

THE FIRE CALL

Winter 2026

an official Publication of the Illinois Association of Fire Protection Districts



In this Issue:

- *Addressing Community Risks and Safety*
- *Firefighter Retention Part 2*
- *When & How to Add Ambulance/EMS*
- *Insurance Insights (NEW COLUMN)*

Join These Illinois Communities Leading the Way in Home Fire Safety

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THE FIRE CALL

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EDITOR/PUBLISHER:
Cheri Breneman

ADVERTISING COORDINATOR:
Karrie Beneky

IAFPD PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE:
Damon Schuld, Chair
Paul R. Grzelak, James Sinclair,

GRAPHIC DESIGN:
Tamiko Kinkade, CP Solutions, Inc.

IAFPD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Brett P. Kunkel 618-531-5687
President

Damon Schuld 815-370-4407
Vice President

Ann Joyce 309-243-5150
Secretary

Ken Yeakley 217-262-3341
Treasurer

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Lawrence Brown	815-315-5977
Paul Grzelak	815-922-4448
Marvin Hill	847-713-2042
Don Loos	217-430-9136
Don Mueller	618-779-9332
Gary Mueller	217-415-3555
Steve Schultz	815-937-1987

AREA REPRESENTATIVES

Brian A. Bernardoni	312-731-1407
Rick George	618-559-6917
James Hoscheid	815-228-2525
Art Kilburg	563-613-3764

ASSOCIATION ADMINISTRATOR
Cheri Breneman
217-525-6620
e-mail: Cheri@iafpd.org

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About the Cover - Thank you to the New Douglas Fire Protection District Chief, Danny Robertson along with department member and photographer, Amanda Simon for allowing IAFPD to showcase this valuable day of training. For more highlights, turn to the Member Spotlight on page 18 of this Winter 2026 issue of The Fire Call.



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Committed to Carrying Forward the Values and Vision of IAFPD

By Brett Kunkel, Shoal Creek Fire Protection District

As I step into the role of President of the Association, I do so with both humility and a deep sense of responsibility. I would like to acknowledge the recent passing of our former President and my dear friend, Michael Dillon, whose leadership, dedication, and service left a lasting impact on our organization and the Illinois fire service.

On behalf of the IAFPD Board of Directors, we honor Mike's legacy and extend our sincere condolences to the Dillon family and members of the Braidwood Fire District for their loss.

It is in that spirit of gratitude and remembrance that I look ahead, committed to carrying forward the values and vision that have shaped our Association over the years.

My involvement in the IAFPD dates to 1979 as a volunteer firefighter working with Kenny Long to form a fire district in my area and gradually helping other fire departments and villages do the same for a few years. I became an Area Representative in 1989 and a Director in 1993. I was elected Secretary in 1997, elected Vice President in 2018 and just recently assumed the office of President.

The first quarterly meeting of the Board of Directors was held on January 10, 2026, and elected Damon Schuldt of Martinton FPD (Iroquois Co.) to fill the vacancy of Vice President and elected Don Loos of Liberty FPD (Adams Co.) to fill the open seat of director. These are not new faces to the IAFPD, but dedicated directors who will do great service to our Association.

Additionally, we welcome Area Representatives James Hoscheid of Cherry FPD (Bureau Co.) and Art Kilburg of Fulton FPD (Whiteside Co.), who were appointed at the September 2025 Board meeting.

Lastly, the IAFPD Foundation Board welcomed Jeff Bryant, a retired Fire Chief of Amboy FPD, as a director. We are pleased to have Jeff's fundraising experience and proactive leadership that will support the organization's mission to educate the next generation of the fire service.

Congratulations again to each of these gentlemen who bring a wealth of experience and camaraderie to the IAFPD. I look forward to serving with you in the year ahead. ■

Brett Kunkel, IAFPD President
Shoal Creek Fire Protection District

IN MEMORY

Michael Matthew Dillon **11/6/1949 – 11/1/2025**

- IAFPD President 2005-2025
- IAFPD Treasurer 2000-2005
- Elected IAFPD Director in 1998
- Appointed IAFPD Area Rep 1996
- Member OSFM Fire Advisory Commission
- Vice Chairman IL Fire Services Association
- Member of IL Fire Service Institute Advisory
- Member Statewide Interoperability Communications Executive Committee



Michael Matthew Dillon (75) of Braidwood, IL, passed away peacefully on November 1, 2025. Born November 6, 1949, Michael devoted his life to family, faith, and community. On November 6, 1971, he married Dawn Downey and shared nearly 54 years of marriage, filled with love, laughter, and unwavering devotion to one another.

Michael proudly served his country in the U.S. Army from 1970 to 1971, stationed at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. His time in the military reflected the same sense of duty and integrity that defined every part of his life.

Michael began his fire service career at 18 years old with the Braidwood Fire Department, where he served as a firefighter, EMT, and Training Officer. In 1973, he became a trustee for the department and he was Board President at the time of his passing. Michael worked for ComEd for 34 years in a variety of roles, eventually becoming Fire Marshal at the Dresden Plant before his retirement. He enjoyed golfing and bowling and was a loyal fan of the Chicago Cubs and Bears. Above all, he will be remembered for his kindness, dedication, and steadfast commitment to the community he loved.



MEMORANDUM

TO: IAFPD Members
FROM: Ann Joyce, Interview & Nominating Committee
RE: Seeking New Representatives to Serve Downstate Illinois

The Illinois Fire Protection Districts invites its members to serve as an Area Representative of the organization.

- 1. Increase your knowledge about IAFPD**
- 2. Enhance your skills with your involvement with the IAFPD**
- 3. Share your vision as you plan for the future of IAFPD**

The duties of the Area Reps generally involve the following:

- Attend (4) Quarterly Board of Directors' meetings
- Attend Trustee Training Sessions in their respective parts of the state.
- Participate in the Annual Conference planning.
- Serve on various committees of the IAFPD and other fire service groups as needed.

The IAFPD asks that Area Representatives promote the activities of the association and serve as the first contact between fire districts and the IAFPD. IAFPD Area Representatives are asked to become acquainted with local, regional and state legislative officials who may have an impact on fire district activities. An IAFPD Area Representative acts as an ambassador of the association by attending meetings of local interest groups who are attempting to form new fire protection districts.

The IAFPD does reimburse Area Representative's expenses as they occur and are approved.

The qualifications for this position are as follows:

- The candidate must be an active trustee of a member fire protection district.
- The candidate must have served their fire protection district for at least 3 years.
- The candidate must be an active participant in association activities.
- The candidate must submit a resume to the IAFPD office.

Interested people willing to serve the Illinois Association of Fire Protection Districts that meet the above criteria will be interviewed by a committee designated by the IAFPD Board of Directors.

Becoming an Area Representative for the IAFPD is another step to improving the quality of fire protection services in your home district as well as all districts in the State of Illinois.

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Staff

Cheri Breneman
Association Administrator

1201 S. Sixth Street, Springfield, IL 62703

Website: www.iafpd.org / Phone: 217-525-6620 / Email: info@iafpd.org

ASSOCIATION UPDATE



*By Cheri Breneman
Association Administrator*

New Year, New Tasks

As we dive into the new year, I want to begin with a simple but productive invitation and one that sets the tone for how we will connect, collaborate, and grow in the months ahead. Our first “new year task” is this: log into our new membership platform and make it yours. While the process is easier to navigate than our previous system, our administrative assistant, Karrie Beneky is the key person and will happily assist with any questions or issues.

Prior to the passing of our devoted President, Karrie evaluated various systems and presented a proposal to the Board to invest in this platform, as we all believe that strong communication and engagement are the heartbeat of a thriving membership community. This new system is more than a technological upgrade; it's a shared space designed to help us listen better, respond faster, and build stronger connections across our entire network.

Six months later, we are launched and ready to put it to work for us. When you log in, you'll find tools that make it easier to stay informed, register for events, update your profile, and connect with fellow members. Like other apps you may have utilized, the Glue Up Membership platform safely allows communication to flow both ways—between the association and members, and among members themselves. Take advantage of the opportunities it presents, and let us know if we can help.

Member engagement doesn't happen by accident; it happens when people show up, participate, and feel heard. This new platform helps us do exactly that, but its success depends on you. Every profile update, discussion post, event registration, and shared idea strengthens the community we're building together.

So, as you set your goals for the new year, I encourage each member of your board, the commissioners, the fire chief, and the attorney to activate their presence on our new membership platform. Explore it, engage with it, and let us know what you think.

To keep in line with the new year's tasks, I urge all members who have

not used one or more of the IAFPD's educational resources to add them to their lists. Whether you choose to download a webinar from the online learning library, join us for a day at the Capitol (March 25), or make plans to attend and enjoy one of the two Conferences (Feb 27-28, O'Fallon, or June 11-13, East Peoria) that we work diligently to offer every year. Engaging with others never disappoints!

Thank you for your continued commitment, continued support, and trust. I'm excited about what we'll accomplish together in the year ahead—and I look forward to connecting with you in new and more dynamic ways. ■



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FIRE COUNSEL NOTES



"BITS & PIECES"

By James S. Sinclair, IAFPD Counsel
Stobbs & Sinclair, LTD

This Fire Counsel Notes, rather than focusing on a single topic in detail, is going to cover a number of short topics that make up some of the interesting current events in the fire service these days.

Legislative Developments. There have been some additional bills passed by the General Assembly worth noting:

Public Act 104-362 (Senate Bill 711) effective August 15, 2025 made multiple changes to the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Systems Act that will be applicable to many Districts engaged in the provision of emergency medical services. Perhaps most significant for many nonurban EMS providers will be the provision which allows a person who is not an "EMS personnel" to operate an EMS vehicle (1) if the person meets the Vehicle Code requirements for the operation of an ambulance under emergent conditions; (2) if 2 licensed EMS personnel are present; and (3) if patient's condition necessitates all of the EMS personnel present to be involved in the care of the patient. Most significantly for nonurban districts, the statute goes on to allow the Department of Public Health to grant a waiver allowing non-EMS personnel to operate the ambulance if only one EMS personnel is present. The ability to obtain a waiver should assist departments with EMS personnel shortages and which encounter circumstances regularly when only one EMS provider is available on a call by authorizing non-EMS personnel to drive an ambulance vehicle. Another change made by this bill is to require testing of EMS candidates by the National Registry examination system and to require EMS Systems to take steps to address their EMS training program if a first attempt

failure rate of 30% or more occurs for those taking a licensure examination. The bill also permits a student enrolled in an IDPH approved course to take the EMR licensure examination after the student has completed the first 40 hours of the course. These changes are directed at increasing the number of qualified EMS personnel in the state.

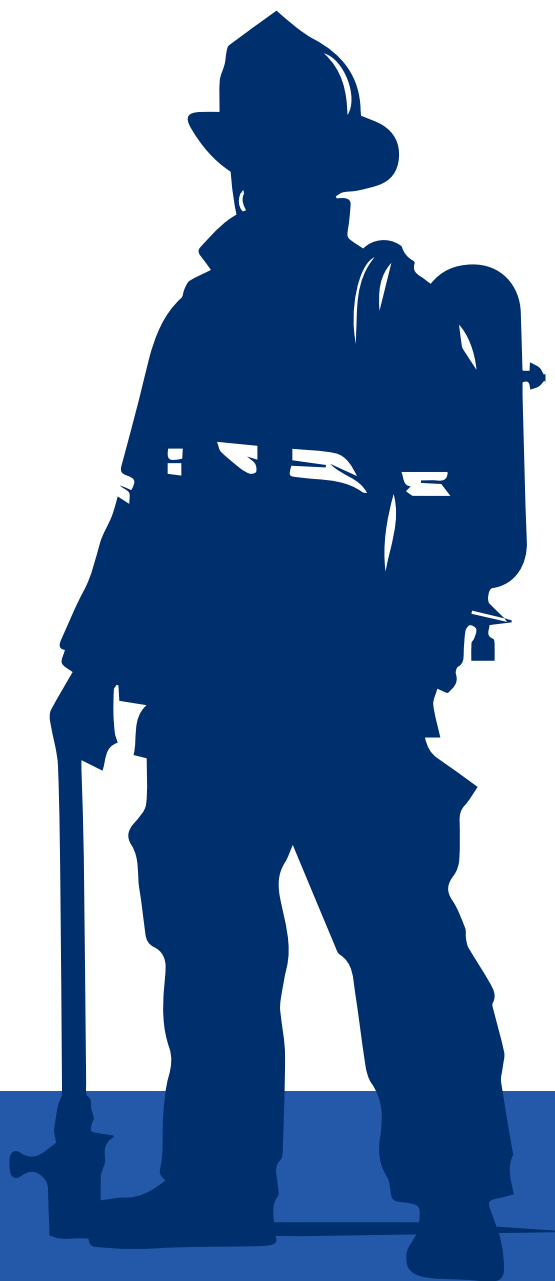
Public Act 104-438 (Senate Bill 243) was passed in the Fall Veto Session and took effect January 1, 2026. It makes numerous changes to the Open Meetings Act and the Freedom of Information Act. Among the more important changes:

- A new Section 2.07 is added to OMA prohibiting the holding of a regular or special meeting on an election day.
- Section 7 of OMA, which allows remote attendance by a board member in limited circumstances, will now allow a service member on active military duty to attend a meeting under OMA remotely.
- Section 2 of FOIA has been amended to add to the definition of "person" in the Act to include "any individual acting as an agent of a corporation, partnership, firm, organization, or association."
- Section 2 of FOIA is also amended to provide that the definition of "public record" does not include "junk mail" and it adds a definition of junk mail to the law to be unsolicited commercial mail or electronic communications received, *but which are not responded to*, by an official, employee, or agent

of the public body. Note the proviso in italics. District personnel should be cautioned about responding on district computers to what is within the definition of junk mail in order to avoid converting the junk mail into a public record that must be retained and produced under FOIA.

- Section 3 of FOIA now requires that any FOIA request which is submitted electronically to a unit of government must contain the actual records request *in the body of the communication* and may not locate the request in an attachment or hyperlink. Units of government are required to notify the requester within 5 business days of the request that the request record request must be contained in the body of the electronic submission. Again, District personnel need to be cautioned about this change which is intended to avoid making the District a victim of a hack.
- Section 3 of FOIA now provides that if a unit of government has a reasonable belief that a person (rather than a bot or an AI generation) did not submit a FOIA request, the unit may require the requester to verify orally or in writing that the requester is a person and the time for the unit to respond is tolled until such verification is provided. If there is no verification within 30 days, the unit may deny the request. The information that may be required from

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Fire Counsel Notes

Continued from page 10

the requester is limited and excludes the provision of personal information, private information, or identifying information. Districts should use this change in the law to avoid machine or artificial intelligence generated requests.

- Section 4 of FOIA now requires that if a unit of government has a website, it is required to post the information about the unit of government required by the Act on the website. (Note that this requirement, unlike other provisions about websites in OMA, does not limit the requirement to the use of website posting only to those sites which are maintained by a full time employee of the unit.) This means that Districts which have a website, regardless of how it is maintained, will need to post the required FOIA information on their website. It will also necessitate that Districts whose Departmental organization has a website consider whether those Departmental websites may also need to carry the FOIA posting based on the relationship between the District and Department. Districts which do not have a website must make the posting on paper at their administrative office as under prior versions of this section.
- Section 9.5 of FOIA regarding the Public Access Counselor (PAC) has been amended in Subsection (f) to provide that an officer or employee of a public body which discloses records in accordance with an opinion of the Attorney General (PAC Opinion) is immune from liability by reason of the disclosure and will not be liable for penalties under FOIA.
- Section 3 of the Local Records Act is similarly amended to define junk mail as in the amendment to FOIA and to take junk mail out of the category of materials that cannot be destroyed or disposed of by a unit of government without Local Record Act Commission approval.

Recent Litigation & Potential Litigation.

There are two recent court cases which, even though they are not yet finally

resolved, deserve noting.

- In a case arising from a house fire in Whiteside County in December 2021, a jury in November 2025 awarded a judgment of \$31.5 million against two fire officers of a municipal fire department and their municipality based on a finding of willful and wanton conduct which resulted in the death of a firefighter from another municipality's fire department who was responding to the incident under an auto aid arrangement between the departments. There has been a substantial amount of reporting about the case, including a podcast in which the firefighter's widow's attorney laid out the case made against the fire officers. An IL-OSHA Inspection Report issued in March 2022 (#1568109) figured prominently in the case as did NFPA standards. Defenses raised by the defendants under the Tort Immunity Act were not successful at trial stage based on the allegations of willful and wanton conduct by the fire officers in the conduct of the fire suppression operation. While an appeal of the verdict is likely, there are some basic points from this litigation that fire protection district trustees should give serious attention to as it relates to the administration of the district's fire department. As noted, the case relied heavily on NFPA standards and the standard operating procedures (SOPs) of the defendant department and, more importantly, on the asserted lack of adequate training on those standards and SOPs by the members of the department including the fire officer defendants. Inadequate accountability and the asserted late appointment of a safety officer on the scene were prominent criticisms. The entire fire suppression operation was compared to applicable NFPA standards and, even though those standards do not, by themselves, carry the force of law, the conduct of the operation was presented by comparison to them. Regardless of the final outcome of this tragic case, district boards need to monitor the adequacy of the operating procedures and the training of their departments on those procedures. Simply taking the position that it is the Fire Officers' responsibility

to assure adequate training and NFPA compliant departmental procedures is a recipe for liability. Boards need to be informed about training regularly and they need to confirm that SOPs are current and adequately aligned with fire service standards such as NFPA. See the IL OSHA announcement elsewhere in this issue of the Fire Call about the Ridge Incident and the IL OSHA presentation about it.

- In an entirely different type of litigation, a federal antitrust lawsuit filed in August 2025 by the City of La Crosse, Wisconsin against Oshkosh Corporation, Pierce Manufacturing, Rev Group, Inc., Rosenbauer America LLC, and the Fire Apparatus Manufacturers Association, alleges that the fire apparatus industry, following the 2008 "Great Recession," underwent a significant consolidation with many formerly independent apparatus manufacturers (E-One, KME, Ferrara, Spartan, Smeal, and Ladder Tower) being acquired by a private equity entity that ultimately became Rev Group, Inc. and that Rev Group's acquisitions, along with acquisitions by the other defendants in the case, resulted in a significant diminution in competition within the industry. It is alleged that the market for fire apparatus is now dominated by a few large players who allegedly have conspired to cooperate and control the market contrary to the antitrust laws. It is further alleged that as a result of this conduct, the price of fire apparatus has doubled and buyers have been forced to overpay for equipment, endure long delays for the delivery of apparatus, and operate with diminished fire apparatus fleets. The complaint goes on to allege that this has weakened the ability of communities to respond to emergency incidents and diverted public funds from other needs resulting in public safety being jeopardized. As yet, the court record in this case does not show a response by the apparatus manufacturers or trade association to the complaint which was filed as a class action. Because antitrust cases and class actions typically take several years to process through the court system, it will be some time

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Fire Counsel Notes

Continued from page 12

before the outcome of this case is known, but it does bear watching given the changes which have occurred in recent years in connection with fire and rescue apparatus procurement. The defendants can be expected, of course, to contest the allegations in the complaint and take the position that there is strong competition present in the fire apparatus market today. Stay tuned.

- While not a litigation matter, it may become one. In a New York Times article of December 14, 2025, reporter Mike Baker examines changes in the cost of software relied upon by rural fire departments to prepare fire reports and handle other administrative tasks common in the fire service. The article reports that rural departments are seeing annual software fees going from \$795 to \$5,000 or more in some cases. The article looks at the activity of private equity firms and consolidation in the fire reporting software market focusing on ESO Solutions and its private equity owner, Vista Equity Partners. Interesting reading. Again, stay tuned.

In Closing, Some Beginning of the Year Tips. As 2026 begins, it is a good time to think about ways to administer your fire protection district more effectively and save administrative expenses (like legal fees). Here are a few tips:

- **Read your mail and read it timely.** Too often districts miss deadlines or get behind in meeting deadlines simply because no one is checking the mail (or in many cases today, email) on a consistent and regular basis. Frequently, this task is left to the fire chief who, being busy, waits until a board meeting to pass the mail or email along. Just as frequently, districts play the volunteer card to justify not tending to mail or emails when received or waiting until the one board meeting each month (or less often) to address district communications and matters. In today's world, these arguments won't play. Be sure that your district has in place an effective procedure to receive, review, and evaluate incoming

correspondence and communications so that deadlines are not missed and district action is on time.

- **Use the Calendar & Checklist.** If your district did not pull out the Annual Calendar & Checklist from the Fall 2025 Issue of the Fire Call, do that now. (It is at page 32.) Use it to determine who will do what and when during the year to meet the annual requirements. Assign a board member to each requirement even if someone else like the fire chief, district attorney, or district accountant will perform the task for the district so that the Board can monitor the completion of the required item.
- **Check Your District's Tax Levy Confirmation Report and the Tax Levy Extension Report.** Nearly all districts early in the year will receive from the County Clerk (or Clerks if the district is in multiple counties) a report which lists the amount of the district's 2025 tax levy broken down by amount and type of levy (corporate/general; rescue; liability insurance; worker's compensation; ambulance; etc. [this

will vary depending on the types of levies the district has in place]). Be sure that the amount of each levy is correct and that the authorized rate limit (if there is a rate limit) is correctly listed. **Also**, later this spring or early summer look for and check the Tax Levy Extension Report which will also be issued by the County Clerk(s) as soon *as it arrives* (it will usually have a reply date deadline). This critical document tells the district how much of the tax levied by the district will be included on the tax bills of district taxpayers and collected when bills are issued. If there is a significant difference between the dollar amount levied and the dollar amount extended, it is a red flag that requires immediate attention since errors, if not corrected at the time the report is issued, will likely result in lost tax revenue for the district. If the report is not clear to the district, the Board should consult with the district's legal counsel or accountant to interpret it to prevent a loss of tax revenue.

As always, take care and good luck! ■

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Proud to provide investment advisory services to Illinois Fire Protection Districts and of our relationships with Illinois Firefighter and Police Pension funds for many years.

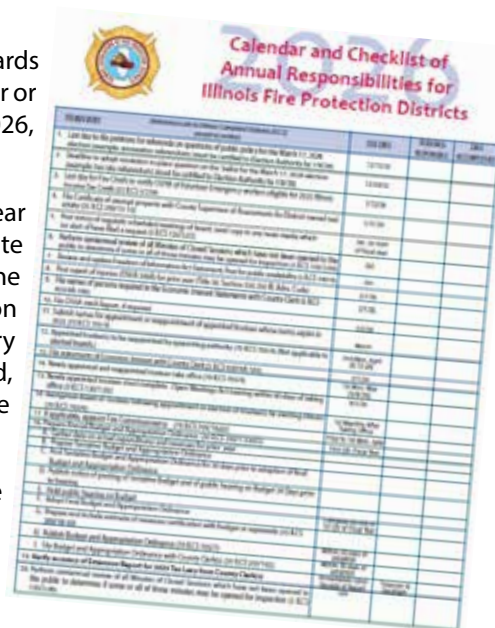
For more information contact:

John Falduto, Managing Partner
jfalduto@sawyerfalduto.com
589 S. York Street
Elmhurst, IL 60126
630.941.8560

www.sawyerfalduto.com

COMPLIANCE CORNER

- ❖ **Post Regular Board Meeting Schedule.** The Open Meetings Act requires district boards to post their regular meeting schedule annually at the beginning of the calendar year or the district's fiscal year. As a result of change in the law taking effect on January 1, 2026, do not set a regular meeting on an election day (March 17, 2026 this year).
- ❖ **File Certification that District Property Remains in Exempt Use.** By January 31, each year districts are required to notify the county Supervisor of Assessments that real estate owned by the district remains in exempt use as a fire station or training facility. The failure to provide the certification can result in the property being assessed and put on the tax rolls which will then cause a tax bill to be issued to the district. Practices vary widely from county to county regarding how this annual verification is accomplished, but, however it is done in your district's county, the district needs to confirm that the proper certification is given.
- ❖ **Check the 2025 Tax Levy Verification Report from the County Clerk.** See the Fire Counsel Notes article in this issue on this point, but be certain that this report is being checked timely for correctness when received by the district.
- ❖ **Follow up on District Trustee appointments.** Appointments (and reappointments) are to be made by appointing authorities on or before the second Monday in April of each year. Requests for appointments or reappointments should be submitted in time for the appointment to be considered and acted on by the appointing authority based on the meeting schedule of the appointing authority. ■



Calendar and Checklist of Annual Responsibilities for Illinois Fire Protection Districts

Item	Description	Due Date	Responsible Party	Status
1	Post Regular Board Meeting Schedule	January 1, 2026	Board	
2	File Certification that District Property Remains in Exempt Use	January 31, 2026	Board	
3	Check the 2025 Tax Levy Verification Report from the County Clerk	February 1, 2026	Board	
4	Follow up on District Trustee appointments	April 2, 2026	Board	
5	Post Regular Board Meeting Schedule	January 1, 2027	Board	
6	File Certification that District Property Remains in Exempt Use	January 31, 2027	Board	
7	Check the 2026 Tax Levy Verification Report from the County Clerk	February 1, 2027	Board	
8	Follow up on District Trustee appointments	April 2, 2027	Board	
9	Post Regular Board Meeting Schedule	January 1, 2028	Board	
10	File Certification that District Property Remains in Exempt Use	January 31, 2028	Board	
11	Check the 2027 Tax Levy Verification Report from the County Clerk	February 1, 2028	Board	
12	Follow up on District Trustee appointments	April 2, 2028	Board	

Don't worry about budgets when you have other fires to put out.

Municipal and Tax-Exempt Financing can help you:

- Finance almost anything that is essential to the daily operation of your Fire Department
- Overcome budget restrictions
- Make necessary building and equipment purchases now, then pay them back over time

- ✓ **No down payment / 100% financing available**
- ✓ **Quick application and closing**

We're here to help!

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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



*By Brittan Bolin
IAFPD Lobbyist*

Fire Districts Must Capitalize on Rural Health Funding

On December 31, 2025, the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) announced that Illinois would receive \$192 million per year over the next five years through the newly created federal Rural Healthcare Transformation Program. The program was created by the budget reconciliation bill approved by Congress in July, also referred to as House Resolution 1 or the “One Big Beautiful Bill (OB BB).” The anticipated cuts to Medicaid in the OB BB will disproportionately impact rural hospitals and healthcare delivery in rural areas. The RHTP was offered to address concerns about the Medicaid cuts resulting from the OB BB, along with the program’s stated purpose to strengthen rural healthcare systems for the future.

States’ shares of the \$50 billion program were calculated based upon geographic size, rural population, and a state’s willingness to adopt administrative-friendly policies. According to HFS, 1.9 million Illinois residents live in what is considered a rural area, accounting for fifteen percent of the state’s population. According to KFF, a healthcare policy and research organization, Illinois will receive between \$100-200 per resident per year through the RHTP program.

States applying for the RHTP grant were required to outline how their plan utilized the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid’s (CMS) five strategic goals from the RHTP Notice of Funding Opportunity. Illinois’ application focused on three key areas: Transforming Rural Healthcare Delivery, Overcoming Geographic Barriers of Care, and Building a Resilient Rural Healthcare Workforce. The Illinois proposal

specifically mentioned spending on infrastructure and increased investment in EMS, mobile health and mobile crisis units.

The plan included spending on vehicles, equipment, information technology systems and perhaps most importantly, staff. When conducting stakeholder outreach during the grant application process, HFS identified “workforce recruitment and retention” as the most important issue among stakeholders. Funds can be used for scholarships, training and certification. As a key partner in the delivery of rural healthcare, fire protection districts providing EMS services should share in this new funding source.

Time is of the essence for several reasons. First, the RHTP program itself is time-sensitive by design. Federal health officials want states to be creative and proactive and show tangible improvements within a relatively short five-year time frame. Some controversial initiatives such as broadening scope of practice for healthcare workers in rural areas have been stymied by opposition from powerful groups such as the American Medical Association. Federal CMS wants states to use the carrot of funding along with the stick of potential claw back of funds to get state lawmakers and administrations to act and to innovate.

Now that the award amount has been determined, the next step is for HFS to enter budget negotiations with CMS. Illinois has submitted a State Plan Amendment (SPA) to the federal government. Once the SPA is approved, the Department may need to promulgate

rules and establish grant application processes. HFS has indicated that it plans to continue stakeholder engagement with grant partner entities, trade groups, and others to best implement the award.

It will be a goal of IAFPD to ensure that we are part of this continued stakeholder outreach. We will work to identify channels to connect with the department and other stakeholders and may be asking member districts to contact the administration or their own legislators regarding the importance of having fire protection districts at the table. Although the OB BB’s cuts to Medicaid are concerning, the Rural Healthcare Transformation Program represents a rare opportunity for this organization to highlight our role in rural healthcare delivery.

EMS1 has covered the new program extensively and recommends that EMS providers and partner organizations such as IAFPD take the following steps to maximize results: 1) Engage early with health officials. 2) Align EMS capabilities with the state’s RHTP priorities. 3) Propose innovative EMS models. 4) Build strong coalitions, and 5) Leverage data to demonstrate impact. IAFPD will be looking at how we can take these steps and establish fire protection districts as an essential partner in rural health and in Illinois’ Rural Healthcare Transformation Program. ■



Illinois Lawmaker Spotlight!

Illinois Association of Fire Protection District Presents 2025 Legislator of the Year



State Representative Patrick Sheehan was appointed to the 37th House District on April 12, 2024, to fill the vacancy of Rep. Tim Ozinga. The 37th District comprises parts of Will and suburban Cook County.

Serving as a police officer for nearly two decades, making Illinois safe for families is Rep. Sheehan's mission. He works to build trust between law enforcement and residents, will work for safer communities, and advocates for proactive strategies to fight crime in the highest-crime neighborhoods.

Rep. Sheehan is dedicated to serving as a voice for seniors, parents, and hardworking taxpayers, working collaboratively to create a safer and more affordable Illinois. Recognizing the outrageous impact inflation has on families across suburban communities, Rep. Sheehan supports capping gasoline taxes and eliminating the grocery tax, while ensuring stable local government revenues. Furthermore, he believes in enacting policies in Springfield to recruit job creators back to Illinois. By expanding the tax base with a more business-friendly environment, we can avoid tax hikes on residents and job creators.

As a Lockport Alderman, President of the Lockport Jr Porters Football & Cheer Program, and former Lockport Parks Commissioner, Rep. Sheehan has been deeply rooted in the community and brings a wealth of experience to the Illinois House of Representatives.

IAFPD selected Rep. Sheehan as our Legislator of the Year for his proactive response to fire service concerns. He is the sponsor of House Bill 1938, which would exempt fire protection districts from the requirements of the Decennial Committees on Local Government Efficiency Act. We will continue to work with Rep. Sheehan towards passage of this bill in 2026.

SAVE THE DATE!

26TH ANNUAL ILLINOIS FIRE SERVICE LEGISLATIVE DAY Wednesday, March 25, 2026



Firehouse Style Breakfast at Boone's Saloon 7:30 am
(one block from the Illinois Capitol)

**Local hotel accommodations are available
for Tuesday, March 24th.**

We are pleased to invite you to participate in Legislative Day 2026 for the Illinois Fire Service. This important event brings together Fire Service Leaders to engage with Legislators on key issues affecting our state's fire service. You will have the opportunity to meet with lawmakers, discuss critical legislation impacting fire safety, and advocate for the resources and support needed to protect our communities. Your voice is crucial in shaping the future of fire service in Illinois.

Register at www.niafpd.org

NEW MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



New Technology to Increase Member Engagement

By: Karrie Beneky
IAFPD Administrative Assistant

We're excited to announce that the **IAFPD GlueUp membership platform is officially up and running!**

As we've shared before, communication is key. This new platform is designed to streamline how you engage with IAFPD, access your benefits, and connect with fellow members in one place.

Get started today by scanning the QR code to learn how to claim your member profile. Once logged in, you'll be asked to review and update your information, including confirming a



unique email address and current mailing address. This step is essential to ensure uninterrupted access to your member benefits, including:

- Discounted and simplified event registration
- Access to *The Fire Call*
- Enhanced networking tools
- The IAFPD Membership Directory
- *The Fire Call* online!

To support you during this transition, we'll also be offering an **introductory session** to walk you through the GlueUp platform and highlight new ways to connect and communicate within the IAFPD community. More details coming soon!

Stay safe, stay connected, and thank you for being part of a strong and supportive IAFPD community. If you have questions about your membership, the GlueUp platform, or upcoming training, we're here to help.

We look forward to connecting with you through GlueUp and seeing you throughout 2026!

Need information about upcoming training or help logging in to the new system? **Contact Karrie** at (217) 525-6620 or karrie@iafpd.org. ■

Thank you to our downstate members for providing great photos of their important training day.



Cover Images: On Saturday, December 6, multiple departments took part in a live fire training, controlled burn exercise on a property located between Rockwell and Bentlage Roads. Participating agencies include: Livingston-Williamson Fire Department, Shoal Creek Fire Protection District, Alhambra Fire Department and Staunton Area Ambulance Service. Max Fire Training led the training portion, and Alhambra Fire assisted with emergency calls in our district during the event. This training opportunity represents a major commitment from our departments. Our firefighters spent a tremendous amount of time and effort preparing the acquired structure for safe and effective use. From coordinating logistics to physically prepping the building—our team went above and beyond to make this possible. The knowledge and experience gained from working in an acquired structure is invaluable for our members and mutual aid partners. They learn about fire behavior, using of thermal imaging, water application, and coordinated fireground operations—skills that ultimately help protect lives and property in our communities.





***“First on the Scene...
Still Responding.”***

Robert Brady

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*We are pleased to introduce you to **VFIS**, the largest provider of insurance, education and consulting services to Emergency Service Organizations.*

VFIS is dedicated to serving the unique insurance and safety requirements of fire departments, as well as ambulance and rescue squads, and 911 centers.

What It Offers

VFIS' coverage is among the broadest available and includes:

- Auto (owned, non-owned or commandeered)
- General Liability (\$1 mil per Occurrence/up to \$10 mil Aggregate)
 - “Good Samaritan” liability
 - Professional health care liability
- Management Liability (all volunteers & employees)
- Property (Guaranteed Replacement Cost)
- Portable Equipment
- Excess Liability – with underlying continuity

What It Includes

- Real and Personal Property on a total blanket limit
- Defense Expense outside the policy limits
- Replacement Cost for buildings, real property, personal effects and more
- Deductible Waiver for covered losses under multiple VFIS policies
- Separate coverage and limits for General Liability and Management Liability

What It Features

- Underwritten through an A.M. Best “A+” (Superior) rated insurance company
- Nationally filed and available on an Admitted basis
- Highly-experienced Claims Management
- Access to innovative safety educational tools
- Access to training programs and consulting services

Why VFIS

VFIS insures more ESOs in North America than any other provider. They offer pricing stability with over 10,000 ESOs having experienced little to no change in pricing at their renewal for the past 5 years. They have trained over 128,000 emergency service personnel since 2006. And 58% of ESOs rate VFIS a 10 on a scale of 1-10 – with 98% rating VFIS an 8 or higher. That's what makes VFIS the safe choice for ESO insurance.

More Info

Robert Brady

(630) 889-3516

bbrady@bbins.com

**You may also visit
www.VFIS.com**

This is only a brief description of the coverage available. The policies contain reductions, limitations, exclusions and terminations provisions. Coverage may not be available in all states.

AROUND THE STATE



A Word from our Fire Service Partners

From the Editor: The following column is intended to provide our readers an update on fire service activities from around the state.

Illinois Fire Service Institute

Happy New Year from the Illinois Fire Service Institute. The new year is filled with endless opportunities to train. From our academy program to essential skills firefighting classes to our comprehensive line-up of advanced technical rescue courses, our instructors and staff are prepared to serve. We look forward to supporting the departments and fire protection districts across Illinois with all their training needs.



2026 BASIC OPERATIONS AND ADVANCED TECHNICIAN FIREFIGHTER ACADEMY

Registration opened in December for the next cycle of the Basic Operations and Advanced Technician Firefighter Academy. This seven-week resident program prepares firefighters to operate safely and effectively on the fireground. Upon successful completion of the Academy and subsequent courses, students will qualify for state and national certification.

The following courses are included in the program:

- Firefighter I / NFPA 1010 - Basic Operations Firefighter
- Firefighter II / NFPA 1010 - Advanced Technician Firefighter
- American Heart Association CPR
- American Heart Association First-Aid
- Resiliency Development for First Responders
- Opioid Awareness
- Courage to Be Safe
- Fire Service Vehicle Operator – Per OSFM JCAR Section 141.370 – After IFSI course completion, the student is required to complete with their sponsoring fire department:
 - Completion of the required NFPA 1010 competency course
 - Completion of an additional 8 hours of documented driving of the vehicles with differing wheelbases in use by the employing authority having jurisdiction
- Traffic Incident Management Awareness
- ICS 100/200/700
- Liquefied Petroleum Gas (Propane) Firefighting

To meet OSFM and National certification requirements, students will need to complete the Hazardous Materials Awareness and Operations course the week following Academy unless they have already earned certification.

We encourage departments to reach out to our Class Support Team if they are currently hiring members and plan to enroll a candidate in the spring cycle. Our staff will provide personalized registration assistance throughout the process.

For complete program details, visit fsi.illinois.edu.

BASIC OPERATIONS FIREFIGHTER ACADEMY I ADVANCED TECHNICIAN

ACADEMY AT A GLANCE

- ▶ 7 week resident program
- ▶ Delivered at the IFSI main campus in Champaign
- ▶ Offered twice a year (spring and fall)

Included in the tuition:

- ▶ 13 courses
- ▶ Physical fitness training program
- ▶ Helmet
- ▶ 6 candidate t-shirts
- ▶ Student textbook, workbook and manual
- ▶ Pro Board and IFSAC certification fees

Upon successful completion of the Basic Operations and Advanced Technician Firefighter Academy, students will earn certification with Pro Board and IFSAC.

After Illinois students complete Fire Service Vehicle Operator through their fire department, they are eligible to apply for OSFM certification.

SPRING 2026 ACADEMY BEGINS MARCH 2

REGISTRATION OPENS SOON: FSI.ILLINOIS.EDU

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Around the State

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MARK YOUR CALENDARS

FIRE COLLEGE

Registration opens March 1 for the 102nd Annual Fire College. This annual training event is scheduled for June 5-7 in Champaign.



The 2026 event will include a complete lineup of hands-on, live fire, and classroom training opportunities. Fire College students will have access to state-of-the-art training props and an expansive cache of tools and equipment.

Fire College classes fill quickly. Watch for the complete event details to be posted in mid-February and plan to register early.

2026 EXPLORER CADET FIRE SCHOOL

The IFSI Explorer Cadet Fire School will be held July 16-19 in Champaign. This unique training opportunity is open to explorers, cadets, and junior firefighters between the ages of 15-20.

The Explorer Cadet Fire School curriculum is intentionally designed to meet the skill level of all attendees. Participants will engage in live fire and



hands-on course activities throughout the four-day event. Student housing is also included in the low tuition cost.

Complete program details will be posted on the IFSI website in March.

IFSI 2026 CALENDARS

The annual IFSI calendar is now available. This yearly publication is a showcase of IFSI programs, units, resources, instructors, staff, partners, and special events.



Calendars were mailed to all Illinois departments in December. Individuals or departments wishing to receive additional or personal copies should reach out to the IFSI Marketing Team at fsi-marketing@illinois.edu. Please provide the quantity requested and the mailing address.

We thank you for your support in the fulfillment of our mission.

Jim Keiken
Director

Illinois Fire Chiefs Association

Thank you for the opportunity to fill you in on what is going on with the Illinois Fire Chiefs Association. The IFCA values our relationship with the IAFFPD. Working together (along with the NIAFFPD) we are planning for our annual Fire Service Leadership Legislative Day in March. Bringing the interests of the Fire Service Leadership to our Legislators is extremely important. The Legislators and staff notice us, and this helps build the relationships that advance our joint interests.

Annually, the IFCA presents up to four Fire Chief of the Year awards, based on the size of the Fire Department or District. This award is the top recognition bestowed upon fire chiefs in Illinois. The award is

presented each year at the IFCA annual conference in October. Applications need to be submitted by August 7th. Consider submitting your fire chief for this prestigious award. More information is available at www.illinoisfirechiefs.org/fcoy.

The Illinois Fire Chiefs Educational and Research Foundation annual scholarship competition is now open. Training and educational classes are expensive and may limit attendance because of costs. This competition provides a wonderful opportunity for firefighters and fire officers to apply for the different certification courses and educational opportunities. The competition closes on March 15, 2026. The Foundation has awarded over \$2.225 million to nearly 3000 recipients. Make sure your firefighters know about this great opportunity. More information is available at www.illinoisfirechiefs.org/foundation/scholarship.

The Foundation also sponsors and funds the Senior Officer Development Program, often providing it at no cost. This is an opportunity for fire department leadership to learn from experts in their fields. This program offers topics necessary for a new company officer and refresher for a veteran officer. Topics areas are selected by the host fire chief with feedback from the surrounding area fire chiefs to meet the needs of the officers from that area. The program can be scheduled in a one-day format (5 topics with a working lunch) or a two-day format (7-8 topics with breakfast and lunch format). Topics include Laws, Regulations & Standards, Firefighter Resiliency Awareness, Conflict Resolution, Leadership for Fire Department Officers (Buddy to Boss, Communication and Role Changes), and Surviving the Modern Fireground. Other topics may be available upon request. For more information contact DC Tim Leidig York Center FPD, tleidig.fpd@gmail.com.

As always, if we can be of assistance do not hesitate to reach out to our office at info@illinoisfirechiefs.org or 847-966-0732.

John Buckley
Executive Director, IFCA
execdir@illinoisfirechiefs.org

Around the State

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Camp I Am Me Supporting Burn Survivors During National Burn Awareness Week



Each year, National Burn Awareness Week serves as a critical reminder to the fire service and the communities they protect: burn injuries remain a serious and often preventable public safety issue. As departments across the state reinforce messages about fire safety prevention and general burn risk reduction, there is also an opportunity to highlight another essential part of this awareness campaign, and that is supporting those whose lives have already been changed by burn injuries.

In Illinois, that support is embodied by Camp I Am Me by Illinois Fire Safety Alliance. Founded and supported by the fire service, Camp I Am Me provides life-changing camp experiences for young burn survivors and their families. Through week-long summer camps and year-round programs, children who have experienced burn injuries are given a safe environment to heal physically, build confidence, and connect with peers who understand their journey.

Firefighters know better that prevention efforts, while vitally important, cannot eliminate every incident. When fires, scalds, and burn injuries do occur, the aftermath can be long and complex both medically and emotionally. Camp I Am Me fills a critical gap by addressing the long-term recovery needs that extend well beyond the hospital stay. For many campers, it is the first place they feel truly understood after an injury.

National Burn Awareness Week is an ideal time for fire departments and trustees to reflect on this full continuum of care. Prevention education saves lives. Survivor support restores them. The Illinois fire service has long played a hands-on role in both; educating the public to reduce risk and stepping forward to support burn survivors through fundraising, volunteering, and advocacy for Camp I Am Me.

As we look towards Burn Awareness Week and beyond, the message is clear:

more work remains. Continued investment in prevention programs, stronger community education, and sustained support for burn survivor services are all essential. By standing behind the efforts of Camp I Am Me, fire departments reinforce a powerful truth that the fire service's commitment does not end when the flames are out.

For fire safety and burn prevention educational tools and to learn about the wide range of burn survivor support programs offered throughout the year, please visit www.campiamme.org.

Philip Zaleski
Executive Director

Illinois OSHA The Ridge Incident Presentation is now online



Thanks to the Illinois Fire Service Institute, you can now watch the Ridge Incident Presentation on-demand through IFSI's online classroom. The course is a 45-minute version of the in-person presentation IL OSHA has delivered across the state that details the tragic 2021 line of duty death of Lt. Garrett Ramos. The course uses audio and video captured during the incident to walk participants through the events that unfolded at a "routine" single-story residential fire.

The training also provides specific, actionable strategies that can be implemented at structure fires to reduce the risk of firefighter injury or death. It's designed for firefighters at all levels—from probationary members to chief officers—and emphasizes practical strategies for improving operational safety, enhancing situational awareness, and strengthening command decision-making under high-risk conditions.

Fire departments would be well-served to add this to their 2026 training calendar.

https://www.fsi.illinois.edu/content/courses/programs/description.cfm?course_id=1621

Questions? E-mail us at DOL.Safety@illinois.gov call us at 217-782-9386 or visit us at osha.illinois.gov - Fire Department Resources Page: osha.illinois.gov/fire

Erik Kambarian, Chief
Div. of Occupational Safety and
Health (IL OSHA) - IL Dept of Labor

Firefighters Pension Investment Fund Update



The FPIF Board of Trustees met on December 19, 2025, and received a presentation from Executive Director and Chief Investment Officer William R. Atwood on FPIF's investment performance relative to pre-consolidation Article 4 pension fund benchmarks. The report compared FPIF's results to what Article 4 pension funds in aggregate would have likely earned prior to asset consolidation.

Since consolidation, FPIF has generated approximately \$258.5 million in additional portfolio value beyond preconsolidation benchmarks, strengthening pension funding for firefighters across Illinois.

FPIF continues to deliver improved investment returns at significantly lower cost. Before consolidation, average investment management costs for downstate and suburban police and fire pension funds were 57 basis points, according to the Illinois Department of Insurance.

In comparison, FPIF's total expenses for FY 2025 were just 12.3 basis points, including 3.9 basis points for FPIF operations and 8.4 basis points for investment management. These efficiencies resulted in approximately \$46 million in cost savings during FY 2025 alone.

Fiscal Year to Date Investment Performance (July 1 – November 30, 2025)

FPIF delivered strong fiscal yeartodate performance, with the portfolio returning 7.5%, slightly exceeding its policy benchmark.

Public equities were the largest contributor, with the Equity Composite up 9.8%, while fixed income investments returned 3.8%, providing stability. Private market investments also produced a positive 5.2% return as the Fund continues to build toward longterm investment targets.

As of November 30, 2025, FPIF assets totaled approximately \$11.0 billion, reflecting net investment gains of \$764 million during the fiscal year to date.

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Around the State

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Annual Comprehensive Financial Report

At the December meeting, the Board of Trustees accepted the Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report and is pleased to report an unmodified (clean) audit opinion for the sixth consecutive year.

FPIF ended the fiscal year with a 13.3% investment return and a net position of \$10,286,871,117.

Upcoming Meetings

The FPIF Board of Trustees is scheduled to meet on March 13, 2026. Meetings of the Audit & Compliance Committee, Elections Committee, and Investments & Operations Committee are scheduled for March 5, 2026.

IL Fire Inspectors Association

We have moved to a new website and email platform. In the process, we have found many bad emails that bounced back. In the event you were getting our weekly emails, and are not now, just contact our office. There is also a chance for you to sign up for weekly email updates.

Some important changes to our training offerings.

- To allow a better chance for members who are working on shift, **our training programs will begin at 9 am** beginning in January.
- For *virtual* training, it will be offered at no cost to members. If you are not an IFIA member, the cost will only be \$25
- As a reminder, you are a member if *your department* is a member. If you are unsure, contact our office.

If you not a member of the IFIA, why not? The cost is only \$100 per organization! This allows all members of your department to receive training at discounted prices. To become a member, go to our website at IllinoisFireInspectors.org and click on membership.

At the December planning meeting the new elected Board of the Fire Inspectors were sworn in. They are President - Dan Medina, Addison; Vice President - Ryan

Angelus, Plainfield; Secretary - Dave Bricker, Homer; Treasurer - Steve Lorendo, Tinley Park.

Sign up now for our annual Fire and Life Safety conference is March 25-27, 2026 with a pre-conference the 24th.

If you are a business and would like to support fire prevention and education efforts across the State, your sponsorships are sincerely welcomed. Information about that is also on our website at the conference.

Par a Dice hotel room reservations can be made now by calling 1-800-547-0711 or at their website of www.paradicedoydgame.com/groups-and-wedding/group-reservations. Use the group code of FIRC26C. Conference registration should be out very soon.

Our "Pre-Conference" on Tuesday afternoon will be with the OSFM. This session will highlight various rules and regulations from their various divisions. This would be beneficial to your Chiefs and training officers, AND, this is free to IFIA members.

Throughout the year we offer several OSFM Fire Inspector certifications and

Public Fire and Life Safety classes. As these become confirmed, they will be posted on our website. Registration can be done from there. **We offer scholarships** to cover the registration fees for our OSFM certification class, that application is available on our website.

If you have taken IFIA classes in 2025, a PDF of those classes, and their CEUs, are available on our website under the training tab. If you'd like a copy of your records, just scroll to your name and do a screen capture of your classes, CEUs. etc. This is our best effort to put them into one place. Ultimately, it is your responsibility to have the certificates in your training file, should there be a need to access them.

Upcoming events:

- February 27 – VIRTUAL, Site Plan Reviews
- April 13, 20, 27, May 4, 11 – Inspector 2, Addison
- July 27-31 – PFLSE, Romeoville

Robert Morris

Executive Director, IFIA



SAVE THE DATE



IAFPD Foundation Golf Outing Fundraiser 'Educating the Next Generation'

August 21, 2026

Oak Springs Golf Course: 6740 E 3500 S Rd. St. Anne, IL 60954

Registration 10:30 Shotgun start at Noon Rain or Shine



Lunch and Dinner Provided Raffles, Door Prizes, Games and FUN!!

**Questions? Contact: Steve Schultz 815-370-4520 /
Larry Brown 815-252-2702 / Don Loos 217-430-9136**

All Proceeds benefit the Foundation Scholarship Program

HONEST & OPEN GOVERNMENT



FOIA & OMA Updates

By David Livingstone

Assistant Madison County State's Attorney serving as Chief of the Civil Division

Since our last update on the Illinois Open Meetings Act (OMA) (5 ILCS 120/) and the Illinois Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) (5 ILCS 140/), there have been at least four binding opinions from the Public Access Counselor (PAC) all three of which concern FOIA. Impactful legislation was also signed by the Governor (Public Act 104-438). Should you endeavor to read any of the binding PAC opinions, the new Public Access Counselor website address is <https://illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/Open-And-Honest-Government/PAC/Opinions/>.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

FEES ASSESSED FOR RESPONDING TO REQUESTS MUST BE PURSUANT TO STATUTE

In PAC Opinion **25-013**, a public body charged a base fee for responding to certain FOIA requests (\$5 for residents and \$10 for non-residents). The basis for the fee was an ordinance adopted by the municipality setting the fee. In short, the PAC said only fees allowed by 5 ILCS 140/6(a) are allowed, unless there is a separate, specific statute that allows for a different fee. A municipal ordinance setting a fee does not apply or take precedence over FOIA.

FEES ASSESSED FOR RESPONDING TO REQUESTS MUST BE PURSUANT TO STATUTE

In PAC Opinion **25-014**, a public body was assessing a 'per-minute' fee for redacting body camera footage. Similar

About the Author: David Livingstone received his undergraduate degree in Criminal Justice, Political Science, and Public Administration from Lindenwood University. He is a 2016 graduate of St. Louis University School of Law, concentrating in Civil Litigation. Formerly a principal in the law firm Stobbs, Sinclair & Livingstone, Ltd., in Alton, Illinois, where he represented a number of individuals, entities, and various local units of government, including fire protection districts. He is now Chief of the Civil Division of the Madison County State's Attorney's Office.

to PAC Op. 25-013, the PAC said the only fees allowed to be charged for responding to FOIA requests are those permitted by FOIA or some other statute, and no statute permits a 'per-minute' redaction fee for body camera footage.

GENERALLY, NAMES OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES SUBJECT TO DISCIPLINE IN CERTAIN RECORDS ARE NOT PRIVATE INFORMATION

In short, the takeaway of PAC Opinion **25-015** is that names of public employees cannot be redacted from a record under 7(1)(c) [unwarranted invasion of personal privacy] when the disclosure of that information bears on the public duties of those employees.

TERMINATION LETTERS ARE NOT NECESSARILY EXEMPT UNDER THE ILLINOIS PERSONNEL RECORD REVIEW ACT

In PAC Opinion **25-016**, a village withheld the letter terminating the village clerk under the Illinois Personnel Record Review Act (PRRA), 7(1)(c) [unwarranted invasion of personal privacy], and 7(1)(n) [adjudication of employee grievances/disciplinary cases]. The PAC said that the PRRA does not prohibit disclosure of termination letters (or other records of disciplinary action) under FOIA, but it does require notice be provided to the

former employee on or before the day the information is divulged. However, the PRRA does prohibit the disclosure of records of disciplinary action that are more than four years old and "performance evaluations," which are not the same as termination letters. Furthermore, the PAC said 7(1)(c) did not apply because the termination was concerned with the clerk's public duties, and 7(1)(n) did not apply because, typically, the final outcome of a disciplinary case does not fall under this exemption, but also because the village could not show that any formalized adjudication was conducted.

NEW LEGISLATION. Courtesy of P.A. 104-438.

5 ILCS 140/3(j) provides that if a public body has a reasonable belief that a request was not submitted by a "person," the public body may require the requestor to verify, orally or in writing, that they are a person. The deadline to respond to the request is paused until the person provides the verification, and if the person does not verify within 30 calendar days, then the public body may deny the request. A public body may not require the requestor to submit personal information, private information, or

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Honest & Open Government

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identifying information to verify they are a person. FOIA's definition of the term "person" is now specifically limited to an *individual* or an *individual acting as an agent* of a corporation, partnership, firm, organization, or association. 5 ILCS 140/2(b). As of this article, there is no guidance from the PAC on the specific process a public body may use to verify a requestor's "personhood," but surely PAC opinions on this will be forthcoming.

5 ILCS 140/2(c) revised the definition of "public record" to now exclude "junk mail." 5 ILCS 140/2(j) defines "junk mail" as "(i) any unsolicited commercial mail sent to a public body and not responded to by an official, employee, or agent of the public body or (ii) any unsolicited commercial electronic communication sent to a public body and not responded to by an official, employee, or agent of the

public body." *Bonus:* the Local Records Act was also revised to exclude "junk mail" as a public record subject to retention and destruction pursuant to a destruction certificate. 50 ILCS 205/3.

5 ILCS 140/3(c) now requires the content of FOIA requests sent by email to be in the actual body of the email, and a public body is not required to open any attachments or click any links within an email sent by a requestor. A public body has 5 business days after receiving such a request to notify the requestor that the request must appear within the body of the email.

5 ILCS 140/4 removes the requirement that a "FOIA Statement" is required to be physically posted so long as it is posted electronically on a website (not social media) that is maintained by the public body. If the public body does not maintain a website, it must still be physically posted.

5 ILCS 140/9.5(f) expanded immunity for producing records in accordance with an Attorney General opinion from just

"public bodies" to "any officer or employee of a public body."

OPEN MEETINGS ACT

NEW LEGISLATION. *Courtesy of P.A. 104-438.*

5 ILCS 120/2.07 now prohibits public bodies (or their committees) from holding any regular or special meetings on the same day as a general primary election, general election, consolidated primary election, or consolidated election. Be sure to check your annual meeting schedules. If a regular meeting falls on an election day, you may want to consider revising it.

5 ILCS 120/7(a) was revised to now allow members who are physically absent due to their "performance of active military duty as a service member" to attend meetings remotely. Be sure to revise your district's remote attendance policy to include this as an allowable reason to attend a meeting remotely. ■



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PENSION POINTERS



Appellate Court Clarifies When Disability Pensions Begin

By John Motylinski
Ottosen DiNolfo Hasenbalg & Castaldo, Ltd.

Illinois downstate firefighters' and police pension boards recently received important guidance from the First District Appellate Court in *Vokac v. Berwyn Police Pension Fund*, 2025 IL App (1st) 240338. The ruling resolves longstanding confusion about when disability pension benefits commence, particularly for members transitioning from PEDAs to workers' compensation.

In *Vokac*, a police officer was injured in the line of duty in March 2020. He remained off work and received Public Employee Disability Act ("PEDA") benefits until May 15, 2021. Once his PEDAs payments ceased, the officer began receiving temporary total disability ("TTD") benefits paid by the municipality's workers' compensation insurance carrier.

Along the way, the officer applied for a disability pension. The Pension Board ultimately awarded him a line-of-duty disability pension effective May 16, 2021, the day after PEDAs ended. The officer sued, arguing his pension should commence on a later date (which would result in a higher benefit calculation).

The case progressed to the First District Appellate Court, which clarified a longstanding issue troubling pension boards since the Third District's 2017 decision in *Sottos v. Firefighters' Pension Fund of Moline*, 2017 IL App (3d) 160481. In *Sottos*, the Third District held that a firefighter's disability benefit should begin once he stopped receiving TTD benefits. Importantly though, the *municipality*

About the Authors: John E. Motylinski is a partner with the law firm of Ottosen DiNolfo Hasenbalg & Castaldo, Ltd. in Lisle. John graduated summa cum laude from the University of Illinois College of Law and holds an undergraduate degree in political science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He focuses on the areas of local government, municipal, public pension, and labor and employment law.

directly paid the TTD. This ruling created confusion on whether *all* TTD benefits kept members on the payroll for pension calculation purposes, even when they were paid by an insurance carrier rather than a municipality.

Vokac answers this question. The court determined a disability pension should be calculated from the moment when an employee no longer receives salary from the municipality. In so doing, the court observed that receiving PEDAs benefits counts as time on the municipal payroll. This is common sense, since PEDAs requires employers to continue paying injured employees on the same basis as they were paid before the injury.

However, the same is not true for TTD benefits from insurance carriers—those do not constitute municipal salary. When a workers' compensation carrier pays TTD, the member no longer receives compensation from the municipality. The court identified several factors that distinguished municipal salary from TTD. For one, TTD benefits equal only 66.66% of average weekly wages under the Workers' Compensation Act, not full pay. Further, the Pension Code specifically provides offsets for disability pensions when

members receive workers' compensation benefits, indicating these are distinct forms of compensation. Finally, the Pension Board's decisions on such matters are entitled to deference.

The *Vokac* decision now cabins *Sottos* to its unique facts, principally that the municipality paid TTD benefits (thus keeping the firefighter on the municipal payroll). When insurance carriers pay TTD benefits—the typical scenario—members are no longer receiving municipal salary.

With the benefit of *Vokac*, we now know that line-of-duty disability pensions should become effective when officers or firefighters stop receiving salary from the municipality. TTD benefits *from insurance carriers* will not extend time on the municipal payroll. Furthermore, *Vokac* demonstrates that courts will defer to pension boards in determining disability pension effective dates. This clarity will prove invaluable as fire and police pension boards navigate the complex landscape of disability pension commencement dates. ■



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Are you giving Cyber Risks the same attention as Auto Risks?

By David Broz, Railside Citrus

Emails leave the station more often than ambulances do. Are you giving Cyber Risks the same attention as Auto Risks? Fire Departments have long been experts at managing operational risks, and risk management is deeply rooted in the fire service. We can look back at decades of standards, resources, policies and procedures that address emergency vehicle operations, fireground safety, EMS, rescue and more.

Technology is playing a bigger and bigger role in fire service operations everyday: staffing, incident reporting, billing, payroll, records management and communication. Advanced technology is now embedded in lifesaving EMS equipment, ambulances and apparatus.

And as fast as new technologies are being adopted in the fire service, cyber risks are increasing even faster. Viruses, ransomware, fraudulent wire transfers and stolen logins are no longer just movie plots – they are happening in fire stations every day.

So as cyber risks have moved from rare concerns to routine exposures, has your organization’s posture on cyber risk management evolved as well?

Why Fire Districts Are Being Targeted by Cyber Criminals

Cyber criminals are opportunistic. While they target businesses in general, there have been increased attacks on public entities over time because threatening or suspending critical public safety operations can give them

leverage in extortion situations. Cyber criminals look for organizations that:

- provide critical public services,
- must restore operations quickly,
- rely on small teams and tight budgets,
- often have aging systems or limited IT staffing.

Furthermore, fire and emergency service organizations can also hold or handle sensitive information (personnel data, medical-related reports, billing data, incident records), making them attractive targets.

The True Cost of a Cyber Incident (With or Without Insurance)

A cyber event isn’t just “a computer issue” anymore. While ransom amounts make headlines, the total cost is often far higher than the demand itself and

recovery can be the true budget-breaker.

Cyber events can trigger multiple layers of cost, including:

- Operational downtime (dispatch support systems, scheduling, reporting, emails)
- Urgent IT and forensic response
- System restoration and recovery
- Notification requirements (depending on the data involved)
- Public relations and reputational damage
- Potential legal and regulatory expenses
- Extortion demands from cyber criminals from ransomware
- Direct loss of money through fraudulent bank transactions

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Auto Risk Management	Cyber Risk Management
Perform routine vehicle maintenance	Keep systems updated with patches and security updates
Train drivers and enforce safe driving standards	Train staff to recognize phishing, scams, and unsafe tech behavior
Keep vehicles inspected and road-ready	Monitor systems, passwords, backups and access permissions
Carry auto insurance for crashes and liability	Carry cyber insurance for ransomware, breaches, and recovery
Investigate near-misses and adjust procedures	Learn from suspicious emails/events and strengthen controls
Manage who can drive district vehicles	Control who can access systems, accounts and sensitive data
Training Officer	Cyber Training Officer
EVOC Instructor	IT Consultant
Safety Committee	Technology Committee

Insurance Insights

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Cyber Risk vs. Auto Risk: The Same Risk-Management Logic Applies

Fire Departments don't wait until after an accident occurs to start training drivers – drivers receive rigorous training to qualify to operate emergency vehicles. Cyber risk management requires the same mindset: don't wait for an incident to occur before you start preparing.

Does your organization have a training officer? An EVOC instructor? A safety committee? Most likely.

How does your organization assess and address cyber risks? Do you have a cyber training officer or a technology committee? Your District's auto risk management program can provide valuable insight into structuring your cyber risk management program—there are many parallels.

Practical Cyber Prevention: “Driver Training” for Your IT Network and Digital Assets

It is not possible to prevent every cyber event, but with strong fundamentals, many incidents can be prevented or their impacts minimized.

Here are some elements to consider when you are evaluating your organization's cyber risk management program:

1. Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) - Requires a second verification step so stolen passwords alone don't unlock systems.
2. Regular Patching and Updates - Outdated systems create openings attackers actively search for.
3. Email Security+Phishing Awareness Training - Most incidents start with a deceptive email or stolen credentials.
4. Strong Password Practices - Use long passwords and avoid reusing logins across multiple systems.
5. Backups (and Testing Them) - Backups are only valuable if they can be restored quickly when needed.

6. Limit Administrative Access - Not everyone needs “full access,” and limiting privileges reduces damage.
7. Have an Incident Response Plan - Know who to call, what systems to shutdown, and how to communicate fast.

What Cyber Liability Coverage Often Covers

There was a time when cyber risks felt distant and cyber insurance felt optional.

Just as the number of cars and drivers has grown overtime, the number of cyber events continues to grow, and the reasons to purchase cyber insurance have started to look more like the reasons to purchase auto coverage:

- You don't buy auto insurance because you plan to crash,
- You buy it because crashes happen and the financial impact is too big to absorb.

Cyber insurance policies vary. Here are common coverage highlights and what they mean in practice:

- **Security & Privacy Liability** - Coverage for claims alleging the district failed to protect sensitive information or systems.
- **Security Failure** - Coverage tied to breakdowns in network security that cause harm (such as unauthorized access).
- **Privacy Events** - Coverage for incidents where confidential data is exposed, stolen, or improperly accessed.
- **Event Management Coverage** - Support for the cost of managing the incident itself, often including breach response specialists, forensics, and notification coordination.
- **Cyber Extortion Coverage** - Coverage to address ransomware

demands and costs tied to responding to extortion events.

- **Cyber Extortion Threats** - Coverage for situations involving credible threats of an attack or data release, even before full damage occurs.

The Bottom Line: Cyber Risk Is Now a Core Fire Department Exposure

Across all industries (and increasingly within the public sector), cyber claims are becoming more frequent - sometimes rivaling traditional claim categories like auto in both urgency and disruption. The key takeaway: Cyber incidents aren't theoretical anymore.

Fire districts already manage auto risk with a proven formula:

*Training + Maintenance
+ Procedures + Insurance*

Approaching cyber risks in this same manner can be an effective way to build and evaluate your organization's cyber risk management program.

Cyber insurance isn't replacing good cyber security. It's the back stop behind it—so that when an incident happens, the fire department can keep serving the public without a budget crisis or operational shutdown becoming the lasting story.

And now more than ever, every fire district needs two things working together: **a strong risk management plan and the right cyber security insurance protection**. The reality is simple: **emails leave the station more often than ambulances do**.

Many insurance companies offer cyber risk training at little or no cost. Reach out to an insurance professional today to learn about cyber insurance and more. ■

About the Author: David M. Broz is the founder and President of Railside Citrus Insurance Agency, an independent insurance agency with offices in Naperville, St. Charles and Elburn, IL. Outside of the office, Dave is a founding board member of the 100 Club of Kane County. He also serves on the Naperville Area Chamber of Commerce Commercial Real Estate Professionals Committee, the Elburn Chamber of Commerce Scholarship Committee, the St. Charles Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and Past President of the Big I of DuPage Independent Insurance Agents Assn.



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A New Way To Address Community Risks And Safety!

By Matt Perez
Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal

Illinois Community Risk Reduction continues to expand its reach throughout our State. The CRR process is an innovative departure from traditional fire prevention and education programs where communities come together to address risks as a team! Could your community be the next to join the movement?

Building Safer, Stronger Communities

Community Risk Reduction (CRR) has emerged as one of the biggest changes in addressing public safety. At its core, CRR is about understanding a community's unique risks and addressing them before they escalate into crises. By blending data-driven analysis with proactive engagement, a community can reduce the likelihood and impact of emergencies. Illinois CRR is promoting a process which is much more than traditional safety messaging and fire prevention education.

The Purpose of CRR

Every community faces a distinct combination of hazards. Some struggle with high fire-incident rates, while others face challenges related to aging infrastructure, natural disasters, or limited access to healthcare. CRR provides a framework for identifying, prioritizing, and determining the likelihood of risks, then developing targeted strategies to mitigate them.

By analyzing these patterns, agencies can allocate resources more effectively, reduce preventable incidents, and improve overall quality of life. Most importantly, CRR is not just a fire service initiative—it's a collaborative effort that involves public health, law enforcement, social services, schools, businesses, and residents themselves. By engaging with

About the Author: *Matt Perez has over 40 years in public safety service in law enforcement, the fire service and as the retired State Fire Marshal. He currently serves as the Illinois Community Risk Reduction Coordinator for the Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal.*

all these stakeholders, it is usually found that emergencies follow patterns shaped by geography, human behavior and socioeconomic conditions.

Building Collaboration

No single agency can identify and address community risks alone. The success of CRR depends on partnerships. Schools can help deliver safety education to children. Public health departments can share data on vulnerable populations. Local businesses can support preparedness campaigns. Faith-based organizations and nonprofits can help reach underserved groups.

This collaborative spirit strengthens trust and ensures that risk-reduction efforts reach every corner of the community. When residents feel included and informed, they become active participants in their own safety.

Data: The Foundation of Effective CRR

A successful CRR program is based on a thorough risk assessment. Agencies gather data on incident history, demographics, building types, environmental hazards, and community vulnerabilities. This information helps identify trends, such as neighborhoods with high fire-call volumes, areas prone to flooding, or populations at greater risk due to age, disability, or limited resources. Effective CRR has to rely on data, not just assumptions or the latest national fire safety topics.

The "Five Es" of Community Risk Reduction

Once a community's risks have

been identified and prioritized, they can be addressed by using the "Five Es": Education, Engineering, Enforcement, Economic Incentives, and Emergency Response.

Education focuses on informing the public about the identified risks and teaching behaviors that reduce them. Fire safety presentations, CPR classes, and disaster preparedness workshops all fall under this category. When people understand risks, they're more likely to take proactive steps to avoid them.

Engineering involves designing safer environments. This includes everything from installing smoke alarms and sprinkler systems to improving roadway design or reinforcing buildings against earthquakes. Engineering solutions often provide long term, passive protection.

Enforcement ensures that safety codes and regulations are followed. Building inspections, code adoptions, fire code compliance, and enforcement of traffic laws help maintain safe standards across the community.

Economic Incentives encourage safer choices through financial motivation. Insurance discounts for sprinkler systems, grants for home-hardening in wildfire zones, or rebates for safety equipment will allow more residents to participate in the mitigation process.

Emergency Response, while traditionally the primary focus of public safety agencies, becomes more of a safety net of a broader strategy. No matter how hard we try, accidents will always happen, but effective CRR can strengthen response capabilities and reduce the number and

Continued on page 35

Community Risks

Continued from page 34

severity of incidents requiring emergency intervention.

Each “E” plays a distinct role in shaping safer communities. The best solution to a problem usually includes education in combination with one or more of the other four “Es”. For example, if a fire department notices a pattern of kitchen fires in a particular apartment complex, they can partner with property managers and community groups to provide targeted education, install safety devices and conduct inspections. Instead of applying a one-size-fits-all approach, CRR ensures that interventions are tailored and effective.

Other Examples of the “Five Es” in Action

CRR initiatives can take many forms, depending on community needs:

- Home safety visits where firefighters install smoke alarms and identify hazards.

- Education, Engineering, Enforcement
 - Wildfire-mitigation programs that help homeowners create defensible space and possibly lower insurance costs.
 - Education, Engineering, Economic Incentive
 - Community-wide disaster preparedness campaigns that strengthen resilience during storms, tornados or other natural hazards.
 - Education, Emergency Response
- Each of these efforts reduces emergency calls, saves lives, and builds a culture of safety.

Assessment of Initiatives

Once the initiatives have been put in place it is important to evaluate their success. In some cases, the actions taken to address the risks will have the desired effect. Other times they may need to be tailored to achieve the desired result. In either case, it is imperative that you assess whatever you do to make sure it is working. So in reality, CRR is an ongoing

process once started and should be a part of future strategic planning.

The Long-Term Impact of CRR

By combining data, collaboration, and proactive strategies, CRR helps communities address risks before they become emergencies. The CRR process can lead to fewer calls for service, lower economic losses, improved public health outcomes and a better quality of life. In addition, emergency responders in these communities will also face fewer high-risk situations, reducing injuries and burnout. Most importantly, residents enjoy a safer, more stable environment.

Effective CRR creates a powerful shift in how we think about public safety and a sense of shared responsibility in communities. When people understand that safety is a collective effort, they become more engaged, more prepared, and more resilient. CRR will be an essential tool for creating safer, healthier, and more connected places to live. ■



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MICHAEL M. DUGAN, a 42-year veteran of the fire service, is also a 27-year member of the Fire Department of New York (FDNY), where he retired as the captain of Ladder Company 123. As a lieutenant, he served in Ladder Company 42 in the South Bronx and was a firefighter on Ladder 43. He is a member of the FDIC International and Fire Engineering advisory boards and is proud recipient of the 2020 Tom Brennan Lifetime Achievement Award.



DEPUTY CHIEF GEORGE K. HEALY is currently a deputy chief with the New York City Fire Department (FDNY), assigned to Division 13 in South Queens. He began his career with the FDNY in April of 1991 where he worked his way through the ranks to his current position. He is an instructor for FDNY's Battalion Chief Command Course, the Deputy Chief Development Course and Chiefs Education Day. George is an inaugural member of the Fire Safety Research Institute (FSRI), part of UL Research Institutes, advisory board. Currently a deputy chief with FDNY, George utilizes FSRI's fire safety research every day.



CHIEF JAMES M. GRADY III retired after 40+ years with Frankfort Fire Protection District and 29 years as Chief who started as a proud volunteer. He is the former Executive Director of the Illinois Fire Chiefs Association and holds a master's degree in public administration with numerous state and national certifications. He served as a field instructor with VCOS Beyond Hoses & Helmets along and staff with the Illinois Fire Service Institute and several community colleges and universities. He is a longstanding member of Illinois Firefighters Medal of Honor Committee & Foundation as well as IAFPD.

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Exciting GUEST PROGRAM Project at the 2026 IAFPD ANNUAL CONFERENCE

ATTN: QUILTERS, NEEDLEWORKERS, AND CRAFTERS

This year during the 2026 IAFPD Conference the auxiliary is planning a special event for quilters, sewers, and crafters. We are going to have a room just for putting together your special quilt or sewing project while the trustees and firefighters are in their classes. If you have a craft project to put together, bring it too. Our room will have tables and power cords to supply all the space you need for working on your project. Bring your own machine and whatever else you need. The room will be secure at night. We will also have water, drinks and snacks available for you while we work.

- Does your department have T-shirts with your department name on them? Wouldn't it be fabulous if we put together a T-shirt quilt with all IAFPD member shirts? Can we get enough shirts to make a quilt?
- We will have pella available and a heated platen to bond it to the back of the shirt.
- We'll cut the shirts to a 12 1/2" square. Make sure that the name fits in the 12" square. Note: the 1/2" is seam allowance.

***This quilt will be something we'll bring and display at IAFPD events.
Come and be a part of this new event at the conference.***



Photo Source: Vienna (IL) FD Auxiliary Facebook



Illinois Association of Fire Protection Districts 2026 “Outstanding Service” Award Nomination



Please select one type of award and use one form per nomination/nominee. Submit a photo with your nomination to be used at the awards presentation and in The Fire Call. **Clearly label all photos with the nominee's name and fire protection district.** *The presentation of awards will take place at an event during the IAFPD Annual Conference at the Embassy Suites Hotel Conference Center, East Peoria, IL. June 11 – 13, 2026. Details will be sent to all recipients ahead of the presentation. Awards, Pins, and Certificates will not be mailed to districts not in attendance until after the conference.*

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- Awards a nominated fire protection district trustee (past or present) for outstanding service to the IAFPD, a particular fire protection district or districts, or the Illinois Fire Service
- Any member of the IAFPD may submit a nomination for this recognition award, but self-nominations are not accepted

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- Awards a nominated individual affiliated (present or past) with the Illinois Fire Service for outstanding service to the IAFPD, a fire protection district, or to the Illinois Fire Service

The following guidelines apply to this award:

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- The Outstanding Service Award Nominations may be submitted by member districts, fire service organizations, or people involved in the Fire Service in Illinois. Self-nominations are not accepted.

*Nominations are submitted to the Awards Committee for review and consideration. **The deadline is May 5th**. Award recipients are notified by mail.*

Nominee _____

Title _____ District or Affiliation _____

Address _____ City/State/Zip _____

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Phone _____ E-Mail _____

Address _____ City/St/Zip _____

IMPORTANT: Please attach a brief statement to explain why you are nominating the individual for the specified award. Indicate your working relationship with the nominee and any other information you feel should be considered by the Recognition & Awards Committee. (Use additional pages if necessary).

Please mail or email this Honoree / Award Nomination Form to:
IAFPD Awards Committee - 1201 S. 6th Street - Springfield, IL 62703
E-mail: info@iafpd.org

Questions? Call IAFPD 217-525-6620 or Visit IAFPD.org

2026 Trustees Years of Service Recognition



Nominations for “Years of Service ” Recognition Awards

Please use one form per nomination/nominee. You may submit a photo with your nomination to be used at the awards presentation and in The Fire Call. **Clearly label all photos with the nominee's name and fire protection district.** Pins and Certificates will not be mailed to districts not in attendance until after the conference.

Trustees' Years of Service Recognition Award

- Recognizes Trustees who have served multiple terms of office with their respective fire protection district and their membership in good standing with IAFPD)
- Recognition awards are granted for 6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 42 & 48 years of service (based on appointed and elected terms)

*Honoree names must be submitted to the Awards Committee **no later than May 5th, 2026**. All honorees are invited to attend the Award Presentation event to formally receive a certificate and years of service lapel pin. The presentation of pins will take place at an event during the IAFPD Annual Conference at the Embassy Suites Hotel Conference Center, East Peoria, IL. June 11–13, 2026. Details will be sent to all recipients ahead of the presentation*

Name of Honoree _____

Board Position _____

Fire Protection District _____

Address _____

City/St/Zip _____

Phone _____ E-Mail _____

Years of Service as Trustee as of June 2026 _____ Date Appointed/Elected _____

Total Years with Department _____

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Fishing For Firefighters

Part 2

By John T. Brady

Did you do it? Did you read the article on this topic in the last issue of *The FireCall*, and then take one or more of the practical steps discussed there to increase the number of firefighters on your rooster? If not, it's never too late to start, and we'll include more tips on increasing your numbers in this article. We'll start by discussing creating partnerships with local businesses.

Often overlooked as a way to attract volunteers is the two-way benefits that come from uniting with local businesses in ways that can pay dividends to both parties. For example, why not join with local businesses to offer special discounts and promotions to your volunteers? This can include things like coupons that can only be redeemed by firefighters, or discounted dinner prices on certain days.

An associated option is to establish a "Volunteer Friendly Employer" certification for businesses that actively support their employees who are also volunteer firefighters. Such a program can both help businesses create goodwill in the community, as well as create pride in volunteers from seeing themselves appreciated and recognized by both their employer and the fire department. This can be as simple as creating signs that a business can display, saying something like: "Hometown Grocery thanks Jacob Marley for his service as a volunteer on the Hometown Fire Department."

Consider having businesses sponsor fire department events like award banquets, picnics, family days, and holiday parties. Such events are not

About the Author: John T. Brady is a 1977 graduate of the University of Illinois College of Law. He is a former treasurer and trustee of a fire protection district, and has represented fire departments, fire protection districts and EMS organizations for 45 years from his office in Peoria. The image for this article © copyright 2025, John T. Brady

only publicity events for the businesses, but they are also chances to reward and recognize volunteers for their service. Such events also build camaraderie among firefighters and their families as an added benefit.

Given how important they are in allowing members to devote time to fire department activities, involving family members in appropriate department activities is important. In addition to recognizing the contributions of the firefighters themselves, we need to recognize firefighters' family members in special ways. Two ways to do this might be an annual dinner for the spouses of firefighters, and including in a special way the children of firefighters when the fire department visits local schools. On the day of the school visit, why not have the principal highlight the children of firefighters with recognition over the school's P.A. system, and have the classroom teacher attach a computer-generated sticker to a child's shirt, that says something like: "my mom (or dad) is a firefighter with the Hometown Volunteer Fire Department". Various statewide organizations also provide opportunities to recognize our personnel, and these opportunities are often underutilized. For example, the Illinois Fire Chiefs Association and the Illinois Association of Fire Protection Districts both offer various state-level awards and recognition programs – take advantage of them.

At a local level, many towns and villages put "welcome" signs by the road for travelers to see as they enter the community. Often, these municipalities will also use the entrance gateway to the town to celebrate a local hero. These same municipalities are also home to many unheralded heroes – like our firefighters and EMTs. Why not add another sign where the highway enters the community that recognizes these everyday heroes for the service that they provide to the community?

These above suggestions involve members of the community in our recognition efforts. But we can also do things within the district itself. Awards ceremonies and recognition efforts are a must – as is attendance by trustees at these ceremonies. When such events are held, are other family members invited to attend? All too often, the answer is "no". Whenever there is recognition of a firefighter, it is an opportunity to also recognize and thank the firefighters' family members for their contributions.

It's relatively simple to have yard signs printed at little expense, and then have them placed in front of firefighter's homes to recognize their contributions to the fire department and community. It can be something as simple as "Hometown Volunteer Fire Department welcomes Tonya Smith as a new firefighter". Such a sign can

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Fishing for Firefighters

Continued from page 40

not only build pride in the firefighter, but also raise awareness in the community of the need to add new members to the department. Providing personalized apparel and other items, like duffel bags and coffee mugs, can serve the dual purpose of both recognizing personnel and raising awareness of the department.

Experienced anglers know: if you want to catch fish, you fish in the right waters -- you go where the fish are. In the same way, a fire department must "fish in the right waters": it must go where potential volunteers are.

At this point, let's take a break from thinking about fishing, and take a short walk through history. Ask yourself: where did people gather during past generations? In the 1920s, they were gathered around that new invention, the radio. The radio was the center of attention, and if you wanted to send a message to people, you advertised on the radio. Turning another page in the history books: where were people in the 1940s? In the 1940s, crowds were in the movie theaters -- movies were the center of attention. So, if you wanted to send a message to people then, your ad was on the movie screen. In the 1950s, people were gathered around TV screens. If you wanted to send a message to people, your ad was on television: For example, Chevrolet had Diana Shore invite people to "see the U.S.A. in a Chevrolet."

Well, those old venues have been abandoned today, and fire departments must be fishing in different waters. Where are our fish? What's the center of attention today? For many young people, social media rules the day. For "Generation Z" (13 to 28 year olds, a prime age target to attract volunteer firefighters), on average 60% are engaged in social media platforms at least 4 hours every day; 22% are typically engaged in social media more than 7 hours a day. So, if we're not fishing in these waters (Facebook,



YouTube, TikTok, and ...), our message won't be seen by our prime target audience.

We need to be using social media for all the opportunities that it offers: not only fishing for volunteers, but also to recognize individual volunteers and highlight their contributions. Of course, if other more traditional forms of media are available -- like local newspapers, radio, and television -- there's nothing wrong with using them as well. But such use can't be at the expense of social media and other "modern" forms of communicating.

There's another tool to mention. To get information today, people often use their mobile phone to scan a "QR code." This way, they can acquire information without taking notes and with little effort. Can the public and prospective volunteers get information about your fire department by scanning a "QR Code"? If not, perhaps it's time to give this tool a try.

And don't ignore a personal connection with potential volunteers. If you want younger volunteers, get involved with Explorer/Cadet programs, and get into the community's schools. If you do "stand-by" at local high school sports events, don't just sit in some far off, hidden part of the stadium or high school gym. Be at the gate handing out flyers, doing blood pressure checks, and generally making your presence known. Get into the high school team's locker room, and making the connection of "How I went from Mudhen High-School Quarterback to Volunteer Firefighter". Be on the video board in the gym before basketball games and at half time. Be

at the high schools, colleges, and junior colleges for career days. Set up a table in the cafeteria and greet students. If a school requires "community service", become a resource.

And "getting personal" goes beyond just the school-age. Get into the community, be a presence at local community events. At least once a week, have apparatus at some high-visibility location in the community doing something: blood pressure checks, handing out smoke alarms, distributing flyers on fire safety. Talk to civic clubs and attend their fund-raising activities: in uniform. Find reasons for the fire department to congratulate someone, and send them a warm note on department stationery.

And, there's nothing wrong with inviting the community to come to you. An old-fashion "Open House" can still attract people, but be sure to make it dynamic, with activities for all.

So, there you have it: a number of practical (and mostly inexpensive) ways to attract more volunteers to your fire department. Will all of them work for you? Probably not. Will some of them work for you? You won't know unless you try. If you need more volunteers, that situation won't change unless you do something to make it change. So, go fishing! Cast a wide net... and make those vital catches that will keep the volunteer fire service and its mission alive for now and for future generations. Ancient wisdom says that a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. In the same way, the solution to staffing shortages starts with taking that first step. ■

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When and How to Bring EMS Services Into Your Fire Protection District

By Shawn Flaherty / ODHC, Ltd. / Lisle

Several fire protection districts across Illinois are currently facing an important decision: whether to provide emergency medical services (EMS). While many fire protection districts have provided EMS for decades, other boards of trustees are wrestling with this decision, which is far from automatic and requires careful advance consideration of legal authority, community needs, financial realities, and operational challenges.

Legal Authority to Provide Emergency Medical Services

We begin with a review of Section 22 of the Fire Protection District Act (70 ILCS 705/22), which begins by declaring, as a matter of public policy that:

1. Adequate and continuing emergency ambulance service should be available to every citizen of Illinois to preserve, protect, and promote the public health, safety, and general welfare;
2. Emergency ambulance service should be provided by private enterprise, insofar as it is economically feasible; and
3. In the event private emergency ambulance services do not exist, fire protection districts should provide EMS as a public responsibility.

This indicates a legislative preference that emergency ambulance service be provided by the private sector, while allowing fire districts to provide these essential services when adequate and continuing emergency medical service does not exist.

Section 22 then provides express authorization for fire district boards to directly provide ambulance services, to contract with EMS providers for

About the Author: This Article originated from a program co-presented by Shawn Flaherty and Jim Sinclair at the IAFPD Conference on June 19, 2025. Shawn can be reached at sflaherty@ottosenlaw.com.

service, and to combine efforts with other governmental units to provide these services. A fire district can seek referendum authority to assess a separate ambulance tax levy rate not to exceed 0.40% of the valuation of taxable property within the District. This funding enables districts to regulate ambulance services, provide care directly or via a contract, and accumulate financial reserves for EMS and essential EMS and pre-hospital medical services. 70 ILCS 705/22(f)-(g).

Considerations for Providing Emergency Medical Services

Many fire districts boards decide to offer emergency medical services for compelling reasons:

- **Community Needs:** Aging populations and increased medical demands within the community.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Fire calls may have declined, while demands for EMS calls are generally increasing at a higher percentage.
- **Public Expectation:** Long-term residents and newcomers expect high-quality care beyond that which is currently provided.
- **Comprehensive Response:** Coordination of a unified fire, rescue, and EMS operations improves coordination and response times. This would allow the community to have access to an "all hazards" department capable of handling multiple hazards under a unified command with common staffing.

- **Strategic Advantage:** Fire station location placement often suits EMS deployment, providing better access to patients when seconds count.

Considerations Against Providing Emergency Medical Services

Other fire district boards have resisted providing EMS, many using one or more of the following arguments against taking on this additional service:

- **Other Providers Exist:** If hospitals, private companies, or volunteer associations already deliver quality EMS, duplication may be unnecessary or there may be a fight to upend the status quo.
- **Cost:** There are significant costs in providing EMS personnel, benefits, equipment, training, and insurance coverages.
- **Staffing Challenges:** Recruiting and retaining paramedics is difficult, even in larger and well-paying communities.
- **Cultural Impact:** Introducing EMS may create internal friction and resource battles within a fire department.

A board of trustees must first decide whether to provide emergency medical services at all. If the Board decides to provide EMS, it can opt to provide the service directly or contract for such services with an outside party.

Continued on page 45

EMS Services

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Providing EMS Directly

The decision to directly provide EMS service is the more complex option. Launching an ambulance service involves the following:

- **Regulatory Compliance:** You must be approved to operate by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and be prepared to complete paperwork, undergo inspections and comply with State and Federal regulations.
- **Coordination with EMS System and Resource Hospital:** The Fire District must join an EMS system in your particular EMS region and you must remain in good standing with any local protocols, regulations and SOGs.
- **Financial Planning:** Secure funding through taxes, fees, or loans; review and add insurance coverages.
- **Personnel:** Hire licensed, certified staff; complete background checks. Understand Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) minimum wage and overtime laws. Under the FLSA, paramedics are generally non-exempt employees entitled to overtime after 40 hours per week. However, cross-trained firefighter/paramedics may follow a different work cycle, averaging 53 hours per week before overtime applies, provided that the fire district has adopted such an FLSA work cycle for its employees.
- **Operational Setup:** Establish hospital relationships, billing systems, dispatch changes, and create ambulance fee ordinances.

Contracting for Emergency Medical Services

If the direct provision of EMS is not feasible, contracting may be the answer. Contract options may include municipal departments, adjacent fire districts, hospitals, or private firms. All contracts should be in writing and must address at a minimum: coverage levels, service fees, renewal terms, ambulance billing matters, legal liability, and HIPAA compliance.

Emergency Services Districts

Recent legislation allowed for the creation of Emergency Services Districts (ESDs), which are voter-initiated taxing bodies that provide EMS in areas where they are not already provided by a municipality or fire protection district. 70 ILCS 205/1. This Act eliminated the previous designation of "rescue squad district" in favor of an ESD and provided expanded authority to ESDs beyond the powers held by rescue squad districts. ESDs have taxing authority, hiring power, and the ability to contract for EMS, offering another avenue for communities lacking adequate coverage.

Level of Service Provided

Different levels of EMS service are permitted in the State of Illinois and EMS Regions and Resource Hospitals maintain different protocols, which provide differing levels of training and expertise. The highest level of EMS service provider in Illinois is a Licensed Paramedic (EMT-P), and lower levels of EMS care may be provided by Advanced EMTs

(AEMT or EMT-I), Basic EMTs (EMT-B), and Pre-Hospital Registered Nurses (PHRN). The entry level EMS provider in our state is the Emergency Medical Responder (EMR). Fire officials must know what is permitted in their own EMS region and be sure they can maintain its EMS service at or beyond that level. Service levels may need adjustment over time due to funding changes, personnel availability, or new providers.

Districts retain the option to discontinue EMS if county-level services assume responsibility.

Conclusion

Providing emergency medical services is a major commitment with profound implications for public safety, finances, and organizational culture. Each fire district board considering adding this public service should weigh its unique circumstances, community expectations, and available financial and personnel resources before making this important decision for their impacted residents. ■

James S. Sinclair

ATTORNEY AT LAW

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IN THE NEWS

Congratulations!

Thank you to the NIAFPD Board of Directors and Executive Director Gina Degleffetti for supporting the fall presentation of the Essential Trustee Training. The partnership was a new educational endeavor, offering two separate locations for attendance and successfully awarded 40 members with program completion certificates.



John Swan officially retired as Chief of the Colona Fire Department (CFD) on September 10, 2025, after 49 years of service, marking the end of a significant era for the Illinois fire service, with Deputy Chief Kirk Wyffels succeeding him. Swan's impactful career included advocating for firefighter safety, leading initiatives like "Go Green Clean," and mentoring many, leaving a lasting legacy as he stepped down for a well-deserved retirement.



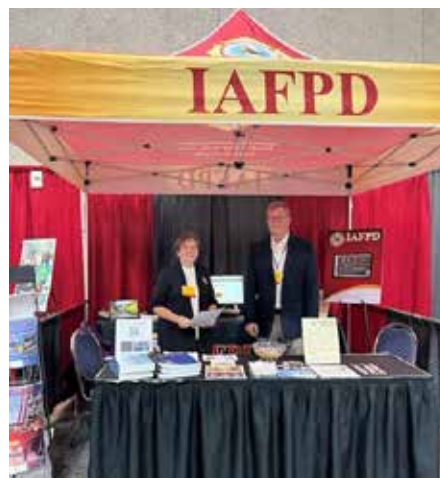
Congratulations Glenn Ericksen and best wishes on your retirement from MABAS-Illinois. We celebrate this special milestone and your incredible leadership and thank you for your years of dedication, vision, and leadership as CEO. Your impact on the organization and on everyone who has had the privilege to work with you—will be felt for years to come.

We are grateful for your guidance, your commitment to excellence, and the culture you helped build. Wishing you a retirement filled with happiness, good health, and plenty of time to enjoy the next great chapter of your life.

Thank You!



Thank you, Cherry Valley Fire Protection District, for hosting the IAFPD Annual Continuing Trustee Education (CTE) Training on November 8th. While a new time of year for the traditional program, this facility and exceptional speakers, Shawn Flaherty and John Motylinski, consistently bring 90+ attendees representing 40+ northern Illinois fire districts together. Thank you, Dave Broz, with Railside Citrus for the continued sponsorship on this important educational program.



IAFPD Directors, Ann Joyce & Damon Schuldt embraced the opportunity to meet with several members who were in attendance at the Illinois Fire Chiefs Conference Annual Conference held in October. The booth is a great place to learn about the resources available and upcoming events offered by IAFPD

IN MEMORY



Aron Jaime (34) of Joliet, passed away unexpectedly on December 14, 2025. Aron was a driven and determined individual who pursued his goals with dedication. In 2015, he proudly completed the Firefighter Academy, demonstrating his commitment to service and helping others. In January of 2017, after completing his real estate coursework and becoming licensed. Aron will be remembered for his kind heart, strong work ethic, and the friendships he formed throughout his life. He was preceded in death by his maternal and paternal grandparents. Left to cherish his memory are his loving parents, his sister along with many aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends who shared in his life's journey.



Donald Eugene Poole (79) of Princeville passed away November 19, 2025. Surviving is his wife of 57 years, Judy Poole, a son, a daughter, and four grandsons. Don was a Vietnam Veteran who served in the United States Army. He was a retired machinist from Caterpillar and later discovered farming to be his passion. Don was a volunteer for the Akron-Princeville Fire Department for 28 years, serving time as Chief, served on the Princeville Village Board for eight years, the Princeville Township Cemetery Board, and was a life-long member of the Princeville United Methodist Church.



Ralph Wayne Hall (64) of Norris City passed away on January 5, 2026 in Evansville, IN. Ralph married Christy Dawn Rhein and they shared over 32 years of marriage until her passing in 2014. He graduated from NCOE High School in 1979. Ralph was a Deputy Coroner for White County, Elk's member, corrections officer, lifetime member of the Coal Belt Fire Protection Association, 40 years with Norris City Fire Protection District which he served as the fire chief and board of trustee's secretary.



Lonnie E. Barnes (59) of Jewett, IL passed away on January 2, 2026. Lonnie was born and married to Teresa Bland in 1992. Survivors include his wife, a son Coty, a daughter, their spouses, his brother and five grandchildren. Lonnie dedicated over 30 years to the Autobody repair industry. In addition to his professional achievements, Lonnie was deeply involved with the Greenup Fire Protection District, serving as a firefighter for 41 years. His passion for supporting the next generation was evident in his devotion to the "Explorers," where he invested time training young people interested in fire service. Lonnie enjoyed hunting, fishing, camping, boating and loved to sing.



William James Brennan (74) of Chillicothe passed away December 12, 2025. He married Brenda Faye Shaddy on February 7, 1976. She preceded him in death on August 26, 2024. Bill was a salesman and had worked for Hennepin Marine, Sieg Automotive and Dave Gill Sterling Trucks. Bill was an active member of the Chillicothe Fire Protection District, where he served as an arson investigator. He was a member of the Fred Meister Chillicothe Community Firefighter's Association, the Red Knights Illinois Chapter 19 Motorcycle Club, St. Edward Catholic Church, the Knights of Columbus and he volunteered at the Wheels of Time Museum. Bill also enjoyed golfing, boating and working on firetrucks and boats.



Keith E. Oncken (93) passed away on January 20, 2026. Keith married Evelyn (Lynn) Hull, the love of his life, on September 10, 1950. Keith was longtime member and trustee with The Milledgeville Fire Protection District. Keith retired in May of 2025 after serving 75 years. First as a firefighter and then a trustee. Many of those as president of the board. Keith also served on multiple other boards around the Milledgeville area. A hardworking quiet leader with a great laugh.



IAFPD Mourns the Loss of Lifetime Member / Legislative Liaison

Timothy F. Deutschle (77) of Bloomingdale, Illinois, passed away peacefully on November 29, 2025, leaving behind a legacy of dedicated service and commitment to his community. Born on April 20, 1948, Timothy embarked on a remarkable career with the Addison Fire Protection District, serving from 1971 until his retirement in 2004. He held the esteemed position of Fire Chief from 1992 until his retirement, demonstrating unwavering leadership and a passion for fire safety that has left an indelible mark on the community. In his continued dedication to public service, Timothy served as the current President of the Board of Trustees for the Bloomingdale Fire Protection District and was active as a lobbyist for the Illinois Association of Fire Protection Districts, advocating for the needs and safety of fire services across the state. Timothy is survived by his beloved wife, Mary Jane with whom he shared 49 years of marriage. He was a proud father to Kati (Sebastian) Otero Barba and a cherished grandfather to his three grandchildren. Timothy F. Deutschle will be remembered not only for his contributions to fire safety but also for his deep commitment to family and friends, reflecting a life dedicated to service.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February 6 – 7

NIAFPD Conference
Westin, Lombard

February 16 – 18

MABAS Illinois Training Summit
Marriott, Bloomington

February 27 – 28

IAFPD Winter Conference
Regency Center, O'Fallon

March 25

Illinois Fire Service Legislative Day
Springfield

March 28

Continuing Trustee Education Training Session
IFSI, Champaign

April 11

Board of Directors (Assn & Foundation)
Springfield

April 12

The Fire Call Copy Deadline

April 20 - 25

FDIC 2026
Indianapolis

May 5

IAFPD Award Nominations Due

May 5

Conference Scholarship Application Deadline

May 6-7

IFCA Symposium
Par-a-Dice, East Peoria

May 12

Firefighter Medal of Honor Ceremony
BOS Center, Springfield

June 11-13

IAFPD Annual Conference
Embassy Suites, East Peoria

August 21

IAFPD Foundation Golf Outing
Oak Springs, St. Anne, IL

IAFPD Offices will be closed in observance of the following holidays:

February 12 - Lincoln's Birthday

February 16 - President's Day

April 3 - Good Friday

May 25 - Memorial Day

Details about many of the events mentioned above can be found at www.iafpd.org or, by contacting the association at: 217-525-6620

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