



VCOS VCOS NEWS

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

Winter 2016–2017

CHAIR'S CORNER

Gearing up for the New Year and New Possibilities

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

Well, here we are again, it's the beginning of a new year and up here in Connecticut, the weather isn't quite what I'm used to in early January, being rather on the warm side. Putting down my thoughts for the Symposium issue of the newsletter is always an enjoyable way to relax for an hour as it requires me to sit back and relive those very pleasant days in the warm sun of Clearwater Beach, Florida. Although it takes place in November, every year the Symposium in the Sun feels to me like the culmination of our year; our way of wrapping up the year and presenting it as a gift to our members.

This twenty-second offering of the Symposium was the most heavily attended conference we've ever had. Over 700 attendees had the opportunity to attend presentations on fire-fighting methods and technology (Crude Oil Transportation Emergency Response; Photovoltaic Design and Hazards; Pipeline Awareness; Fire Behavior – Modern Day Mythbusters; Modern Fire Attack – Going Dutch), on day-to-day running of a fire department (Suicide in the Fire Service; Building Leaders from Within; R&R Issues and Discussion) and on the care and feeding of leaders in the

See 'Chair's Corner' on p. 6

Symposium in the Sun Surpasses Expectations Again

By contributing writer Mike Macdonald

For the 22nd consecutive year, leaders from the fire service and emergency response sector flocked to the Gulf Coast of Florida in early November to participate in what has proven to be the must-attend event in the industry, the VCOS Symposium in the Sun. The Symposium earned its distinguished reputation by being a place where representatives from volunteer and combination departments from around the country gather to interact with top-notch instructors and enjoy unparalleled networking with their peers.

"Overall, it's one of the best conferences I've been to," says Rich Cowger, Chief of the Columbus (Mont.) Fire Rescue Department, who was attending his eighth Symposium. "The information is spot-on and timely. The folks are knowledgeable about the topics they're speaking of, and it is relevant to me and to my organization's needs."

Nicole Stotemyer, recruitment and retention coordinator for the Washington County (Md.) Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association, who was attending for the second time, agreed. "I am relatively new to the fire service, and I love to learn. The Symposium is a great place to network with some of the best minds in the fire service, learn from their experiences, and be able to take some of the ideas back to my county to share in hopes that the information will be helpful to someone else."

Having attendees return home refreshed, energized, and

See 'Familiar Faces' on p. 9

VCOS 2017 Election

As the VCOS election has now been consolidated into the IAFC election, all deadlines have been pushed forward. The deadline this year to put your name in as a candidate for the board of directors is February 28.

The election will include three seats for at-large board members with 3-year terms through 2020. Voting will be open between April 27 and June 8. Ballots will be sent by email. We cannot accept any candidates from the Eastern Division.

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.

Why Would a Fire Service Leader Attend Education

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

As our lives move us ever forward, the daily requirements of life, job, and passion compete for our time and we must find balance among each of these competing areas. How to do that well is the challenge. We all feel that we don't have as much time as we want or need for the important things but spending some of our time on becoming better fire service leaders is well within the scope of our daily requirements.

As we move into leadership positions, we are faced with ever changing challenges. One may ask, "Why should I continue to attend educational presentations now that I am the leader of my organization or station?" Well, the answer to that question is easy: everyone should challenge oneself to improve each and every day. I, for one, try to learn something new every single day.

Because the VCOS leadership has always discussed and reacted to attendee feedback from Symposium in the Sun, striving for flexibility and rapid adaptation to that feedback, several years ago they realized that they had to figure out how to offer the same great education on the West Coast.

After years of planning, Symposium in the West was opened for business in 2016.

Where Symposium in the Sun is fixed in Clearwater Beach, Symposium in the West will move from location to location on a two-year cycle. In 2017, it will be in Reno, Nevada for the second year followed by the next two years in Phoenix, Arizona. Topics presented remain cutting edge and hard-hitting and we're introducing new 20-minute talks based on the popular Ted Talks format to challenge attendees on some of the hardest questions facing the fire service today.

Education at our two Symposiums is world class. Presenters are drawn from both the fire service and beyond. Fire service speakers are selected from current and past leaders as well as industry experts; moreover, we have literally drawn world-wide for our educators and presenters. The topics selected by the Symposium Planning Committee are timely,

challenging, and specific to the needs of the volunteer and combination fire service, focusing on providing cutting edge information to attendees.

The first presentation to the fire service of truly scientific studies from IFSFI, UL, and NIST concerning how fire responds to hose streams and airflow occurred at the Symposium in the Sun. The following year, we presented SLICE-RS, which taught us how to size up a structure and perform fire operations applying the science learned the previous year.

The mental health of those in the fire service is so important that a presentation on suicide occurred at both the inaugural Symposium in the West in 2016 and again during Symposium in the Sun. Although hard-hitting and emotional, these presentations challenged each attendee to think about how to keep their members safe on and off the fire ground.

The VCOS prides itself in creating an environment that supports learning but also affords time and space to interact with other attendees and sponsors. Strategically planned to be an intimate space, networking is encouraged and easy to accomplish. Attendees can interact easily with VCOS leaders and presenters as they also attend

classes. Many attendees have become close friends over the years and their families look forward to reconnecting each year during the Symposium.

Continuing to learn on a regular basis is important to all leaders, especially those of us in the fire service. The VCOS has created two opportunities to interact with leaders from the fire service and around the world. Attendees from the United States and many other countries, including Russia, Australia, Japan, and Mexico, among others, come together to grow their professional and personal networks. Our service is committed to supporting our communities and each other; coming together during a Symposium not only gives us new tools and best practices, it lets us grow our networks and continues to improve us intellectually. As a member of the VCOS Board of Directors, I look forward to seeing and visiting with you at an upcoming Symposium. Be safe and keep learning!



Attendees listen with rapt attention to Firefighter Scott Giselhart's presentation on recognizing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and preventing suicide among fire service personnel.

Leadership
Brainchild

Symposium
in the Sun

Membership
Feedback

Symposium
in the West

'Symposium in the Sun' Awards



LEFT: The John M. Buckman III Award, sponsored by Provident Insurance, is presented to Chief Rich Cowger, Columbus (Mont.) Fire Rescue.

Left to right: Mr. Barry Balliet and Jeff Siegrist from Provident, Chief Rich Cowger, Chief John M. Buckman III.

BELOW: The Recruitment-Retention Award, sponsored by VFIS, is presented to the Old Mystic (Conn.) Fire Department. Accepting the award from VFIS President Bill Jenaway is Chief Kenneth W. Richards.



LEFT: The Illness and Injury Prevention Award, sponsored by VFIS, is awarded to the IAFCA's Safety, Health & Survival Section.

From left: Bill Jenaway, Section Chair Scott Kerwood and Section Secretary Todd LeDuc.



Chief Timothy S. Wall presents his annual "Chair's Award" to VFIS and Provident Insurance for their unwavering generous support of the section since its inception.

From left: Chief Timothy Wall, VCOS Chair, Joe Giorgi, VFIS, Jeff Siegrist, Provident, Barry Balliet, Provident, Chief Fred Windisch, VCOS board, Chief Robert Bettenhausen, VCOS Secretary-Treasurer Emeritus, Chief Larry Curl, Past VCOS Chair, Chief John M. Buckman III, Past VCOS Chair

'Symposium in the Sun' Exhibitors

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—Chief Timothy S. Wall, VCOS Chair

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

fire service (Understanding Your Other Half; Cancer in the Fire Service; Preparing for Your Climb Down the Ladder of Success) among others.

The fact that we felt we should run a course entitled "Right of Boom - Active Shooter/Dynamic Mass Casualty Events: An Evolving Threat" demonstrates just how Symposium has changed in the past 22 years and how we have to keep updating our presentations to keep abreast of changes in today's world of firefighting. A sad commentary indeed.

I urge all our members to look at pages 4, 5, and 10 to see our many amazing sponsors and thank them by checking out their products first when you're making your purchasing decisions for the year. Without these loyal VCOS sponsors, we would not be where we are today – providing the best possible education for volunteer and combination departments. If you missed them in Florida, you'll have another chance to meet them and your fellow VCOS members in Reno in May. A West Coast opportunity to learn from the best in the business!

And, again this year at Symposium in the Sun, we celebrated those among us who deserved special recognition. Page 3 focuses on three award winners who were nominated by their peers for outstanding contributions to the fire service. And I'm very happy every year to present a "Chair's Award" to an individual or agency of my own

choosing. This year, I wanted to give my heartfelt thanks to two entities which have been intimately involved in the success of our entire organization since our beginning: Provident Insurance and VFIS. Not only do they sponsor the major VCOS recognition programs that you read about every year but they attend every single board meeting and every single conference we hold. Their input has always been invaluable and their financial support has been beyond generous. Just thinking about the time commitment involved is mind-boggling and makes me realize how invested Provident and VFIS are in our success. The entire VCOS board joins me in thanking them for their many years of support.

Remember that our election will be different this year. We have decided to run our election concurrently with the IAFC election so the deadlines are substantially changed. The deadline to submit your name as a candidate for the VCOS board is February 28. There will be three board seats up for re-election and we encourage all interested members to run. This is your opportunity to be a part of a great organization, enabling you to share your ideas for the future of our organization.

I am joined by the VCOS board of directors in wishing you a great year in 2017 and in thanking you for your past year of membership. You are the reason for our existence and for our success! Stay safe, stay healthy and start working on those new possibilities!

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NEWS & NOTES ...

Symposium in the West

Symposium in the West will take place on May 4-6, 2017 in Reno; conference registration is open now.

Step Up & Stand Out Winner Announced

Congratulations to Assistant Chief Bob Love of North Hays County (Texas) Fire Rescue for winning the Step Up and Stand Out contest sponsored by Kidde. He was presented with this award at Firehouse Expo in 2016 for his outstanding commitment as a volunteer to his fire department and community. He received the most votes in the online video contest and the award is well deserved.

VCOS thanks Kidde for helping recognize outstanding volunteer firefighters and promoting the importance of volunteer recruitment and retention.

Request for Best Practices at Rail Incidents

Have you responded to a train derailment? What about a rail incident with a hazmat leak or fire? Did you feel prepared or overwhelmed? Whether you've experienced a large- or small-scale rail event, we want to hear from you!

CSX Transportation has partnered with IAFC's Hazmat Center to gather planning and operational best practices used during rail incidents. The IAFC is looking for advice and perspective on the top 5-10 planning or operational activities a department can implement to have a successful response and recovery effort during a rail incident.

Please email your department name, city and state; the type of incident you responded to; and the top 5 to 10 best practices you would recommend to James Rist, the IAFC

point of contact, at jrist@iafc.org.

Symposium Raffle Winners

- Fire Captain Troy Phillips of the Oakland-Mapleville (R.I.) Fire District and Assistant Chief An Hong Nguyen of Northwest Houston (Texas) Fire Rescue each won 50 fire alarm packages from Kidde.
- Chief Brian Taylor of Pleasant Township (Ohio) Fire Dept. won the thermal imaging camera from Air One Equipment, Inc.
- Deputy Chief Douglas Maxellon of the North Thompsonville (Conn.) Fire Dept. was the winner of the Blitzfire Package donated by Task Force Tips.

Follow Us on Social Media

We hope you'll like us on Facebook if you haven't already. In addition, follow us on Twitter @IAFC_VCOS. Use social media to stay connected, network with others and see all the latest VCOS news.

IAFC Releases Guide to Address Gap in Firefighter Physicals

The IAFC released A Healthcare Provider's Guide to Firefighter Physicals to assist healthcare providers in the evaluation and treatment of the health and wellness of firefighters. The guide serves as an important new tool for firefighters to manage their own healthcare.

The research-supported, experience-driven guide, available through the IAFC, features a systems approach to the physical examination of firefighters, addressing cardiovascular health and fitness, cancer, musculoskeletal injuries, behavioral health, lung disease, sleep disorders and infectious diseases.

'Symposium in the Sun' Scholarships



Chief Timothy S. Wall (left) and Chief Jim Seavey (right), present a \$1500 VCOS scholarship to Chief William Rector, Dunkirk (Md.) Volunteer Fire Company



Captain Jeff Gooch, Cranberry (Pa.) Township Volunteer Fire Company stands with his wife, Trina, after being awarded the "Emerging Leader" scholarship from Richard Gasaway of The Gasaway Consulting Group, LLC.

'Familiar Faces', continued from p. 1

ready to share is the ultimate goal of the Symposium, that way more people are able to benefit. Each year the Symposium committee limits the number of spots available in an effort to keep an intimate feel, but as champions of education in the fire service they often struggle to turn people away, as evidenced by this year's record of 700 attendees who made their way to the Clearwater Beach Hilton for various reasons—although recruiting and retention, as always, proved to be a big topic of interest.

“As a new Fire Commissioner, I had attended other conventions and presentations this year,” says Frank Sammartano, of the Jericho (N.Y.) Fire District, who was attending for the first time. “After reading up on the Symposium, I noticed that it was going to have speakers on motivation, morale, and firefighter retention. Also cancer in the fire service was an important topic for me.

“Like departments all over the country we are going through a decline in membership. This is due to the fact that the current makeup of our lives with both parents working and shuttling their kids around is coupled with the fact that our communities are changing, and people moving into our areas aren't volunteering. It's becoming harder to retain members and to get them to come out for calls. I really enjoyed the presentation about motivating members - it was very informative. I was particularly happy to be able to network with other Chiefs and Commissioners who are having the same problem – that was really helpful.”

“Recruiting and retention is my main focus as well,” says Joyce Shry, personal assistant and recruiter for the Frederick County (Md.) Volunteer Fire and Rescue Services. “I loved the pre- and post-conference seminars. Those were the great

est value to me. I found that once I left the official conference for the day, many of those topics were still being discussed in smaller groups that I was welcomed into.”

Attendees walking out of presentations and continuing the conversations on their own with peers for the benefit of all... it's what separates the Symposium in the Sun from virtually any other professional event you will see, and is what helps make it the best.

“I think anytime you can get a group of people together to learn and talk about how to make the fire service better than we found it, it's a good thing and should be taken advantage of,” Stotelmeyer says. “Attending conferences like this, in my opinion, is the best thing you can do for your personal and professional growth—but don't keep the information to yourself, share!”



Evening roundtable discussions of topics covered at the day's presentations are always well-attended.



Symposium in the Sun attendees run through the town of Clearwater Beach for the annual 5K race.

A member of Clearwater Fire & Rescue prepares to participate in this year's stairclimb. This year's theme: $343 \times 110 = \text{Never Forget}$





Attendees relaxing after a full day of education



'Exhibitors', continued from p. 5

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THEY SAID IT - Quotes from the post-Symposium survey

What was your favorite part of the Symposium?

- Being a woman at a male-dominated event, it was awesome to not have to wait in line for the bathroom. But, seriously, as a woman it was nice to see some female recognition and female-oriented presentations, especially the one about how the sexes communicate differently. *(Nicole Stotemyer, Washington County (Md.) Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association)*

What session did you most enjoy?

- The session by Tracy Krein, “Buffalos & Hummingbirds.” She hit the nail on the head about gender differences in communication styles. It was perfect. *(Frank Sammartano, Jericho (N.Y.) Fire District)*
- “Turn the Ship Around” about developing a new model of leadership and “Buffalos & Butterflies.” *(Jeffrey Hevey, Harris County, Texas)*

What was the most interesting thing you learned?

- In the session, “Developing Leaders from Within,” I was surprised to learn that 65 percent of high-ranking officers are planning to retire in the next five years. I was also shocked to learn that 38 percent of them haven’t thought about a leadership development plan, or have talked about it but still haven’t taken action. *(Nicole Stotemyer, Washington County (Md.) Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association)*

Was there a particular point or message that stood out?

- The session discussing post-traumatic stress disorder and firefighter suicide. Serious issues. It was presented by an excellent and moving speaker. *(Jay Gardiner, Setauket (N.Y.) Fire District)*
- You can’t train too much for a job that will kill you. *(Jeffrey Hevey, Harris County, Texas)*

What was your overall opinion about the Symposium?

- As I have said before, this was one of the BEST conferences I have been to. *(Frank Sammartano, Jericho (N.Y.) Fire District)*
- This year’s conference was good but much of what we heard was military based. It was interesting to me that the military has changed the way it trains, but fire and rescue hasn’t overall. *(Joyce Shry, Frederick County (Md.) Volunteer Fire and Rescue Services)*
- The location, duh! No, honestly, while that is a neat factor, I think that the Symposium itself is so full of information and networking abilities that it could be held anywhere and stand on its own. It deals with the current topics and cutting-edge issues that face today’s fire service and folks aren’t afraid to say it like it is. You meet some great folks there, who have either been where you are or know someone who has, and can point you in the right direction. *(Rich Cowger, Columbus (Mont.) Fire Rescue Dept)*



A great lunch on the beach sponsored by AT&T

Another fabulous sunset just adds to the wonderful memories this conference will elicit when you’re back home



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