill. If you have a volunteer who is a carpenter, have him run a building construction lecture. You want to find ways to keep all your people engaged and interested, and to give them a sense of purpose.

Another important concept is to be consistent, and to plan topics in advance. Let your people know what night and time your drills will be and what you will be doing. Try to schedule your training on the same day or night every week and at the same time whenever possible. This way, you can become the constant in their hectic schedules and they can hopefully schedule the rest of their lives around the fire department.

We are all busy and always trying to find enough hours in every day to get it all done. Something always seems to have to give. Don’t let it ever be your training; it is much too important. I started with one famous firefighter quote and will end with yet another.

“Don’t train till you get it right; train till you can’t get it wrong!” A lot of lives depend on it. Stay safe out there!



*In addition to hands-on training at the department, high-quality educational opportunities are essential. Symposium attendees listen avidly as Howard Cross delivers his seminar entitled “Building Excellence in the Leadership Team.”*

# Symposium in the Sun Awards

Chief Chuck Flynn, VCOS Vice Chair, presents the “Step Up and Stand Out” award to the Wiggins (Miss.) Fire Department. Chief Jody Hatten accepts the award on behalf of his department. The award is sponsored by Kidde and AllState



Nicole Stotelmyer, Recruitment and Retention Coordinator, accepts the Retention & Recruitment Award sponsored by VFIS on behalf of Washington County (Md.) Volunteer Fire Rescue Association.



*Left to right: Joe Giorgi, Regional V.P., VFIS, Nicole Stotelmyer, Bill Jenaway, Executive V.P., VFIS*

The annual VCOS Chair’s Award was presented to the IAFC staff. Executive Director/CEO Mark Light accepted the award on behalf of the staff.



*Left to right: Monica Willemssen, IAFC Program Manager, Kelly Ameen, IAFC Assistant Director, Chief Timothy S. Wall, VCOS Chair, Mark Light, IAFC Executive Director/CEO*

VFIS Executive V.P. Bill Jenaway presents the annual Illness and Injury Prevention Award, sponsored by VFIS, to the Staunton (Ill.) Fire Department. Chief Rick Haase accepted on behalf of the department.



# Symposium in the Sun Exhibitors

## THANKS TO OUR 2017 SYMPOSIUM EXHIBITORS AND SPONSORS!

*"We ask that all our members make a point of looking first to these businesses when selecting a vendor. They have shown their commitment to the volunteer fire service and we can show our gratitude by supporting them when the opportunity arises."*

—Chief Timothy S. Wall, VCOS Chair

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*See 'Exhibitors' on p. 9*

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then **WHO?**

If not **NOW**  
then **WHEN?**

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- **Motivating Self-Growth**
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- **Leading the Team**

*'Chair's Corner,' continued from p. 1*

of applications we receive! Make sure you take the time this year to fill out an application for yourself or for someone from your department. If you're selected as the winner, you'll be getting a premier conference experience for free!

The Chair's Award was given to the IAFC staff for all their dedication and hard work. I thank and compliment all staff. The VCOS Board and I also congratulate Kelly Ameen, VCOS staff liaison, on her recent promotion to Assistant Director. In addition, I'd like to give special recognition to Joelle Fishkin who was the editor of the VCOS newsletter for many years when she was the VCOS staff liaison. Since she retired a few years ago, she has continued to volunteer her time to keep the newsletter going. She does an extraordinary job. This edition is her last newsletter as editor and we appreciate all she has done. Keep an eye out for a new format of the newsletter coming soon.

The board joins me in thanking Chief Ken Stuebing, the At-Large Member of the IAFC Board of Directors, for his invitation to hold our February board meeting at his department in Halifax, Nova Scotia. We are greatly looking forward to this opportunity to work with the Canadian Division and to build further on our relationship with their very large population of volunteer firefighters.

I have a few announcements about upcoming elections, both the VCOS and the IAFC's. All VCOS members should have received a special email from the IAFC recently giving details concerning the upcoming IAFC election. The

VCOS Board of Directors voted to endorse Chief Dan Eggleston and Chief Gary Ludwig in the IAFC election. We ask that you pay attention to these two elections and we strongly encourage you to cast your vote.

Regarding the VCOS election, there will be 3 seats available for At-Large Board Members. (All details of the election will be posted to our website.) One of the At-Large seats is mine and I want my VCOS friends to know that I will not be running for that seat. I will, however, remain on the VCOS Board of Directors as Past-Chair for one additional year and then I will see where other opportunities may take me.

Having been on this board since 1994 has been one of the highlights of my career and serving as your chair for the past 13 years has been incredibly gratifying. We have many dedicated current members on the board who are ready to continue the awesome work the section has always been known for and with the caliber of candidates we always get on the VCOS ballot, I assure you that the future is bright for the VCOS Board of Directors and membership into the distant future. I wish to thank all of you for allowing me to work on your behalf for all these years – it's been my great honor to have done so.

Stay safe out there!

Chief Timothy S. Wall, VCOS Chair



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# Symposium in the Sun Scholarships

Chief Joseph Bartos, West Point (Va.) Fire Department, accepts the “Emerging Leader” scholarship from Richard Gasaway of the Gasaway Consulting Group, LLC.



Chief William Jones, Roanoke Island (N.C.) Volunteer Fire Department is the recipient of a VCOS-sponsored \$1500 scholarship to attend Symposium



## NEWS & NOTES

### Symposium in the West

Symposium in the West will take place on May 3 - 5, 2018 at the Embassy Suites in Phoenix-Scottsdale, Arizona. Registration is now open. Two scholarships available.

### VCOS Yellow Ribbon Report

“Under the Helmet: Performing an Internal Size-Up.” The goal of this report is to bring awareness about the fire and emergency services’ emotional and behavioral health problem, and emphasize the importance of changing the culture. The report can be downloaded from the VCOS website at [www.vcos.org/resources](http://www.vcos.org/resources).

### VCOS Scholarship Named for Chief Robert Bettenhausen, Ret.

One of the \$1500 VCOS Scholarships to attend the Symposium in the Sun has been named in honor of the VCOS’ Secretary-Treasurer Emeritus Chief Robert Bettenhausen for his many years of service and dedication to the fire service and to the VCOS section. Congratulations to Chief Bettenhausen!

### Symposium Raffle Winners

Congratulations to the Laurelton (N.Y.) Fire District for being the winner of the thermal imaging camera donated by MSA. Many thanks to MSA for donating this valuable gift for our annual raffle!

Thanks to Kidde for their generous donation of carbon monoxide (CO) alarms for our raffle. The following departments each won 25 alarms: San Juan County (N.M.) Fire Department, Ashland City (Tenn.) Fire Department, Oxford (Mich.) Fire Department, Zoneton (Ky.) Fire District.

*Left to right: Chief Timothy S. Wall, VCOS Chair; Chief William Jones, Chief Chuck Flynn, VCOS Vice Chair; Chief Jim Seavey, VCOS Board Member*

Captain Richard Andrews, Gilford (N.H.) Fire-Rescue is the recipient of a VCOS-sponsored \$1500 scholarship to attend Symposium



*Left to right: Chief Timothy S. Wall, VCOS Chair; Captain Richard Andrews, Chief Jim Seavey, VCOS Board Member; Chief Chuck Flynn, VCOS Vice Chair*



*'Exhibitors', continued from p. 5*

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## Chief Thill Wins Leadership Award

Inner Grove Heights (Minn.) Fire Chief Judy Thill was recognized for her achievements as she was awarded the John M. Buckman III Leadership Award. “I’ve been following Chief Buckman’s writings since the early 2000s,” Chief Thill said, “and to be recognized with an award that has his name on it is just an unbelievable honor.”

The award has been presented annually since 2009 at VCOS Symposium in the Sun by Provident, recognizing a chief officer from a volunteer or combination fire department who has demonstrated leadership, integrity, and outstanding moral values within the fire service.

“In an industry dominated by men, Chief Thill stands out not because of her gender, but because of her list of accomplishments,” said Jeff Siegrist, a regional director at Provident, who made the presentation. “She is active at the local, state, and national levels, and has made an impact at each. In all our years sponsoring this award, I have never seen a more impressive and thorough application. The people who put that application together did an outstanding job, and you could see the regard they have for Chief Thill.”

Chief Thill said she didn’t even know the members of her staff nominated her until it was announced that she had won.

“When they told me I won I was shocked, speechless, and overwhelmed,” she said, “honestly, I couldn’t get a word out.



*Left to right: Barry Balliet, Provident CEO, Jeff Siegrist, Provident Regional Director, Chief Judy Thill, Chief John M. Buckman III, Ret.*

Members of the volunteer fire service are such a close group. We’re family. And there are so many deserving of awards. I’m also thrilled that the award afforded me the opportunity to attend the VCOS Symposium and get to meet so many peers. Leadership is not ‘I,’ it’s ‘we.’”



*Above: Lunch on the beach sponsored by AT&T.*

*Below: A little evening relaxation after a full day of education.*



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*'Feeling Blessed', continued from p. 1*

to do everything yourself. But over time you realize that's why you have people around you; people in the organization who you know can be counted on because that's the type of person you promoted into those positions. At some point you realize that if you die today, the trucks will still roll out tomorrow. And although that's a bittersweet realization, it means you are doing your job.

Our succession plan wasn't scripted. Over the years, however, leaders emerged from the training ground and leaders emerged when there was something particular going on within the organization. The way you recognize those emerging leaders is by really getting to know your people and sharing information with them from day one. You have to put a lot of time and effort into this objective, however. Some want to ride fire trucks forever, and that's great, but others want to be chief someday. Either way it's your job to support their goal. Give them training, education, and opportunities and prepare them for success. That made perfect sense to me as that's what others did for me. As the fire chief, we're there to be their cheerleaders. When they are trying to climb the ladder, it's our job to keep it steady and be there to catch them if they fall.

After deciding to retire, one of the first things I did to begin the transition process was to turn over the budget. I was there in a supportive role, but I let my people take care of the budget. And they did a fantastic job. I knew it would work out, but when it actually happened, I had tears in my eyes because I had an epiphany. I realized the place had never actually been mine, and it was going to be just fine after I left. And then I realized that the goal of my career had been to leave the place better than I found it.

The people I associated myself with made me look good, and it was wonderful to be able to leave when I still liked everybody! I went back recently and saw where they painted some walls and moved the coffee maker, and the station looked great - they had already started making their mark. By doing things the right way and investing in good people, it allowed me to make my mark and leave with my head held high. With so many of us moving toward retirement, we owe it to the next generation of leaders, and to ourselves, to get the ball rolling in time before the torch is passed. Succession planning is not something you do as you're walking out the door!

To sum things up, I served, both as a volunteer and full-time, with great people throughout the entire organization so perhaps this made succession planning easier. From our cadets to our trustees, this was a fabulous bunch of caring men and women. I was a member of several organizations that helped develop me as a leader and taught me to be a mentor and one of these is the Volunteer & Combination Officers Section (VCOS), where I was surrounded by individuals who offered wisdom, leadership and friendship. Finally, my family - without them and their support none of this would have been possible.

I have been blessed in my career, but mine is not a unique story. All who choose a service career are given many opportunities to succeed: ask for help early in your career, mentor those who seek mentoring throughout your career, give people the opportunity to perform to their highest level, and you too, will retire with feelings of accomplishment, satisfaction and success.

## THEY SAID IT - Quotes from the post-Symposium survey

“Everything good happens around the kitchen table.”

*Alan Brunacini, Chief, Phoenix (Ariz.) Fire Department & Author*

“Adversity is going to come. You don’t control what, when, where, or how. But you do determine how you will respond to it. Are you going to be a wing or a weight to those around you?”

*Chad Williams, former U.S. Navy SEAL*

“You are significant when you have nothing to prove but everything to give.”

*Stephen Gower, author and speaker*

“When you’re good at telling your story, you get people to start appreciating it.”

*Vickie Pritchett, Associate Director, Pleasant View (Tenn.) Volunteer Fire Department*

“You don’t have to prove your value. People get that. But it’s up to us to help them understand the resources and efforts that it actually takes to operate.”

*Keith Bryant, U.S. Fire Administrator*

“We’re blessed that the number of large fires is going down, but now we have a world where we have company officers being promoted who have never seen certain scenarios.”

*John Russ, Program Manager, IAFC National Firefighter Near Miss Program*



*Attendees prepare for 5K walk and stair climb after being addressed by Chief Ronald Siarnicki, Executive Director of the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (holding microphone)*

“We have the responsibility to provide the education and tools so that our members not only have a long career, but also a long and healthy retirement.”

*Otto Drozd, Chief, Orange County (Fla.) Fire Rescue Department*

“We need to mobilize and call our elected officials often.”

*Tom Jenkins, Chief, Rogers (Ark.) Fire Department, IAFC President*

“When you are surrounded by great people, anything is possible.”

*Mark Light, CEO and Executive Director, IAFC*

“Understand, people in your organization watch everything you do and hear every word you say. Be crisp and clear in your communications, because you never know what people will latch onto.”

*Greg Smith, President, Shell Pipeline*

“On scene, we often have to make immediate decisions without the luxury of knowing all the facts. Off scene, we have discretionary time. Use it to gather facts. Make decisions that are intelligent, not emotional.”

*Gary Ludwig, Chief, Champaign (Ill.) Fire Department*

“If you have a legal conflict, get an outside opinion, because as chief, you are probably too close to the situation.”

*David “Chip” Comstock, Attorney, Bonezzi Switzer Polito & Hupp Co.*

“Leadership doesn’t carry a rank or title. It is the person who can influence the situation. It’s the person who is willing to make a difference in the lives around him or her every day.”

*Brian Ward, CSO for Fire Protection and Emergency Operations, Georgia Pacific*

“To be trustworthy, you have to perform your assignments without any misgiving and with integrity.”

*Bill Webb, Executive Director, Congressional Fire Service Institute*

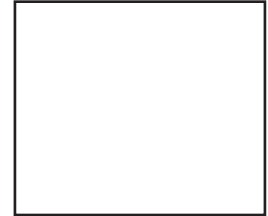
“Screenings save lives. The cost of the exam that caught my cancer was cheaper than the cost of each dress uniform that would have been needed to attend my funeral.”

*Matt Corso, Captain, Spring (Texas) Fire Department*

“Athletes are high investments and teams spend a lot of money to keep them functioning at high levels. Are our firefighters any different?”

*Hunt Whitten, Health and Safety Officer, Ponderosa (Texas) Fire Department*

**Volunteer & Combination Officers Section  
International Association of Fire Chiefs  
4025 Fair Ridge Dr.  
Fairfax, VA 22033**



## VCOS Board of Directors Public Contact Information



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**Chief Timothy S. Wall**  
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**Chief Charles Flynn**  
NE Division – term thru 2020  
Suffield (CT) Fire Dept  
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#### Secretary/Treasurer

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### AT-LARGE BOARD MEMBERS

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#### Chief Jim Cook

SE Division – term thru 2020  
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jcook@leesburgfire.org

#### Chief Rich Cowger

WE Division - term through 2019  
Columbus (MT) Fire Rescue  
rcowger@columbusfirerescue.com

#### Chief Ed Rush

EA Division – term thru 2018  
Hartsdale (NY) Fire District  
erush@hartsdalefire.org

#### Chief James P. Seavey, Sr.

EA Division - term thru 2018  
Cabin John Park (NY) Vol. Fire  
Department  
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#### Chief Fred Windisch, EFO, CFO

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