

ASSOCIATION UPDATE



*By Cheri Breneman
Association Administrator*

Next Mission: Conference in June

As we head into the spring season and all the activity it brings for the IAFFPD, some of us do so with heavy hearts and a time of reflection. Our organization has experienced a third significant loss in a very short time (President Mike Dillon, Legislative Liaison Time Deuschle and newly elected President Brett Kunkel), and we are continuing to work through both grief and transition together.

The passing of our recently appointed President, Brett Kunkel, a lifetime member of the Shoal Creek Fire Protection District, has reminded us of the fire service community's compassion and the strength of the IAFFPD family. In the short time since we lost Michael Dillon in November, Brett has fully dedicated himself to leading the IAFFPD forward and carrying out the Board of Directors' vision.

In this issue, we honor Brett's life and the many ways he contributed to this organization; at the same time, we recommit ourselves to the mission he cared so deeply about.

We are turning to the important work ahead of us, including events that Brett cared deeply about through his work on the conference planning committee. In the 21 years I've been with the IAFFPD, he never missed a conference. He played a key role in shaping many of the programs and activities offered over the years, as well as those we're planning for 2026. The keynotes, the memorial to remember our friends, and the tradeshow were especially

meaningful to him, and we're committed to making this year's event one he would be proud of.

As we have announced recently, the conference will include a celebration of America's 250th anniversary, recognizing our nation's history, the flag, the national anthem, and the fire service. We'll also pause to honor a day that remains vivid for all of us, reflecting Brett's strong support for remembering the 343 firefighters, and to welcome two FDNY speakers to share their stories. And the tradeshow, something Brett helped lead for many years, will present our members with a strong apparatus showcase along with new products, interactive activities, and specialty services for fire departments of all kinds. We host an evening party that brings people together for music, drinks, and great conversation. We will raise a glass to those who are not there with us, but present in spirit.

Our speakers are second to none, and what truly makes the IAFFPD Conference the success it has been for 80 years. We are grateful to attorneys James Sinclair, John Brady, Shawn Flaherty, and Carolyn Clifford for their role in our conference program development. We are pleased to welcome their colleagues, Karl Ottoson, John Motylinski, Meghan Trela, and several other professionals who bring high-quality contributions to the educational agenda. We have 4 sessions running during most time slots, so it is suggested you bring your fellow trustees to DIVIDE AND CONQUER,

and take back as much information as possible to your fire protection district.

As you read through what I hope is every page of this issue of *The Fire Call*, you will see the IAFFPD 81st Annual Conference details, and then take the next step: **GET REGISTERED BEFORE MAY 30**. If your district is routinely represented at this conference, and you know a neighboring district that is not. Please reach out to them with some words of encouragement to join you in doing what you find valuable to your role with the fire district. We have a newcomer discount available for this purpose!

As the IAFFPD Conference moves to a new venue, we do so with our members' needs in mind. The Embassy has twice as many hotel rooms, with great amenities, the famous cook-to-order breakfast, a complimentary evening reception, spacious sleeping rooms, and an easy-to-access conference center. East Peoria has several great eateries and shopping within a 2-minute drive. We anticipate a great turnout and hope you have plans to join us in June! ■