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Gray Installed as President
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Presidents Message
By: James A. Gray, Jr.

It is indeed an honor and a privilege to serve as President of the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association. This is undoubtedly a highlight of my career. I am sincerely humbled by the opportunity afforded me to follow in the footsteps of so many great Chiefs who have lead this organization throughout its 79 year history. But more importantly, I am excited about the opportunity to serve you, the Membership of the VFCA as well as the citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

I want to thank Immediate Past-President Chris Eudailey for his leadership over the past two years. Working with our Board of Directors, Chief Eudailey kept the Association financially strong, advocated for minimum training standards to enhance firefighter safety, and ensured that our positions on important issues, such as the realignment of regional EMS Councils, were effectively communicated to policymakers. Please join me in congratulating Chief Eudailey for a successful term as President.

My term as President begins in the face of some difficult times in our country. Failures in the real estate and financial markets have sent the economy into a downward spiral; the effects of which have not been experienced in this county since the great depression. The economic downturn is having devastating effects on the ability of state and local governments to maintain existing levels of service, forcing cuts in funding for important programs such as education and public safety. As a result, funding from the State for fire service training and equipment grants have been reduced or eliminated, including grants that VFCA has relied upon to support our training and education efforts. But rest assured, the Association has worked with our lobbyist to communicate our position to our elected and appointed officials on the importance of continued financial support from the State for programs such as Aid to Localities (ATL) and Training Mini-Grants. We will continue to advocate for full-funding of these programs in the future.

However, in spite of the economy and loss of key funding sources, the VFCA remains determined to deliver high quality training and education programs such as the Mid-Atlantic Expo and Symposium and the Virginia Fire Officer Academy. These programs provide valuable learning opportunities for members and non-members, exposing you to high-caliber presenters/speakers with expertise in a wide variety of subject matter. We want to continue to meet our goal of delivering quality training and educational programs right here in the Commonwealth of Virginia at exceptional value.

I realize that my term as President is very limited, but I am committed to being a strong advocate for firefighter health and safety, fire prevention education, increased membership, and developing and strengthening relationships with other fire service stakeholders. Each of these priorities is covered in our 2009-2011 Strategic Plan and we have recently taken some initial action toward accomplishing them.

First, with the recent passing of the residential sprinkler requirement in the 2009 ICC Model Codes, we are supporting the establishment of the Virginia Residential Sprinkler Coalition to advocate for adoption of a residential sprinkler requirement in Virginia. We believe residential sprinklers have proven effective in reducing civilian loss of life from fire. Furthermore, early detection and extinguishment of residential fires will also lead to a reduction of firefighter fatalities. Our Fire and Life Safety Committee members will represent us in this effort.

Secondly, in support of our efforts to reduce loss of life and property resulting from fire in the Commonwealth, the Executive Committee recently approved the Association’s participation as a partner with Vision 20/20 National Strategies for Fire Loss Prevention. Funded by a grant from the Department of Homeland Security, Vision 20/20 is a strategic plan with a simple goal - marshal forces for the development and support of a national strategic agenda for fire loss prevention. We will support the implementation of the Vision 20/20 strategies in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Thirdly, our membership is the lifeblood of the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association. However, only a small percentage of fire departments across the Commonwealth can be counted as members. We want to change that and have every fire department in the Commonwealth, career and volunteer, represented on our membership roster. To that end, we have established a standing Membership Committee chaired by Walt Bailey, Division 3 Vice-President. The Membership Committee will reach out to all fire departments to share what VFCA has accomplished on their behalf and invite them to become active members.

Finally, our Strategic Plan calls on us to create joint opportunities to enhance the quality of life for our customers. This means that, to be effective, we must develop and strengthen partnerships both inside and outside of the fire service. I will ask all our Board members to identify private-sector benefactors for the Virginia Fire Chiefs Foundation so we can continue to support higher education and training opportunities for our members. We will also continue to meet regularly with other fire service stakeholder groups to identify commonalities so that we can speak with one voice for the benefit of the fire service.

In conclusion, I believe the success of these endeavors will require the collective efforts of all of our members. I have the good fortune of working with a very talented and diverse Board of Directors and we have pledged to work together to keep the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association viable and focused on a common vision. We invite you to be an active participant in the Association as we strive to serve the greater good in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
A FAREWELL FROM YOUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Approaching a Fork in the Road

By: Bill Smith

I’ve long been a believer in the concept of the “fork in the road.” Many times in life, we encounter decisions - or forks in the road - that force us to decide between one direction or another. Based on our experience, knowledge, emotion and luck, we choose. Somehow we hopefully always choose the correct fork that advances us to the next phase of our lives.

This situation has confronted me at every major crossroad of my life. And looking back, I know why I have made the decisions that I did. I needed to learn something, or help someone else, or be in the right place at the right time.

Since first joining the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association many years ago, I have encountered a whole drawer full of forks in the road. I have been a proud member of the association and have served in many capacities over the years. That was the first of many either/or decisions I encountered that brought me to where I am today in this great organization.

During the association’s annual planning retreat that was held in November 2001, the attendees discussed the possibility of hiring a new full-time Executive Director to work for our association. From those discussions, a goal of conducting a needs assessment during the next year to explore that possibility was established. Immediately following the election of the association’s new officers at the annual business meeting in 2002, they began the process of moving forward with that part of the plan. With that being said, I took the job of Executive Assistant in April 2002 knowing that we (the association) had intentions of hiring a full-time Executive Director in the near future. Well, that didn’t happen and here we are some seven years later and I find myself at yet another fork in life’s journey.

As your Executive Director, I see the organization poised on the threshold of an exciting new future. Getting there will require a great deal of work, risk and worry, but will also bring a great deal of success and satisfaction. At the same time, I see my professional career starting to wind down as I contemplate retirement. While I do not know what the future will hold, I do know that it will focus more on personal endeavors and less on professional ones.

Hence, I made the decision to resign from my position as Executive Director of the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association. My final day in the office will be on March 31st. But I leave having no doubt that I went the right direction when I happened upon the VFCA fork so many years ago.

Although I will be leaving as your Executive Director, I will continue as Editor of Commonwealth Chief for at least the near future. So please keep those articles and information coming.

Looking at old Board minutes and back issues of Commonwealth Chief magazine from the past several years, I’m astounded at how far this Association has come. Through the collective efforts of the staff, Board and committees, the organization has moved light years ahead. For example:

- Growth in membership.
- Diversification of Association income sources.
- Growth in Association reserve funds.
- Hiring of additional staff.
- Establishing an integrated database that modernized our membership and event processing allowing more information on each member to be captured and easier tracking of member activity.
- Establishing a new VFCA web site that provides members with a more streamlined approach to information sharing, updated content all in a graphically pleasing package.

I’ve had the absolute privilege of working with the most dedicated, talented and professional individuals on the Board, the committees, staff and within the membership.
• Changes in our member publication from the newsletter that began as a volunteer-produced and copied publication in the mid ’80’s to a more professionally edited and designed magazine Commonwealth Chief that contains timely information and pertinent feature articles.

• Improved member benefits, including a 24/7 Accident & Dismemberment insurance program.

• Annual growth in the MAE&S to a very popular, successful event with engaging speakers, entertaining evening programs and a full to the ¬brim trade show.

• On-line registration for exhibitors and attendee’s.

• Automating the annual dues collection system to include the ability to pay on-line and with credit cards.

• Expansion of the Board of Directors and title changes that now align VFCA board members with the VDFP seven divisions as well as provide four at-large Vice Presidents to ensure all areas of the Commonwealth are appropriately represented.

• Received and administered a number of grants over the years, with funds used to set up and operate the Mid-Atlantic Expo & Symposium, the Virginia Fire Officer Academy and other training and educational venues.

• Creation of the Virginia Fire Chiefs Foundation (VFCF), along with a separate and distinct graphic image for the foundation. Within the Foundation a number of exciting programs are underway.

• Established the Virginia Fire Officer Academy program to provide leadership development to new and upcoming company level fire officers. This award-winning program has graduated 80 participants in two classes and a is third being planned.

• Established the Virginia LAST team that has proven to be a great help to several fire departments across the Commonwealth in their most dire time of need.

• Assisted in having the State Fire Marshal’s Office moved from DHCD to VDFP.

• Established the Annual Congressional Luncheon.

These are just a few of the many things that has helped to move your association to where it is today.

As I seek out the next opportunity in my life, I do so knowing that I’ve grown as a person and a professional, I’ve stretched my abilities - and patience - to greater lengths and I’ve had the absolute privilege of working with the most dedicated, talented and professional individuals on the Board, the committees, staff and within the membership.

I wish all of you the best of luck as you encounter the forks that will help to guide you through the next steps in the life of this association.

Please stay in touch! I can be reached by email at bsmith@vfca.us or by phone at (757) 810-1690.

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New Executive Director Named

James W. “Jimmy” Carter has been appointed by the VFCA Board to become the Association’s newest Executive Director. Jimmy is a long time VFCA member and former Deputy Chief of the Virginia Beach Fire Department who has worked for the association as our PR & Marketing Director. Additionally, he has served as the Conference Committee Chair/”Czar” for a number of years.

Jimmy brings with him a wealth of leadership and management experience. With those skills and those of the new Board, the VFCA will continue on its course of honoring Virginia’s Fire Service: our past, present and future.

Carter said: “As your executive director, I will dedicate myself to do the very best I can to continue the forward movement of the VFCA and represent this association in a professional manner to the best of my abilities. I will be calling on many of you for your assistance and guidance on several issues.”

He went on to say “I am very confident the newly elected Executive Officers and Board members will provide the necessary guidance needed to make the daily decisions and long term strategies as we continue to move this association forward through these very tough economic times.”

“I want to thank the Executive Officers and Board for having the confidence in me to bestow this very prestigious position and responsibility on my shoulders. I hope I am capable of living up to the expectations.”

If I can assist you in any way, please feel free to contact me.
Gray Assumes Role as President of Association

On February 21, 2009, James A. “Jimmy” Gray, Jr. became the newest president of the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association, replacing predecessor R. Christian Eudailey. Upon taking office during an installation banquet, Gray thanked Eudailey for his leadership during the last two years. “This is truly a humbling experience,” Gray told a small crowd at Waterman’s Restaurant.

Gray is the fire chief for the Hampton Division of Fire & Rescue. He served the past two years as first vice president of the fire chiefs association and said he learned a lot from watching Eudailey.

Chief Gray was appointed Fire Chief of the City of Hampton Virginia on March 15, 2004. Prior to that, he was employed with the City of Chesapeake Fire Department for over 26 years. He was born in Portsmouth Virginia and attended Portsmouth Catholic Schools. He has three children, ages 22, 26 and 36. He was formerly the youth ministry coordinator at St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Norfolk, and continues to coordinate youth retreats for the church and the Catholic Diocese of Richmond. Chief Gray enjoys watching professional sports including basketball, football and baseball. He also plays golf when time permits.

He has an A.A.S. Degree from Tidewater Community College, a B.S. Degree from Hampton University, and a Master of Public Administration from Troy State University.

Other officers for 2009 are: Charles L. Werner, first vice president; Jack W. Jones, second vice president; R. Christian Eudailey, past president; James H. Johnson, treasurer; John E. Tunstall, vice president of Division 1; Robert A. Symons, vice president of Division 2; Walter T. Bailey, vice of Division 3; Robert A. Anderson Sr., vice president of Division 4; Kenneth L. Jones, vice president of Division 5; H. Lee Day, vice president of Division 6; Brett R. Bowman, vice president of Division 7; Steve R. Cover, vice president at-large; Nick Caputo, vice president at-large; Ian J. Bennett, vice president at-large; John O’Neal, vice president at-large.

Gray congratulated the board after they took their oath, and said he looked forward to working with all of them. “I believe we have a great board to work with this year,” he said, “and I want to thank new members for stepping up and joining the team. “Gray said though the job of president will be a demanding one, he looks forward to the challenge.

Meet the New Guy’s!!!

This year there are two new board members that joined the VFCA team. They are Chief’s John A. O’Neal of the City of Manassas Park Fire and Rescue Department and Steven R. Cover of the Virginia Beach Fire Department. Cover is featured in “Meet the Chief” in this edition of Commonwealth Chief.

O’Neal serves as the Fire Chief and department director in command of a full service department located in the National Capital Region (NCR) area of northern Virginia. He leads the activities of the fire and rescue department including suppression, emergency medical response and transport at the ALS level, emergency management and disaster preparedness, fire code enforcement, public education and post fire investigations. The department operates extensively and seamlessly with Prince William County and the City of Manassas with automatic response mutual aid.

Prior to coming to Manassas Park, O’Neal served as Deputy Chief of Jacksonville, NC Fire Department. Earlier in his career he spent 20 years with the Portsmouth, VA Department of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Services where he worked his way from Firefighter to Battalion Chief. He also has extensive experience as a Paramedic throughout the Hampton Roads area.

O’Neal holds a Masters of Public Administration from Troy State University, a Bachelor’s in Fire Science with a Minor in Management from the University of Maryland, and an Associates Degree from Tidewater Community College.

John has been married to his wife Winnie for 16 years. They have one daughter Kate, who is 10.

Preliminary 2008 VFIRS STATS

523,000 responses by Virginia FD’s
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573 civilian and fire service injuries
Fire loss totals $409 million

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The Fire Safety Chain

Robby Dawson
Battalion Chief/Fire Marshal, Chesterfield Fire and EMS Chairman, VFCA Fire and Life Safety Committee

Anyone who has taken a CPR course over the last several decades has been exposed to the “Chain of Survival”. This simple concept founded by the American Heart Association illustrates how the components of early access, CPR, defibrillation, and advanced care can save lives when all of the links in the chain work properly. This same concept can be applied to life safety and the life saving efforts of the fire service.

The Fire Safety Chain has three links – public education; built in fire protection; and manual fire suppression. Each of these links has a number of component parts which must be in place for the link to be an effective part of the chain. When one of the components is not effectively addressed from a community, state or nationwide strategy for fire safety, the chain can be compromised. Failure any part of the chain can result in fire losses, injuries and death, not only for the public we serve, but firefighters as well.

The First Link – Public Education

The public education link is the first step in the overall chain. This link is the most proactive and effective way to reduce fire loss. One educator working in a school room or community meeting can impact dozens of citizens and with effective education techniques can improve safety in the home or workplace and reduce the risk of fire. The components of this link include changing the behavior of the public to be more aware of the risky behaviors which cause fires in the home. Another component of education is preparedness. Even with effective behavior changes, unintentional fires still occur. We must work toward changing the “it can’t happen to me” attitude of the public and prepare them for a home fire. This includes fire extinguisher use, home escape planning, and home fire drills to make the reaction to the fire or smoke alarm habit.

This effort should not just be in the realm of prevention sections of our departments. Vision 20/20 is an effort to identify strategies for fire loss prevention on a national level, and fire service leaders have identified five strategies to accomplish this goal. Strategy number two is to “raise the level of importance for [fire] prevention within the fire service.” This includes steps to increase prevention education for firefighters in fire academies and NFPA 1001 and 1021 standards, make fire prevention part of each firefighter’s job description, and incorporate fire prevention activities in performance reviews.

The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation has also embraced prevention efforts. As part of their Everyone Goes Home Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives, they have noted that “Public education must receive more resources and be championed as a critical fire and life safety program.” Another of their 16 initiatives also addresses the next link in the chain, building codes.

The Second Link – Built in Fire Protection

How a home or office building is constructed can have a tremendous impact on the fire safety of the structure. Model building codes adopted on a state or local level prescribe materials and methods used in the construction of every building in the community. These codes include two types of fire protection measures – passive and active fire protection systems.

Passive fire protection components of buildings are designed to prevent fire spread or limit fire areas to reduce fire loss and protect the occupants. The most common component used is the fire rated assembly used to compartmentalize parts of buildings and create safe areas, particularly egress corridors, to protect the occupants.

Active fire protection components are those that can react to the fire condition in a building. The two most common active fire protection components are alarm systems and suppression systems. Alarm systems react to smoke or heat produced by the fire to alert occupants or summon the fire department. The quick notification of occupants provides them with adequate time to evacuate the building while conditions remain tenable. This is the principle behind residential smoke alarms. Over the last 30 years, this active protection system has been credited as one of the main reasons fire deaths in the United States has declined, but the United States still has one of the highest per capita death rates in the world due to fire.

The most effective active fire protection systems are water based sprinkler systems. These systems have been utilized in commercial and high rise buildings for years and have repeatedly proven their effectiveness at extinguishing or controlling fires allowing the occupants to escape and limiting property damage. These systems have been available for use in single family homes for decades, but the public attitude, misconceptions about these systems, homebuilder opposition, and a lack of requirements in the building codes have limited their installation on a wide spread basis. Several localities like Scottsdale, Arizona, Prince Georges County, Maryland and others have required home sprinklers for many years, and have proven their effectiveness at reducing property loss, preventing injuries and preventing deaths due to fires in the home.

The Final Link – Manual Fire Suppression

When public education fails, and built in fire protection measures aren’t enough to protect the public, manual fire suppression must be put into use. Retired Fire Chief Alan Bruniinni recently noted in a firehouse.com pod cast that, “manual fire suppression is the end of the fire protection chain, the most desperate, dangerous and least effective way for us to protect people and property.” Even though this link is the most dangerous and least effective we must be well practiced at these components to be able to protect the public as well as ourselves as we react to the failures in the first two links. The elements of this final link include Command and Control, Training and Education, and Safety. These components are the fundamental elements of firefighting operations, and in the realm of manual fire suppression, we must be well trained in those skills and abilities to do them safely and effectively.

In addition to being proficient at the basics of fire suppression, the fire service must continue to provide effective fire education programs and improve built in fire protection like residential sprinklers in order to have a complete and strong Fire Safety Chain. The Department of Housing and Community Development will be working over the next several months to adopt the 2009 edition of the International Codes. Fire service leaders need to become involved in the process to bring their perspective and expertise to the table in order to improve the strength of the Fire Safety Chain – one link at a time.
Meet The Chief
Getting to know Steve Cover

In this issue we will meet one of the many fire chiefs who will be spotlighted in the coming issues of Commonwealth Chief this year. Here we take a look at Chief Steven R. Cover from the Virginia Beach Fire Department who is one of the two new VFCA board members.

Tenure in the Fire Service: Four years as a volunteer firefighter and approaching 29 years in the career service.

Career Journey: I was exposed to the fire service by my next door neighbor; Oceana Volunteer Fire Chief Van Crane. I began as a Junior Volunteer in 1977 in the Oceana section of the city and was hired by the Virginia Beach Fire Department in 1980. I served as a Firefighter/Master Firefighter until 1990. During this phase of my career, I was fortunate enough to operate out of some busy engine and ladder companies. In 1990 I was promoted to Captain and was assigned to Station #10 and asked to work on the development of our technical rescue program with two other Captains, Mike Brown and T.J. McAndrews. In 1997 I was selected for the position of Battalion Chief and provided oversight for the special operations functions of the department. I was promoted to District Chief in 2002 and served in both operational and administrative roles. I was appointed to the Deputy Chief of Operations position in 2006. In June of 2007, when Chief Greg Cade was appointed to the U.S. Fire Administration, I was appointed to the Interim Fire Chief’s position and in November of 2007, I was appointed Fire Chief.

Form of Government: The City of Virginia Beach was chartered on January 1, 1963 and operates under a Council-Manager form of government. The eleven member City Council, appoints the City Manager who acts as the Chief Executive Officer.

Source of Funding for Jurisdiction: The Virginia Beach Fire Department is a combination department that is funded through the City of Virginia Beach’s General Fund. The Fire department budget is just over $42 million.

Population Served: Virginia Beach’s present population is approximately 439,900. During the summer tourist season our population is known to escalate to over 1 million.

Square Miles Covered: Our geographic area totals 307 square miles.

Department Composition: The VBFD employs 481 personnel with 42 of those being civilian support staff. In addition to the Fire Chief, we have 2 Deputy Chiefs, 5 District Chiefs, one Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator, 19 Battalion Chiefs, 95 Captains, 142 Master Firefighters, 21 Master Firefighter Medics, 103 Firefighters, 25 Firefighter Medics, and 492 Volunteer Members.

Department Equipment: Our suppression personnel operate out of 19 fire stations on three shifts with a District Chief Shift Commander, 4 Battalion Chiefs, 20 Engine Companies, 7 Ladder Companies and 2 Heavy Rescue Companies on each shift.

Call Summary: In 2008 we responded to 27,848 alarms, of which 16,716 were EMS related calls. We also answered 72 mutual aid calls during this period. Our estimated property loss for 2008 was $25,653,504. The estimated value of property saved during this period was $1,618,397,295. We also provided 9,051 fire inspections and 1,151 life safety education events during 2008.

What is the most challenging issue facing your department? With the state of the current economy, ensuring the department is adequately funded has to rank high on the list. As we are all well aware, these times are unlike any most of us have ever seen. The levels of cuts to budgets are unprecedented in many organizations and while I feel we have been fortunate in Virginia Beach, the next few months could be difficult. My charge to the men and women in our department is not to ask for very much, but let’s not loose anything either. In other words, let’s hunker down and let this economic storm pass. I am convinced that the people in our organization understand the times we are in and they are doing their part to be fiscally responsible.
What challenges are facing the Fire Service today? Coupled with the issues of funding, we are increasingly asked to do more with less. The fire service has to constantly ensure we are efficient in providing the highest levels of service possible to our citizens. We generate very little revenue in comparison to what it costs the community to provide fire and EMS services. The fire service is sort of like an insurance policy for the community. Citizens do not think about us until they really need us.

Additionally, we need to ensure we are capable of dealing with a wide variety of services; the all hazards approach. We must be competent in fire prevention, fire education, hazardous materials response, technical rescue, wildland firefighting, marine rescue and fire/EMS training in addition to the fundamental fire and EMS roles. We must also ensure we are telling our story through our public information networks, gaining much needed influence. We must write grants and prepare budgets that get the support we need to secure necessary resources.

Describe your management style: I would say that I’m actively engaged. While I really try to let the experts in our department handle the operating core issues, I like to know what is happening. As the leader of the organization, I must be able to speak to the many different facets of our business in order to gain support and to tell our story.

I also work hard to be approachable and available to our staff. My door is usually open and I enjoy learning from the members of the VBFD daily. From time to time I still stop by incidents to lend support if needed and to let our folks know that I still truly care about what we do. After all, when I started this career, I signed up to ride on a fire truck!

What do you look for in a new recruit? We have to recruit, hire and train the smartest, hardest working and most diverse workforce ever. Another important component in the process is to ensure the individual has the personal values that align with those of the VBFD; honesty, caring, trust and integrity. If the individual is willing to learn and has the right set of values, the foundation is set and the rest will develop.

How do you view training? Aside from emergency response, training is the next most important thing we do. Excellent service delivery utilizing a well-trained and well-equipped workforce does not happen without a focus on training. Not only does training pay dividends for our customers, but our personnel benefit greatly by an increased safety profile. It is often said that when we get in a tight situation we will react the way we train. This is a trademark of the military and it certainly fits with us.

Our people are asked to operate at a high level in extreme circumstances on a variety of incidents. The skill sets required take time, practice and experience to refine. A firefighter may have to rely on a skill learned some time ago to self-rescue or save another firefighter. There is no more important training in my mind than honing skills that may save our own!

Do you have a close working relationship with neighboring departments? We are truly blessed in Virginia Beach to have great relationships with not only the cities of Chesapeake and Norfolk and our Military Installations, with which we share boundaries, but every city in the Hampton Roads area. We provide and receive mutual aid on a regular basis with our neighboring departments and the prospect of automatic aid is being discussed.

The Fire Chiefs in the Hampton Roads region meet on a monthly basis and we have appointed members of our respective departments to serve on working groups. These six working groups work on initiatives that impact all areas of our departments. Additionally, the Hampton Roads fire departments all participate in many regional specialty teams that range from hazardous materials, technical rescue and maritime response to the Metropolitan Medical Response System and the FEMA Urban Search and Rescue Program.

I believe the fire service is certainly resilient enough to survive the current economic times. If we focus on four areas, I feel our chances will greatly improve. First, we have to continue to deliver quality service. We must strive to be the absolute best that we can be at what I call “the moment of truth.” Next, we must develop our people. There is no greater resource available to us to carry out our mission. We should focus on continuous improvement of personnel and development of our future leaders. Third, we have to develop relationships at all levels of government, within the private sector and with the labor organizations within our departments. Collaboration will be a key to our future success. Finally, we must continue to secure the necessary resources; including personnel, equipment and infrastructure in order to deliver quality emergency service.

I want to close by saying Thank You to each and every member of the Virginia Fire and Rescue service. You work tirelessly to deliver great service to people in need without much fanfare. You are grounded securely in your values and there is much other’s in this world could learn from all of you!

If you know someone who would be interesting to read about in this column, contact Bill Smith, Executive Director, Virginia Fire Chiefs Association (888) 818-0893 or bsmith@vfca.us
As I write this article the economy continues in its downward spiral. The housing markets are off, the auto industry; banks, airlines, etc. are all claiming to be on the brink of financial disaster it seems. Hopefully the $789B stimulus package just passed by Congress will help the situation soon.

All levels of government are also feeling the pinch. City manager’s, county administrators, mayors and other public officials are all looking at unprecedented ways of cutting budgets, including closing fire stations and putting companies out of service. All across the country we are seeing and experiencing first hand these trying times.

The National Picture

Late last year, Atlanta Fire Rescue Chief Kelvin Cochran said that Fire Station 23, would be closed from Christmas Day to June 30, the end of the city’s budget cycle. Fire Truck 12, which operates at Fire Station 12 will not operate during the same time period.

Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin said she tried to avoid public safety cuts in May when she proposed what she has described as a “modest” property tax increase.

Later, Franklin announced that 222 city workers would lose their jobs to help fill a projected $50 million to $60 million budget shortfall. Most remaining city workers, including firefighters, would work fewer hours and suffer a pay cut as part of the budget cuts.

Across the country, The Sacramento Fire Department was scheduled to increase the number of fire engines it takes out of service on a rotating basis from one to two every day beginning March 1, according to a city staff report.

Fire Department officials there say that the cost-cutting strategy would lead to increased response times to emergencies in many neighborhoods – and that could contribute to greater property loss.

Yet, with the city’s budget crunch growing more dire, such a move might be just the beginning.

City officials are discussing taking three engines out of service beginning in July, Assistant City Manager Gus Vina said.

The dramatic moves are being considered as the city faces a $50 million budget deficit for the next fiscal year.

Beginning March 1, a second fire engine was scheduled to be added to the list to help cut more costs.

The proposal to shelve a third engine is being considered for the 2009-10 fiscal year, which begins July 1, Vina said. In early drafts, a third engine would be taken off the streets 165 days a year.

In Philadelphia, Seven city fire companies ceased operations earlier this year as part of Mayor Nutter’s budget-cutting plan, but not without rancor, as the head of the firefighters’ union claimed that “people will die” because of the closures.

Citing a decline in structure fires and a shrinking population, Nutter announced in November that he hoped to realize savings by decommissioning the five engine companies and two ladder companies. Nutter has forecast a $108 million budget shortfall this year, and more than $1 billion over five years.

In Miami recently, hundreds of hopefuls lined up for 35 firefighter jobs. Many camped out overnight. In just under twelve hours, the city took 750 applications for the 35 jobs that offer $46,000 a year.

Here in Virginia

Closer to home here in Virginia, the headline reads “King William strains to meet fire, rescue needs.”

Lynn Barbour pulled the heart-monitor batteries out of their chargers and let out a heavy sigh.

King William County’s Volunteer Fire & Rescue Company had 40 of the batteries, which are the power source for defibrillators, the devices used to help people going through cardiac arrest.

Now they’re down to 12, and those are four to 10-year-old hand-me-downs from another rescue squad.

“Most don’t last us but 30 minutes, even the good ones,” said Barbour, the county’s EMS captain, training officer and a full-time EMS liaison for both Henrico Doctors’ Hospital campuses. Volunteers often change batteries more than once during a call.

Equipment isn’t the only challenge.

More people are moving into the area, and existing residents are aging.

The slow economy means more calls from people who have no way to get to a hospital or money for a visit to the doctor or hospital.

Equipment is wearing out faster and not being replaced as often.

Like groups in other rural areas, King William’s all-volunteer fire and rescue organizations have reached a breaking point when it comes to volunteers and resources.

In 2006, King William volunteers answered 1,119 calls.

Last year, there were 2,063 – an 84 percent increase in two years – and fire and rescue officials say they have seen more calls so far in 2009 than this time last year.

According to Census Bureau data, King William was Virginia’s fifth fastest-growing locality between July 2006 and July 2007. The population grew 3.46 percent, from 15,165 people to 15,689.

“We have dedicated folks that run all the time, but you can...
only handle so much,” Barbour said.

Trained volunteers are harder to find.

The county needs more, especially those with fire and EMS training, said Steve Puckett, King William’s emergency-services director. However, training is time-consuming and expensive.

“Volunteerism has changed over the years,” Puckett said. Years ago “people lived close by and they could leave work and go take an ambulance call.”

But now an average ambulance call lasts several hours, and “employers just can’t afford to let you do that,” he said.

The story is familiar to other rural areas. New Kent and Louisa counties have added paid professionals to their volunteer base within the past decade.

Louisa Fire Chief Robert Dubé said the county has had paid EMS workers since 1999. Last month, The Louisa Board of Supervisors approved more paid firefighter/EMS positions, bringing the total to 30.

The county answers about 3,400 calls a year, Dubé said.

Louisa County Administrator Dale Mullen said residents and the business community complained about coverage and response times.

“What if your loved one, your spouse . . . mother or father needed an ambulance right now and nobody was available to come?” he said. “That’s a hard thing to think about.”

New Kent began having paid professionals about five years ago, said Fire Chief Tommy Hicks.

Paid staff has helped bring the county’s average response time down from 23 minutes to eight minutes. The county has 10 full-time and 22 part-time personnel and roughly 90 volunteers.

Late last year when fuel prices were at an all time high across the country it created an additional hardship on volunteers as well as jurisdictions across the Commonwealth and nation.

To balance the state budget Gov. Timothy M. Kaine has ordered 570 state employee layoffs, cut college funding by at least 5 percent, ordered some older prisons closed and postponed state employee raises to deal with a $2.5 billion government fiscal crisis.

The governor also asked the General Assembly to approve about $250 million in debt for capital outlay projects now paid with cash and to withdraw about $400 million from the state “rainy day” cash reserves just to make ends meet in the current fiscal year.

The austere round of cuts is the third imposed since last October and deepest in at least five years. They come amid a worsening global economy that Kaine acknowledged would probably force even more cuts in the next fiscal year.

“We might decide as we see events play out here in the next month or two that for purposes of the decisions we make in the 2010 budget that we would cut expenses further, that we would go beyond the revenue estimate,” Kaine said somberly at a news conference.

“Nationally, we don’t know where the bottom is,” Kaine said. “All we can do is make the real decisions in real time, not putting it off until later to keep this budget in balance and protect the services that are most critical.”

Kaine projected that revenues for the current fiscal year which began in July would be about $973 million short of their targets. For the fiscal year that begins next summer, the shortfall is estimated at more than $1.5 billion.

As dark as the Democratic governor’s forecast was, there were legislators who feared he may have been too optimistic.

“I just don’t see it being $2.5 billion. I wish I did,” said House Majority Whip Kirk Cox, R-Colonial Heights.

Economists and advisers with whom Kaine met have set the shortfall in a range from $2 billion to nearly $3 billion. Kaine split the difference, and Cox said Kaine observed “a very thoughtful process” to reach what seemed a reasonable figure.

“But, boy, has the world changed in the last few weeks,” he said. “I think he should have started at $3 billion and then see where it goes from there.”

The steps Kaine announced deal only with the current fiscal year. He is leaving the more dire prospect of reconciling the fiscal 2010 shortfall for the amended budget he must submit to legislative money committees in December.

Total agency spending reductions in Kaine’s newest directive would total about $323 million in savings. About $75 million will result from job cuts and layoffs, according to the administration.

Virginia will save another $44.7 million by postponing until next July the 2-percent raises state workers were to receive next month.

What’s Being Done

Last fall, on October 31 and November 1, nearly 200 fire service leaders, stakeholders and IAFC staff members gathered in Washington, D.C., to participate in the IAFC’s, 2008 Strategic Planning and Leadership Forum. This year’s theme, Thriving in Tough Times, challenged participants to focus on core issues, think strategically and turn adversity into opportunity.

The economic downturn and the resulting cutbacks both locally and nationally took center stage. IAFC Treasurer Chief Bill Metcalf provided an overview of the economic situation and the implications for fire departments and the IAFC. While the picture was bleak, Metcalf, IAFC President Chief Larry Grorud and others on the program reminded the audience about the power of thinking and acting strategically, planning carefully and providing good leadership.

To further help fire departments across the nation cope with this crisis, the IAFC has created a task force to help fire chief’s deal with the economic challenges. Stafford County Fire Chief Rob Brown is now chairman of that national task force.

With government facing a financial reckoning that could include difficult cuts to crucial staff and services, there may be more safety in knowledge than in numbers. Brown described a Web-based communication network that has been set up that will allow departments to quickly and easily share cost-saving ideas.

“We want to design tools for fire chiefs so they don’t make knee-jerk decisions that could have a cataclysmic result for public services,” Brown said. “Don’t grab the low-hanging fruit just because it’s easy.”

“We’re looking at many things to help us weather this financial storm without service reductions, if possible,” Brown
With revenue dwindling and some departments struggling to maintain sufficient staffing levels, efficiency has become the new buzzword. By cutting fuel consumption and maintenance costs, departments can save money and keep firefighters in the trucks.

Compounding the problem is the natural tendency for call volume to increase as the economy worsens, Brown said.

“The IAFC’s concern was that this unprecedented global situation is affecting everyone, and will trickle down to public services,” Brown said.

He added that while some communities were insulated from budget issues over the past year, almost all are feeling the pinch now.

What You Can Do

As individual fire officer’s it is extremely important to remember that you are not in this alone. There are many resources out there that can assist you.

One of the most important things we must do when times get tight is to build on existing relationships and alliances. Network with your peers to learn “what works for them.”

Explore new ways of working smarter. Try not to fall into the trap of stopping staff development as that is almost always a short sighted way of saving a few short-term dollars. Consider telecommuting or different work shifts where it could work.

As has been pointed out in another article in this issue, there is a new Administration in Washington. There will be many opportunities for appointments to both old and new positions as government reorganizes itself to do the peoples work. Consider offering your name or someone you may know that could do a good job.

In Congress, there are a number of new faces there. Contact them to get them to become members of the Congressional Fire Service Caucus. Get to know your legislator’s at all levels of government. They can help you, their constituents, with support of things like the FIRE Act, SAFER, etc.

Although economic times are bleak right now, things will change. During the past 30 years, economic reversals or corrections have made several appearances. We experienced recessions during the ’70s, ’80s and ’90s. The real question is whether the current collapse of the U.S. housing market and global stock markets will lead to something much more severe than the recessions we’ve experienced in the last three decades—something more akin to the Great Depression of the 1930s.

In the meantime, stay positive, look for ways to work smarter and more efficiently and do what you can to make things better in your own organization. Remember, tough times always bring change. But also remember that change can prove to be an opportunity to become smarter and more efficient.

On April 3, 2008, representatives from the Virginia Fire Service will gather in Washington with fire and EMS leadership from around the country. The visit will be aimed at reaching legislators of the 111th Congress to discuss fire related issues.

CFSI will host the 21st Annual National Fire and Emergency Services Dinner and Seminars in Washington, D. C. at the Washington Hilton.

The Annual National Fire and Emergency Services Dinner and Seminars in Washington is an extraordinary day filled with opportunities for fire service leaders to engage Congressional leaders and Administration officials in discussions about federal programs and legislation addressing the needs of local first responders.

This is the Fire Services’ day in Washington. In addition to the Dinner, and during our visit there, the Annual Congressional Luncheon has been scheduled with members of the Virginia delegation to exchange information and share ideas on how the federal government can address the challenges of the fire services, both nationally and locally.

The National Fire and Emergency Services Dinner is an annual fundraising event for the Congressional Fire Services Institute. The Dinner is in its twenty-first year and since its creation has expanded to include over 2,000 attendees annually. In past years, keynote speakers have included President George W. Bush, President Bill Clinton, President George H.W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Vice President Al Gore, Vice President Dan Quayle, Secretary Tom Ridge, Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert and Senator John McCain.

This event is considered a unique opportunity to meet and network with other fire service leaders from around the country.
The 30th Annual Virginia EMS Symposium

Virginia’s Premier EMS Training Event!

• Over 250 classes to meet your CE needs.
• A full day of pre-conference classes on Wednesday, Nov. 11th.
• Enjoy the Governor’s EMS Awards Banquet on Saturday, Nov. 14th and much more!

Register online at www.vdh.virginia.gov/oems starting Aug. 1st. 2009

And The Winner is....

Nominate someone today for your Regional EMS Awards Program! The regional winners go on to compete for the state award that is presented at the Governor’s Awards Banquet during the symposium. To learn more about how to nominate someone visit your Regional EMS Council Web site at www.vaems.org.

“An education for life”
November 11 - 15, 2009
Norfolk Waterside Marriott
Norfolk, Virginia
The annual Virginia Fire Chiefs Association Mid-Atlantic Expo and Symposium was held February 19 – 22, 2009 in Virginia Beach. Participants attended seminars and considered innovative technology and services for their departments. Emphasis was on leadership, mentorship, and survivorship. The new VDFP Driver Simulator provided hands-on simulated driver training. The President’s Award was renamed the W. C. “Bill” Smith President’s Award, in honor of the retiring executive director. The Saturday General Session keynote speakers were Lt. Danny Urps, Lt. Chris Brown, Master Technician Eric Moore, Technician Thomas Ferguson, and Master Technician Joe Swift, all from Fairfax County, Virginia, about a “Mayday” incident which they were involved that occurred on May 27, 2007. The symposium ended with an informative account of Two Elements of Success and how to avoid the “5 Types of Stupid” by Jeff Johnson, fire chief and chief executive officer of Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue, Oregon.

By the numbers:
- Nearly 650 fire service personnel attended the symposium
- The pre-conference seminars began with registration on Wednesday, February 19, 2009
- 24 pre-conference seminars at the Convention Center, including a two-day seminar
- One hands-on seminar was offered two times at the Virginia Beach Training Center and provided early participants with training on flashovers
- Approximately 425 exhibitors, which included 113 companies, provided two days of information and opportunities for purchasing fire-related equipment and services
- An Exhibitor Reception was held Friday evening
- A luncheon was provided by the VFCA to registered conference attendees
- 12 past presidents of the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association and dignitaries enjoyed dinner together
- 11 current Virginia Fire Chiefs Association officers were installed
- A 2-day mini-officer’s academy was presented by Kimberly Alyn, best-selling author and trainer
- 2 general sessions were highlights of Saturday and Sunday
- Saturday’s general session keynote speakers spoke about a “Mayday” incident everyone survived
- 24 additional seminars followed Saturday’s general session keynote speaker
- 9 individuals and groups received Governor’s Fire Service Awards
- 2 VFCA officers received the W. C. “Bill” Smith President’s Award
- 2 groups of were recognized as academy graduates
- 2 Departments received health & safety awards
- 9 EFO graduates were presented flags flown over the United States Capital in their honor
- 26 individuals were remembered in the memorial service
- 31 individuals received scholarships totaling $7,450.00
- The finale of the five-day symposium was the general session with “The Two Elements of Success” and how to avoid the “5 Types of Stupid”

The 2010 MAE&S promises to provide more opportunities for education and acknowledgment.

Photo’s/Article by Susan Rueger of Rueger Photography
Conference at a glance…

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The 2010 MAE&S promises to provide more opportunities for education and acknowledgement of outstanding service by Virginia’s fire departments.

Next Year…

Mid-Atlantic Expo & Symposium
2010
February 25 – 28, 2010
Virginia Beach, VA
Caputo Receives the W. C. “Bill” Smith President’s Award

During the Opening Ceremony at the 2009 MAE&S, Nicholas J. Caputo became the recipient of the renamed 2008, W. C. “Bill” Smith VFCA President’s Award.

Nick is the Deputy Chief with the Spotsylvania County Department of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Management. He is married to his wife Amy.

He was honored for his work/service with the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association (VFCA) Board of Director’s, Chair of the Professional Development Committee and Virginia Fire Officer Academy.

Nick has chaired the VFCA Professional Development Committee for a number of years and each year coordinates all of the educational session for the Mid-Atlantic Expo & Symposium. Additionally, in 2007 and 2008 he served as the Board representative for the Virginia Fire Officer Academy.

This year Academy was held June 16-20, 2008, on the campus of the University of Richmond. Forty company officers from 34 departments across the Commonwealth participated.

The Academy is a collaborative effort between the VFCA, the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation and the University of Richmond. Students attended a resident-style, week-long program focusing on “Safety through Leadership.” The academy used a hands-on approach, focusing on exercises, scenarios and role-playing events.

Virginia EFO Graduates Honored

Nine Virginia Fire Officer’s were honored for completing their Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP) during 2008.

Each graduate was invited to the podium where they were presented with an American flag that had been flown over the U. S. Capitol in their honor. The new graduates include: Benjamin Barksdale, Arlington County Fire Department; Charles R. Jolly, Suffolk Department of Fire & Rescue; David R. Eagle, Danville Fire Department; Jason R. Loftus, Accomack County Public Safety; Thomas E. Poulin, Virginia Beach Fire Department; Richard C. Edinger, Chesterfield Fire & EMS; Simone Gulsano, Chesapeake Fire Department; R. Scott Garber, Staunton Fire & Rescue; and Marci Stone, Bedford Science and Technology.

The Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP) is an initiative of the United States Fire Administration/National Fire Academy designed to provide senior officers and others in key leadership roles.

The officers enhance their professional development through a unique series of four graduate and upper-division-baccalaureate equivalent courses. The EFOP spans a 4-year period with 4 core courses. Each course is 2 weeks in length.

EFOP participant must complete an Applied Research Project (ARP) that relates to their organization within 6 months after the completion of each of the four courses. A certificate of completion for the entire EFOP is awarded only after the successful completion of the final research project.

Virginia CFO’s/CMO’s named

Eleven candidates from Virginia received their CFO/CMO designation in 2008. They include: Walter T. Bailey, Phenix Fire Department; Jason D. Campbell, Lynchburg Fire & EMS Department; Richard V. Cooper, Virginia Beach Fire Department; Laurie A. Gurley, Virginia Beach Fire Department; Terrence J. McAndrews, Virginia Beach Fire Department; Jeffrey T. Tervilliger, Portsmouth Department of Fire Rescue and Emergency Services; Kenneth Jones, Newport News Fire Department; Edward M. Brazle, Virginia Beach EMS; William Sullivan Kiely, Virginia Beach EMS; Michael B. Player, York County Department of Fire and Life Safety.

Additionally, nine others were recertified in the CFO/D process.
2008 Governor’s Fire Service Award
Recipients Recognized

Richmond, Virginia: – On Saturday, February 21st the 2008 Governor’s Fire Service Awards were presented to nine individuals/departments in eight categories during opening ceremonies at the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association’s Expo and Symposium held at the Virginia Beach Convention Center.

The Governor’s Fire Service Awards were established in 2002 as a formal recognition of excellence in Virginia’s Fire Services. Nominees are carefully reviewed and selected by the Virginia Fire Services Board Executive Committee and forwarded to the Governor through the Secretary of Public Safety for final approval. The awards are presented annually to recipients in eight categories.

Governor Fire Service Awards were presented to the following individuals:

Award: Excellence in Virginia’s Fire Service
Recipient: Daniel Arsenault and Travis Gaylord – Hampton Fire and Rescue
Criteria: This award recognizes an individual who exemplifies an outstanding dedication to helping protect the citizens of Virginia against the devastating effects of fire, not only in their own jurisdictions, but in other areas of the Commonwealth as well.

Award: Excellence in Virginia Fire & Life Safety Education
Recipient: Bridgette M. Hoilman – Chesapeake Fire Department
Criteria: This award recognizes an individual who exemplifies outstanding dedication and service for the furtherance of Virginia Public Fire & Life Safety Education not only in their own department, but in other areas of the Commonwealth as well.

Award: Excellence in Virginia Fire Service Management
Recipient: Chief James A. Gray, Jr. – Hampton Fire and Rescue
Criteria: This award recognizes any Officer or Fire Department that has demonstrated exceptional dedication to sound management principles and excellence in fire service leadership not only in their own department, but for the greater good of other fire departments within the Commonwealth.

Award: Outstanding Fire Department Response
Recipient: Roanoke County Fire and Rescue
Criteria: This award recognizes any outstanding Fire Department response made in the last year, which demonstrates mutual aid, integration of multiple system components, interagency interfacing and cooperation, or complex assessment or rescue.

Award: Excellence in Virginia’s Fire Service Training
Recipient: Chief V. T. “Slim” Crawford – Scruggs Volunteer Fire Rescue Dive Team
Criteria: This award recognizes any individual/individuals providing lesson plans, support or delivery of programs within the Commonwealth which are fire service related.

Award: Excellence in Virginia Fire Prevention
Recipient: Fairfax County Fire Prevention Division
Criteria: This award recognizes any individual who has demonstrated exceptional dedication to the field of fire prevention; to include the adoption, amendment or interpretation of the Statewide Fire Prevention Code, Statewide Building Code, and other related codes or fire prevention principles that would impact not only their own jurisdiction but other localities as well.

Award: Civilian Lifesaving Award
Recipient: Reverend James McNeil – Chesapeake, VA
Criteria: This award recognizes any civilian, with no fire service affiliation, who exemplifies an outstanding dedication to helping protect the citizens of Virginia against the devastating effects of fire.

Award: Excellence in Private Sector Fire Services Support
Recipient: Lawrenceville Brick, Inc. – Lawrenceville, VA
Criteria: This award recognizes any private sector or nonprofit entity that has demonstrated exceptional dedication to the success of Virginia Fire Services throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia.

VFCA President, Chief Jimmy Gray appointed by Governor Tim Kaine to serve on the State Emergency Medical Services Advisory Board.

New and dangerous college trend surfaces – “Flash Mobs”

A new trend is beginning to spread across college and university campuses called Flash Mob. As you can see the example in the YouTube video, students join together and enter a structure and party for about 15 minutes then disband without any other disruption. The biggest concern is when this activity takes place in structures that cannot handle such activity and could potentially collapse.

The link below shows an example from UVA in mid-December: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_BgOlpy2ZY
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This year, as a part of its 2008 scholarship program, the Virginia Fire Chiefs Foundation presented thirty one, Robert E. White Memorial Scholarships to Virginia students who have been accepted into a post-high school educational institution or programs. The awards were presented during the Mid-Atlantic Expo & Symposium in Virginia Beach.

Selection of the award recipients was based on demonstrated need, desire, initiative and potential benefits of the educational opportunity.

The recipients included: Ronald S. Garber of Staunton Fire & Rescue Department who received $500 towards a Masters degree from Columbia Southern University. Kurt Mueller, of Chesterfield County Fire & EMS received $500 towards a Master’s degree at Jacksonville State University and Kenneth Pravetz, of Virginia Beach Fire received $500 towards his Master’s degree at Columbia Southern University.

There were ten $315.00 awards presented, all to Fire Service students working on Bachelor degrees. They include: Joseph Bartos, who attends the University of Richmond. James Cullinan, III, who attends University of Maryland. Lisa Garrett, who attends VCU. Ronald Hiteshew, who attends Columbia Southern University. Jacob Newton, who attends Hampden-Sydney College. Robert Owens, Sr. of Mechanicsville who is attending Columbia Southern University. Taylor Roby, who attends Bridgewater College. Mark Shaw, who attends Grand Canyon University. Kristopher Shrader, who attends VCU and Todd Southard who attends the University of Richmond.

This year there were thirteen $100 awards made for dependent children of firefighters. They went to: Jennifer Bartgis, who attends William & Mary; Courtney Edwards who attends Eckerd College; Brooke Eudailey, who attends James Madison; Jennifer Eudailey who attends Christopher Newport University; Ashley Heath who will attend University of Virginia; Stephen Hudson who’s at Longwood University; Maureen Loughran, who is attending Old Dominion; William Schmidt who’s also at ODU; Tyler Smith who is in the application process; Anna Stogoski, who plans to attend JMU; Shannon Stone who will be attending Bridgewater; Aaron Taylor who is planning on University of Virginia; and Taryn Taylor who is attending Miller-Motte Technical College.

There were two Associate degree program awards made. They include: Peter Mackerlich, who is attending Columbia Southern and Stephen Turner who attends Northern Virginia Community College.

Lastly, there were three $300.00 awards made to the following individuals:
- Dana Main, 2009 MAE&S
- Ashley Pitts, Rappahanock Community College
- Megan Young, J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College

The scholarship program was first established a number of years ago in memory of Mr. Robert E. White, a citizen of the Commonwealth of Virginia who donated his money towards the betterment of the Fire Service throughout the state.

The objective of the program is to assist individuals desiring to further their education through a variety of opportunities such as college classes, National Fire Academy classes, VFCA events such as the Mid-Atlantic Expo & Symposium, certificate programs, and other Fire & EMS programs or conferences. Individual scholarship awards are made up to $1,000 and can be utilized for any direct expenses such as registration, tuition, books, meals, lodging and/or transportation.

Over the past seven years 127 scholarships have been awarded totaling more than $55,000.

Applications for the 2009 grant period (January 2009 to July 1, 2010) will be accepted between September 1, and December 1, 2009. Successful applicants will be notified by January 1, 2010. Awardees will be recognized at the 2010 Mid-Atlantic Expo & Symposium.

Applications and eligibility information may be obtained by visiting the VFCA website at www.vfca.us, or by calling or writing the Association. You may reach us by phone at (888) 818-0983.
Changing the Face of Virginia’s Fire Service:
Innovation, Teamwork and Dedication

For more information visit us online at  www.vafire.com
2008 Needs Assessment

The Fire Service Needs Assessment is an annual survey conducted by the Virginia Department of Fire Programs. Fire departments complete a survey questionnaire designed to identify the needs of Virginia’s Fire Service. Results are then compiled and published in a comprehensive report available each year in January in time for the General Assembly.

The 2008 Needs Assessment Report is now available by contacting the VDFP at http://www.vafire.com/. Thanks to all fire departments in Virginia for their efforts in responding to the survey. The assessment could not be successful without their valuable support and contribution.

The information presented in this report is the product of an extensive, continuing effort to provide a current and comprehensive assessment of the challenges facing Virginia’s fire and emergency services.

It provides an overview of Virginia’s fire service by providing current needs assessment survey data annually along with updated information on reported incidents, training, and funding.

Top Needs

To complete the assessment, fire departments were asked to rank their top needs from #1 to #5 with #1 being the most important need and #5 being the least important need. Overall, Personnel, was selected as the #1 top need with Virginia’s fire service. These rankings were similar when comparing the five regions of Virginia with the exception of apparatus being the top need in the Mountain Region. The overall top needs for Virginia did not vary from last year’s survey, displaying that the fire service needs are unchanged and inadequacies with departments continue to exist.

Estimated Costs

Reporting departments also provided their estimated costs for Fiscal Year 2009 for five specific “need” categories. The results were compiled and the total operating costs with Virginia’s fire service is estimated as $612 million. The estimated costs reported with last year’s survey were $496 million, suggesting that funding shortfalls are increasing with Virginia’s fire service.

2008 Fire Service Needs Assessment Quick Facts

- The overall survey response for the Needs Assessment was 92%; 3% higher from the 89% response from 2007.
- 83% of departments reported a need for firefighter training.
- 79% of fire departments have no program to maintain basic firefighter fitness and health as required by the NFPA 1500 standard.
- 76% of fire departments reported that their primary type of area that they protect is rural.
- 76% of all fire departments responded that they need more volunteer firefighters.
- 67% of firefighters are volunteer firefighters.
- 63% of fire departments have no personnel recruitment program; 69% have no retention program.
- 54% of fire departments have no GPS map coordinate system to help navigate during emergency response.
- For equipment, personal protective equipment (52%) is most needed by fire departments; radios (49%) are ranked second.
- 46% of respondents reported that they need improvements or remodeling of their existing stations.
- 42% of fire departments have radios with no emergency alert button.
- 35% of fire departments reported that they need an engine / pumper.
- 33% of fire departments have stations with no backup power.
- 29% of fire departments funding comes from fundraising.
- 28% of fire stations are reported as being 40 years of age or older.
- Personnel is the top reported need by fire departments; Training is the second highest need.
- Overall, fire departments reported that their total estimated costs for Fiscal Year 2009 would be $612 million.
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The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) recently announced the theme Protect Yourself: Your Safety, Health and Survival Are Your Responsibility for the 2009 Safety, Health and Survival Week, scheduled for June 14-20.

We here at VFCA encourage all fire/EMS departments to devote that week to reviewing safety policies, evaluating the progress of existing initiatives and discussing health and fitness. Fire/EMS departments should make a concerted effort during the week to correct safety deficiencies and to provide training as needed. An entire week is provided to ensure that each shift and volunteer duty crew can spend one day focusing on fire fighter safety, health and survival.

Protect Yourself: Your Safety, Health and Survival Are Your Responsibility encourages chiefs and fire/EMS personnel to focus on what they personally can do to manage risk and enhance their health and safety. This year’s theme reflects the need for personal responsibility and accountability within a strong safety culture.

Fire fighter safety is a full-time job for all of us, all of the time. We can’t rely on someone else to do it for us. It takes personal commitment.

Recommended activities and materials will incorporate four key areas where standard operating procedures, policies and initiatives—along with the training and enforcement that support them—can limit fire/EMS personnel’s risk of injury or death:

Safety – Emergency Driving (Enough is Enough—End Senseless Death)
1. Lower speeds—stop racing to the scene. Drive safely and arrive alive to help others.
2. Utilize seat belts—never drive or ride without them.
3. Stop at every intersection—look in all directions and then proceed in a safe manner.

Health – Fire Fighter Heart Disease and Cancer Education and Prevention
1. Don’t smoke or use tobacco products.
2. Get active.
3. Eat a heart-healthy diet.
4. Maintain a healthy weight.
5. Get regular health screenings.

Survival – Structural Size-Up and Situational Awareness
1. Keep apprised of different types of building materials and construction used in your community.
2. Develop a comprehensive size-up checklist.
3. Always complete a 360° walk of the structure to collect valuable, operational decision-making information.
4. Learn the practice of reading smoke.
5. Be familiar with the accepted rules of engagement.
6. Learn your accountability system and use it.
7. Master your tools and equipment.
8. Remain calm and concentrate.

Chiefs – Be the Leader in Safety
1. Become personally engaged in safety and make it part of your strategic vision for the department.
2. Be willing to make the tough decisions regarding safety policies and practices and their implementation.
3. Hold members of the organization accountable for their safety and the safety of those with whom they work.
4. Ensure that resources are available to accomplish activities safely and effectively.

Keep watching www.iafc.org/safetyweek for more information on this year’s program and planning resources developed by the IAFC Safety, Health and Survival Section.
Growing up as an avid New York Yankee fan, Yogi Berra was one of my baseball heroes. He certainly did not look like an athlete but he could play the game, becoming a Hall of Famer after his playing days were over. Many of later generations probably have never heard of or remember him as a player but have heard his witticisms many times. The above article title is one of Yogi’s observations and in my opinion fits well with the symposium that I had the privilege of participating in November 17 and 18 in Washington, D. C.

I was asked to be on one of three panels during the one and one-half day symposium entitled “Fire Protection and Safety: The Next 25 Years” hosted by the Fire Protection Research Foundation. More than 130 professionals from both the public and private sector met to look 25 years in the future and discuss challenges. Attendees and presenters represented many fields including the fire service, facility fire protection, research, engineering, and manufacturing.

The symposium consisted of three basic topic areas, each of which included a keynote speaker, and a panel discussion with a diverse set of panelists, each of whom made a short presentation followed by a questions and answer session. These three basic topic areas were:

Session Topic 1: Demographics and Urban Growth Patterns (Future Fire Protection: the Social and Demographic Context)

Session Topic 2: Materials and Technology (Tomorrow’s Materials and Technologies and Fire Safety)

Session Topic 3: Environment, Energy, and Sustainability (Tomorrow’s Sustainability Challenges and Fire Safety)

Presenters were asked to look into the future and predict or give a glimpse from their perspectives on where fire protection and safety will be in the 25 years. There were more than 25 presenters for the day and a half symposium and many expectations and visions were shared. With the variety of backgrounds, it is not surprising that several common themes emerged from the three sessions. I will highlight only a few.

The changing demographics of the U.S. population was one theme that will produce challenges for the fire service. Not only is the median age of the population increasing, but the cultural identity is also changing with population growth, much of it through immigration. As one speaker noted the changes will define certain cultural characteristics that will have a significant influence on the fire service.

Shifting of populations to urban areas, the aging population living in communities with housing closer together, language barriers (communication), and the growing urban/wildland interface create increasing and new problems in fire prevention and firefighting protection. With cultural differences, new approaches will be required for fire safety education and enforcement programs, and possible changes in volunteer fire fighter recruitment. The aging population and resulting increasing disabilities of the population will create the need for additional fire protection in buildings currently not found as society continues to call for aging in place in buildings with a “home” like atmosphere.

Energy and technology are changing rapidly. In some cases they will result in safer products and new fire fighting tools but may also create new hazards or problems. Several presenters discussed biotechnology, nanotechnologies, robotics, and other innovative technological applications that will have significant impact.

Personalized medicine based on databases of patient data, new families of chemical and biological sensors, improvements in battery capacity, wearable personal medical monitoring devices, integrated advanced radios, and PPE improvement were a few of the advances through bio and nanotechnologies, including PPE biodefense systems.

Nanotechnology is in itself an interesting term. It is defined as “the science of developing materials at the atomic and molecular level in order to imbue them with special electrical and chemical properties. Nanotechnology, which deals with devices typically less than 100 nanometers in size, is making a significant contribution to the fields of computer storage, semiconductors, biotechnology, manufacturing and energy. Fire fighters of the future will be different from today and their transition is already happening, with the new advances creating an information rich environment on the fire ground. The technology for the use of robotics will continue to advance and enhance the ability to function in severe locations.

A nanometer is one billionth of a meter. Imagine the effect of the nanotechnology and the power they will have. In the future, amazing nanotech-based products are expected, including extraordinarily tiny computers that are very powerful, building materials that withstand earthquakes, advanced systems for drug delivery and custom-tailored pharmaceuticals as well as the elimination of invasive surgery, because repairs can be made from within the body.

In other areas the future is now. Biodiesel, lightweight construction and other technologies have been accepted or recognized but do present hazards, often unseen or undefined, to firefighters. Many are currently being discussed through the code development process but solutions are months or even years away.

In referring to what is done in industry today, one speaker noted that “Those not knowledgeable in fire safety are making unwise decisions, and these decisions are being made in unrealistic time frames” and later stated that “new and unproven methods will be implemented with insufficient testing and approval.” The great philosopher Yogi (again) once noted that “You’ve got to be very careful if you don’t know where you are going, because you might not get there”. This might just sum up this problem. Participation of the fire service in all aspects of fire safety continues to be a priority to help insure unwise decisions are challenged.

I was asked to be a panel member for Session Topic 3 and to address the fire marshal’s perspective on how changes in our environment will affect fire safety in the future. Such issues as environmental restrictions on fire protection materials, reduced water supplies, new sources of energy that may have related fire hazards and new building designs that focus on sustainability were some of the areas I considered.
Mayday Lesson’s Learned a hit at 2009 MAE&S

By: Susan Rueger

The Saturday general session keynote speakers were Lt. Danny Urps, Lt. Chris Brown, Master Technician Eric Moore, Technician Thomas Ferguson, and Master Technician Joe Swift, all from Fairfax County, Virginia. They were involved in a “Mayday” incident on May 27, 2007 at 1522 hours. 6056 Estates Drive was a three-story townhouse plus a basement. The fire started due to a cigarette on the deck at the rear of the building and went up side C wall, which had vinyl siding, into the structure. All sides were burning and spreading; winds were 10-15 mph. While the call started as a routine fire, it ended with two crew members from Rescue 426 (Moore and Ferguson) being lost, disoriented, and injured.

Moore and Ferguson, from Rescue 426, and two members from Engine 422 were sent to the third floor to check the status of the fire. The goal was to stop the spread of the fire to adjacent townhouses. The roof did not burn through because the third floor attic was finished, which allowed more voids to conceal the fire. The crew did not realize that there was a bi-fold door (like on a closet) at the top of the stairs. Moore and Ferguson were looking for the stairs and the bi-fold door closed by itself when the heat rose in the room. The two members of Engine 422 exited the structure; miscommunication.

With Moore and Ferguson trapped in third floor loft room that had extreme heat, the “Mayday” was dispatched and a hose line was requested. The “Mayday” was clear and concise; command acknowledged Mayday and resources were deployed. At the time, the Alpha side showed mild amount of smoke. Moore was in pain because of his burned hands. Ferguson was very fit but was huffing and puffing. Four other firefighters were sent up to rescue them. The unusual bi-fold door provided a challenge to them, also, but no one panicked. Their tag line burned through. Swift found Ferguson and refused to let go of him. Four minutes, 54 seconds after the “Mayday” call, everyone was out. Both Moore and Ferguson were sent to Washington Hospital Burn Center. Moore was hospitalized with second and third degree burns to his hands. Ferguson was treated and released.

Lessons learned:
• Personal discipline (recall your training, take care of ourselves and each other)
• Positive communications – face to face (make sure everyone understands directions)
• Remain calm (don’t panic and be humble)
• Accountability (go in together and leave together except for a tragedy)
• Physical fitness (even the most fit person gets tired)
• Train like your life depends on it – because it does
• Survival attitude: never give up (we CAN do this!)
• Call a “Mayday” when situation dictates (there was another incident by a crew in the basement that should have been a “Mayday”)
• P.A.R.s must be done (accountability passports not used to track units on the fire ground)
• Command officer accountability and coordination was poor (two incident commanders instead of Charlie Division Supervisor acting as a division supervisor)
• BFC was positioned too close to structure and exposures
• Suppression positioning was sound
• Second alarm and rapid intervention team (R.I.T. level 2) were correctly requested early, but was initially told to disregard
• All 24 units on tactical channel (correct)
Heart Attacks, Trauma Killed Firefighters in 2008

In early January, the United States Fire Administration (USFA) announced there were 114 on-duty firefighter fatalities in the United States as a result of incidents that occurred in 2008. During this period, there were firefighters lost from 34 states and one from the Virgin Islands. North Carolina experienced the highest number of fatalities (11), while Oregon (9), Pennsylvania (9), California (8), New York (7), Illinois (6), Missouri (6), and Ohio (6) each suffered more than 5 on-duty losses.

“The tragic losses of on-duty firefighters in 2008 are a reminder of the necessary commitment and efforts by firefighters in all fire departments across the United States to focus on and improve our operational safety,” United States Fire Administrator Greg Cade said. “We understand all too well that many of these losses are preventable. The USFA remains dedicated to continuing our efforts to ensure 2009 is a year where we reduce these losses so that firefighters can return home safely to their families and continue serving their communities.”

As the USFA continues to collect and evaluate information regarding the 2008 on-duty firefighter deaths, here are some of the early known facts:

- Preliminary estimates indicate that heart attacks and strokes were responsible for the deaths of 50 firefighters (43.8%) in 2008. This shows a decrease from 54 of the 118 (45.7%) firefighters in 2007.
- In 2008, 26 on-duty firefighters died in association with wildland fires.
  - This loss is more than double the 11 wildland firefighter fatalities in 2007.
  - The 2008 toll is also above the annual average of 21 wildland fire-associated fatalities over the past 10 years, 1999-2008.
- For 2008, 64.9% of all firefighter fatalities occurred while performing emergency duties.
- Twenty-nine firefighters died in 2008 as the result of vehicle crashes.
- Fourteen of these deaths involved aircraft crashes.
- Fifteen firefighters died in motor vehicle crashes.
  - Six firefighters were killed in crashes involving their personal vehicles and three died in water tender (tanker) crashes. These two vehicle types have historically been most often involved in crashes that take the lives of firefighters.
  - Speed and a lack of seat belt use historically contribute to these incidents.

These fatality statistics for 2008 are provisional and subject to change as the USFA contacts State Fire Marshals to verify the names of firefighters reported to have died on-duty during 2008. The final number of firefighter fatalities will be reported in USFA’s annual firefighter fatality report including the annual fatality reports from 1986 through 2007 and the Firefighter Fatality Retrospective Study 1990–2000, please visit the USFA Web site.

Firefighters and Cancer
New resources focus on prevention, support

Two years ago, a study released by the University of Cincinnati indicated that firefighters have a greater risk than workers in other professions to develop certain cancers. According to the study, the risk of testicular cancer is nearly doubled among firefighters. They also have significantly higher rates of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, prostate cancer, and multiple myeloma.

This past September, the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) issued a Cancer Initiative, noting that:

- Two in every three male firefighters will contract cancer.
- One in every three female firefighters will contract cancer.

While the news is sobering to the profession, it has prompted more open discussion and action. Among the advancements in the past two years: re-examination of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and exposures; increased attention to overhaul techniques that minimize risk; a new focus on air quality in fire stations; federal agencies placing control of workplace health hazards high on their agendas; and the founding of several firefighting-based organizations aimed at supporting research, legislation, and the victims of cancer.

Here are some highlights:

The Fire Fighter Cancer Foundation was created in 2007, from a Maryland group that, began in 2004 as “Families of Fire Fighters with Cancer”. Now international, the group’s mission is to focus on cancer-causing exposures and advocate for cancer research and legislation. Website: www.FFCancer.org.

In January 2007, the Retired Professional Fire Fighters Cancer Fund was founded. This organization is committed to raising funds for cancer research, with specific focus on those cancers that are most prevalent in firefighters. Website: www.letsfirecancer.org.

Shortly after the 2007 Fire Dept. Instructors Conference in Indianapolis, Fire Engineering magazine made available an interview about firefighter cancer, designed to raise
In August 2007, recognizing firefighters as a high risk group, the International Myeloma Foundation issued specific guidelines aimed at the fire service. The guidelines can be found at: http://myeloma.org/pdfs/firefighter_guidelines.pdf.

In February 2008, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released the preliminary draft of its National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA), Public Safety Sub-sector. Goals in the agenda include further research into hazardous firefighter exposures, aimed toward better standards in PPE, firehouse exposures, and secondary contact exposures. The initiatives can be viewed as a document at: www.cdc.gov/niosis/nora/comment/public/PubSafSubDraftMar2008/pdfs/PubSafSubDraftMar2008.pdf.

In spring 2008, the MagneGrip Group announced that it has joined forces with the Fire Fighter Cancer Foundation and is supporting the foundation’s mission to focus on cancer-causing exposures and advocate for cancer research and legislation.

In September 2008, The International Association of Fire Chiefs released its Cancer Initiative, identifying cancer risks and posted recommended lifestyle guidelines (as stated by the World Cancer Research Fund) that may help reduce the risk of cancer. The initiative can be found at: www.iafsafety.org/fullstory.php?71675.

In early October 2008, the Firefighters Cancer Support Network (FCSN) held a high-profile fundraiser in Los Angeles, featuring an appearance by Tonight Show host Jay Leno. Founded in 2007 on the west coast, FCSN provides information and support for firefighters with cancer. Today it is linked with the Lance Armstrong “LIVESTRONG” Foundation and the American Cancer Society. Firefighters who develop cancer and their families can: encouraged to reach FCSN at: www.firefightercancer-support.org or www.fcsn.org, phone (866) 994-FCSN (3276).


Reflecting on Vehicle Related LODDs and Injuries

Consider this scenario for a moment:

An alarm is sounded for a motor vehicle crash with injuries. On hearing the alarm, a 28-year-old firefighter gets into his pickup truck and begins to respond. On the way, he enters a T-shaped intersection without stopping for the stop sign. The driver of another pickup truck, traveling through the intersection with the right of way, tries to avoid a collision by braking but is unsuccessful, striking the firefighter’s vehicle on the driver’s side to the rear of the cab and causing the vehicle to spin around. The driver’s door opens as it spins, ejecting the firefighter, who is not wearing his seatbelt. Both vehicles come to a stop off the road.

The firefighter suffers severe head trauma and is rendered unconscious. Emergency medical technicians (EMTs) respond and transport him to a local hospital. He is later flown to a medical center and placed on life support. He dies 13 days later, never having regained consciousness. The cause of death is listed as severe traumatic brain injury. – Adapted from the Firefighter Fatalities in the U.S. - 2007, 7/08 report.

Reflecting

How do you feel after reading this? What are your thoughts? Are you outraged? If yes, perhaps you find this scenario upsetting because the series of events that led to the firefighter’s premature death, if broken into component parts, could have yielded a different outcome. For example, would more prudent driving have prevented the collision? Furthermore, what would have happened if the young firefighter were wearing his seatbelt? Would his life have been spared?

When tragedy strikes, it is difficult for us as humans to understand, let alone accept devastating events that could have been prevented. This is particularly true when we think about fire service vehicle-related deaths.

Knowledge of how to prevent vehicle-related injuries and deaths in the fire service does not seem to carry over to our actions. As former U.S. Fire Administrator Greg Cade and St. Louis Rams’ Quarterback Marc Bulger touted in a recent buckling up public service announcement created by Firehouse.com and Cygnus Business Media, “…buckling up should be a no-brainer for responders.” Yet each year countless firefighters are killed or injured in crashes because they were not wearing their seat belts. Already this year, Virginia’s Fire Service has lost two first responders in similar crashes. Again, the victims were not wearing their seat belts. Enough is enough!

Be the Rescuer, Not the Rescued

Simple precautionary measures could make all the difference between life and death when responding to emergencies. The two most important measures are driving safely and wearing your seatbelt. “Simply take an extra moment to buckle your seatbelt, and make a concerted effort to evaluate your driving habits to determine if you are consistently checking mirrors, and maintaining safe following distances,” said Virginia Department of Fire Programs Executive Director, W. G. Shelton Jr.

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