

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



By Damon Schuldt, Martinton FPD

Writing this article brings a mixed “fire brigade bucket” of thoughts and emotions as we remember the passing of our President Brett Kunkel. If there was ever a life devoted to service, dedication and involvement it would be the one of Brett Kunkel. While he spent his working career as a coal miner, he was instrumental in developing and participating in their Fire Brigade including attending many training sessions in Illinois and other portions of the country. He started in the fire service as Junior FF Kunkel in 1970 for what would become the Shoal Creek FPD and moved up the ranks to become Chief. He worked to push for formation of fire districts in his area to enhance service. In 1989 he joined the IAFF and held several positions including VP and most recently as President. In addition to his fire service work, he was previously the Mayor of Sorrento, IL further solidifying a commitment to his community.

The following are excerpts from the eulogy that I had the privilege of delivering at Brett's funeral service:

*“What do you say about a man who has dedicated his life to so many causes... so many organizations... so many people... so many family members... and certainly to the fire services in Illinois.” One would say that “when a person like Brett Kunkel lives his life, you can see it... In his dedication, his commitment, his involvement, his helpfulness each*

*and every day he lived....He traveled through life by his actions....not by words, not by accolades, but by and how he led his life. Brett was one of the most respected persons we have known because of those actions.”*

*We should “honor Brett by following in his example of a life of service and to keep that Brett Kunkel smile on your face as we celebrate his life and honor a legacy that will live on for a very long time. I would challenge the young people, and the young firefighters in the room, to take Brett's life as an example of how to lead your life and your career.”*

It is with honor, respect and humbleness that I am propelled in to the President's position as per the bylaws of our association – a place within a great organization that will continue to be there for our members, our partners and the fire services in Illinois. It is my hope that I follow in the footsteps of Mike and Brett and build upon their legacy of commitment, service and dedication. I feel I can speak for our association that we are committed to serving our membership and our partners (or as I like to refer to them as our “customers”) to the best of our ability.

We want to encourage everyone to join us for the 2026 conference on June 11th - 13th at the Embassy Suites and Conference Center in East Peoria, IL. We are excited to bring you quality educational and networking opportunities at a venue new to

our event. This year will offer a wide range of session topics coupled with a trade show to include a special 911 memorial exhibit. Our conference is for all fire service personnel, not just Trustees, so please bring a friend, a neighboring Trustee, a Chief, Pension Trustees or other department members. Look at our website and/or an email for upcoming registration.

We also have a fall Continuing Trustee Education (CTE) class scheduled for Nov. 14<sup>th</sup> at Cherry Valley FPD. This is another great opportunity to learn and to refresh your knowledge while become more proficient in your tasks.

As always, stay safe and I look forward to visiting with you at the conference! ■

**Damon Schuldt, IAFFD President  
Martinton Fire Protection District**



**Brett Kunkel**

**4/19/1956 - 3/29/2026**