

IAFF History: Honor, Struggle and Action



The IAFF was formed in 1918 to unite fire fighters—for better wages, improved safety, and greater service for their communities. At a time when fire fighters worked seven days a week, had little benefits, and safety meant putting a wet towel over your face before running into flames, the IAFF became the voice of the fire fighter, the protector of the protector.

IAFF history is this legacy—of safety achievements, political accomplishments, and every success our locals achieve. The IAFF is always on the frontline and has been the leader in advancements that have improved the service and lives of our members. Collecting our history and sharing it, especially with new members, is important in continuing our legacy.

1903 The First Fire Fighter Unions



Photo: 1911, Library of Congress

Fire fighters knew they had to organize their own union to improve the working conditions of the fire service. Before the IAFF officially formed in 1918, 17 locals had affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The first was Washington, DC in 1901, which only briefly organized.

In 1903, Pittsburgh organized and became AFL Local 11431. Pittsburgh fire fighters, who would become IAFF Local 1, decided it was time to organize when their newly elected city government threatened to remove fire fighters who weren't supporters of the new administration. In an attempt to break up the union, their first president, Captain Frank G. Jones, was immediately fired by the city. Members of the union paid his wages and fought to have him reinstated. A partial victory was achieved in 1906 when he was reappointed as a lieutenant. Frank G. Jones went on to submit a resolution to the AFL for fire fighters

to be able to organize locals across the country, marking the beginning of the IAFF, a separate union for fire fighters.

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1918 The International Association of Fire Fighters Is Founded



Thirty-six delegates selected from 24 locals gathered to attend the first IAFF convention on February 28, 1918 in Washington, DC. They met at the American Federation of Labor building at 10:00 a.m. to adopt a Constitution and By-Laws for the new union, created for the sole benefit of rank-and-file fire fighters in the United States and Canada . They elected Thomas G. Spellacy of Schenectady, New York the first president and William Smith as the first Secretary-Treasurer, neither of whom stayed on past 1920. The delegates debated on a name for the new organization, deciding between the International Brotherhood of Fire Fighters, the International Union of Fire Fighters, and the International Association of Fire Fighters. They also proposed publishing a magazine for their members, decided the salary of officers, and approved a motion to create a Fire Fighters Fund, to benefit orphaned children of fire fighters.

1930s The Making of the Modern Fire Fighter

Fire fighting as an institution would come into the United States and Canada in the late 1700s, as Benjamin Franklin is said to have created the first fire company. But it would not be until the 1850s that fire fighters would get paid or until the 1900s that safety and operation standards would be developed. At the start of the IAFF, fire fighters worked 24-hour shifts on continuous duty and were paid very low wages. The first issues IAFF locals took on were fair wages, benefits and improved hours.

During the Depression of the 1930s, fire fighting became a coveted and dependable job. Those who began their careers in the fire service in this era would see advancements in the fire service like none before them—the two-way radio, improved breathing equipment, modern fire apparatus, and more.

Already, the IAFF was improving the lives and working conditions of its members in the 1930s. At the 1934 Convention the 16-year-old IAFF was praised by the National Fire Protection Association, the United States Agricultural Department and others for playing a crucial part in fire reduction, education and research. It was during this time that the IAFF assisted locals in Pennsylvania to pass the first Heart and Lung Act, Worker's Compensation Act, and the Occupational Disease Law, establishing some of the first heart and lung legislation. In a 1934 issue of the *Fire Fighter*, Secretary-Treasurer George J. Richardson wrote, “There are many more things in store for us.”

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1941 IAFF and WWII



On December 7, 1941, the United States of America was attacked by Japan at Pearl Harbor. The United States soon joined the Allied Forces, including Canada, which had entered the war on September 10, 1939. IAFF fire fighters willingly served their nations.

The December 1941 issue of Fire Fighter declared to members: “The fire fighters of the Nation, in particular, have a distinct service to perform. Already well organized, trained, and accustomed to discipline and the orderly performance of their duties under any and all conditions, and with complete disregard of any personal danger, fire fighters may be expected to set an example to their fellow citizens in the trying days that lay ahead.”

During the war, the Canadian Fire Fighters Corps was established for civilian fire service in the United Kingdom. The Corps fire service recruited hundreds of fire service officers and fire fighters who had gained the permission of their chief to serve. They trained at the Ottawa Fire Department to assist in protecting life and property in England, both on land and on ships at sea.

While IAFF members served overseas, members on the homefront did their part for the war. Some locals recall scrapping old engines for metal. Other locals organized drives to send luxury items overseas to the soldiers. In 1943, the IAFF surveyed locals and found over 43% of those employed in the fire service were eligible for the draft and that fire chiefs faced a serious problem, replacing their experienced fire fighters who had gone into the service. Concerned with weakened fire protection, the IAFF encouraged fire fighters to rotate shifts and work paid overtime during wartime. When fire fighters returned, the IAFF worked to ensure members would return to their fire houses and that disabled fire fighters would find positions in the fire service.

1954 IAFF adopts the Muscular Dystrophy Association as their charity



In 1952, Charlie Crowley went to IAFF member George Graney's Fire Engine Company 1 in South Boston. Crowley's sons had been diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy and he needed money to take care of them. IAFF Local 718 member Graney immediately rounded up 20 fire fighters and set in motion a door-to-door drive that raised \$5,000. The next year, Graney launched a city-wide fundraising campaign with the help of fire fighters across Boston. After success in that state, Graney suggested Crowley and his friends at the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) go nationwide with fire fighters in their fundraising efforts. At the IAFF's 22nd Convention, Graney and Crowley convinced IAFF members to make MDA the

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International's "charity of choice."

Since MDA was adopted as the IAFF's charity in 1954, more than \$240 million has been raised for research and treatments to prolong the lives of children suffering with Muscular Dystrophy. This assistance has been used to purchase braces and wheelchairs, in community health centers, support groups, and for summer camps. The IAFF has emerged as the single largest sponsor of the MDA under the leadership of General President Schaitberger, who is also a Vice President of MDA. Fire fighters have taken Graney's vision and made it their mission, to raise funds in many ways: by placing collection jars in stores and restaurants, sponsoring charity softball games and running auctions. Today, their favorite fundraising activity is the "Fill the Boot" drive at intersections and sports venues.

1955 George Meany and the AFL-CIO



Photo: Library of Congress

George Meany, a former plumber from New York City, was president of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) from 1952 to 1955, when it merged with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Meany was the driving force behind the joining of the two labor organizations and is credited with uniting the American labor movement. Meany believed that trade unions were an essential part of democratic society.

Previous to the merge, the CIO split from the AFL in 1938. The two organizations had opposing views on the way labor should be organized: by craft vs. industry. When Meany became president, he worked to strengthen the labor movement by reuniting two organizations. He was the president of the AFL-CIO from 1955 to 1979 and regarded the merge as the landmark of his career.

Meany's death came in 1980, 63 years from the day he enrolled into union membership by Plumbers, Local 2 of New York after completing his apprenticeship. From that point on, trade unionism became Meany's cause. He even met his wife, Eugenia McMahon when she walked a picket line for the Ladies Garment Workers.

1956 George J. Richardson, Creator of IAFF History

One of the founding delegates of the International Association of Fire Fighters, George J. Richardson would go on to serve as General Secretary-Treasurer, for 36 years, from 1920 to 1956. He became a fire fighter in 1913 when he joined the Vancouver Fire Department in British Columbia. Three years later he became a charter member of Canada's first fire fighter's union, Local 18. Much of what we know today about early IAFF history is from his 1974 book, *Symbol of Action*.

In addition to his duties with the IAFF, Richardson was an advisor and representative of labor and professional rescue. In 1945, Richardson traveled to the Pacific to assist in making recommendations for combat areas, which included conferences with General MacArthur. Richardson was also present during peace negotiations with the Japanese. Throughout the 1940s, 50s, and 60s he served on a number of government commissions, represented the AFL at various

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international conferences, and as a representative of organized labor, he attended the Atomic Bomb Explosion Test in Las Vegas in 1945. Richardson was also a member of the Washington Redskin's "Chain Gang"—manning the down markers at home games from the team's first game in 1937 until 1975.

He was officially designated as Secretary-Treasurer Emeritus of the IAFF in 1956. A year later, AFL-CIO President George Meany appointed him to be his assistant. George Richardson died in 1980 at the age of 86, five days before Meany. He is remembered for his great sense of humor and monumental contributions to the fire fighter labor movement.

1958 John P. Redmond Foundation



John P. Redmond joined the Chicago Fire Department in 1912 and became a member of the AFL Federal Local 12270, which had organized before the IAFF's creation. Later, he became the 8th District Vice President, serving 16 years. During that time helped many locals organize. Redmond was unanimously voted in as president of the IAFF in 1946 and served until his sudden death on December 10, 1957, from occupational heart disease.

The John P. Redmond Foundation was established as a nonprofit organization at the IAFF Convention in 1958. The purpose of the Foundation was to encourage and carry forth research and education regarding the occupational hazards and diseases associated with fire fighting. The Foundation has

developed a record of achievement by keeping in the forefront of the health and safety issues affecting fire fighters. Studies funded through the Redmond Foundation have lead to conclusive medical evidence that correlates heart and lung diseases with the profession of fire fighting. The research has been used to lobby for statutes that provide benefits to fire fighters with heart and lung disease.

To promote education, research and training, the Redmond Foundation continues to sponsor a biennial symposium on the occupational health and safety hazards of the fire service. Since 1971, the symposiums have provided forums for detailed discussion on safety and health matters directly affecting fire fighting personnel by bringing together fire fighters, medical researchers, medical practitioners, safety experts, fire chiefs, city management representatives, political leaders, universities, industry representatives and federal government representatives from various agencies.

1960s Beginning of Modern EMS

The late 1960s saw the emergence of specially trained personnel for emergency medical support. Although some towns had a "rescue squad" in place, most systems to for getting patients to a

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hospital were ill equipped to handle medical emergencies and the death toll was high. The need for trained technicians and specific transportation became a focus through a report published through the National Academy of Sciences called, *Accidental Death and Disability: The Neglected Disease of Modern Society* .

Important legislature was at the center of the emerging Emergency Medical Service (EMS): The National Highway Safety Act of 1966 established national standards for inspections of emergency services vehicles. The National Traffic and Motor Safety Act of 1966 specified ambulance design and construction. The Emergency Medical Services Systems Act of 1973 directed each state to develop an emergency service system.

Today, the IAFF Fire & EMS Operations/GIS Department provides comprehensive information on fire departments and fire-based EMS that assists in improving the working conditions of IAFF members. The Department promotes appropriate staffing and deployment for fire suppression and the effectiveness of fire-based emergency medical services systems by providing local affiliates with the tools necessary to develop, enhance and protect their working conditions.

1975 FIREPAC

Formed in 1975, FIREPAC is the IAFF's political action committee. At the 1976 Convention, Resolution 135 set forth the FIREPAC program as “a means for the voices of fire fighters to be heard on legislative matters in Washington ” and urged all locals to participate in FIREPAC.

Since its creation, FIREPAC has been on the frontline for fire fighter issues by raising a conscience within the federal government about fire fighter staffing, labor issues, safety and equipment. FIREPAC has helped to prevent station closings, secure federal funding for fire fighting, and train members to become active in their government. The program educates members on the importance of political action through seminars, the annual Legislative Conference and the IAFF's Political Academy.

1976 Public Safety Officer Benefit Act

After an eight-year battle with the U.S. Congress, the IAFF persuaded President Gerald Ford to sign the Public Safety Officer Benefit Act (PSOB), which provides federal money to families of fire fighters killed in the line of duty. The legislation had a frustrating journey, with attempts to be watered down or shelved, and was attached with amendments that would have made it ineffective. The IAFF called on members to call, write and send telegraphs to urge President Ford to sign the legislation. In the time between IAFF's call to members and the signing of the bill, 16 fire fighters across the United States and Canada were killed in the line of duty. McClennan called the passing of the Act and membership's response a, “tremendous show of unity that proves what we can do when we are all determined.”

A series of expansions of PSOB has increased the Act's benefits for families of fallen fire fighters:

- The 1980s saw funds double for allocation, from \$50,000 to \$100,000.
- In 1990, PSOB was expanded to include fire fighters disabled in the line of duty.

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- After 9/11, PSOB funding increased to \$250,000.
- In 2003, PSOB was expanded to include fire fighters who died from a heart attack or stroke.

1977 The McClennan Scholarship

IAFF's McClennan Scholarship was named after former president William “Howie” McClennan. Elected President in 1968, McClennan served until his retirement in 1980. He began his career as a Boston fire fighter in 1942 and served for 26 years. His first fire was one of the worst in American history—the Coconut Grove nightclub, which killed more than 500 people. After fighting on the freezing streets of Boston, McClennan was inspired to speak up for fire fighters in his local.

McClennan's true passion was fighting for professional fire fighters. He was a leader in Boston Local 718 and served as 3rd District Vice President for 12 years. While president of the IAFF, he was appointed by Richard Nixon to serve as Vice-Chairman of the National Commission on Fire Safety, which helped establish the National Fire Academy, in addition to publishing its famous report, *America Burning*. The report led the nation to make the reduction of fire fighter deaths and property loss from fires a priority. McClennan's gregarious and outgoing personality is remembered today—he called everyone “pal” and had a loud fashion sense. McClennan died at the age of 95 on October 7, 2002.

Established in 1977 by President McClennan, the scholarship provides financial assistance for children of fire fighters killed in the line of duty who plan to pursue higher education. Currently, the scholarship funds more than 20 students.

1980 Advancing Health and Safety



While today's fire fighters perform the same job as their brothers and sisters before them, their equipment, policies and ideas about fighting fires have changed. As the 20th century closed, a number of standards would be issued for fire fighters to follow to ensure their job is performed at its highest efficiency.

One of the first standards issued to the fire service was the Occupational Health and Safety Administration's (OSHA) “Fire Brigades,” 29 CFR 1910.156 of 1980.

The IAFF was a driving force behind the standard which issued requirements for the organization, training, and personal protective clothing and equipment of fire brigades. The goal was to create minimum acceptable standards that each fire department could follow—what personal protective equipment fire fighters wore and how they were trained. It gave manufacturers of the equipment a benchmark for protective equipment. This legislation was a milestone for fire fighters and the beginning of a mission to improve and standardize the fire service.

The IAFF has been behind the development of some of the most important standards to protect fire fighters:

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- 1986: NFPA 1500 Standard on Fire Occupational Safety and Health Program, which provides guidelines for establishing, implementing and managing a comprehensive safety and health program.
- 1983: NFPA 1982, Personal Alert Safety Systems for Firefighters, which provides standards on audible devices for fire fighters in trouble.
- 2001: NFPA 1710, Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments, which provides standards on minimum staffing.

1983 The IAFF and Personal Alert Safety Systems (PASS)



In 1978, four fire fighters in Syracuse , New York died after becoming disorientated fighting a fire in a dormitory. In 1979, three fire fighters died in a restaurant fire in Lubbock , Texas , after becoming disorientated inside the building. Again in 1979, a fire fighter in the City of Los Angeles, California, was killed after becoming disoriented in an industrial warehouse, which was followed by a confusing search to find the lost rescue worker. The IAFF studied line-of-duty deaths and found the inability of fire fighters to let others on the fire ground know they are in trouble and need assistance contributed to many deaths. Fire fighters need the capability to signal distress at a scene. Two-way radio was not the answer for every department.

In response, the IAFF developed performance criteria for the PASS device, or Personal Alert Safety System. It emits an audible alarm signal to summon assistance. The IAFF was the driving force behind developing and introducing standards for the device to the fire service's standard issuer, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). In 1983, the NFPA adopted their standard, NFPA 1982: Personal Alert Safety Systems for Fire Fighters, which sets regulations on the functioning and test methods for devices. Later, PASS devices would be built into breathing equipment and would be modified so that fire fighters would not have to remove a glove to turn them on.

1985 Creation of the Fallen Fire Fighter Memorial

The Fallen Fire Fighter Memorial was created in 1985 to honor the sacrifice made by professional fire fighters and paramedics who have given their lives in the line of duty. The names of more than 2410 fallen IAFF members have been engraved into the Wall of Honor. With the passage of the Public Safety Officers Benefit Act of 1976, the IAFF was able to create a memorial that included the names of fire fighters who answered their last alarm. Today, the organization provides assistance to surviving families. The memorial, under the shadow of Pikes Peak in Colorado Springs, Colorado is a reminder to us all of the risks that fire fighters take every day.

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1987 Human Relations at the IAFF



In 1987, a group of fire fighters from across the United States and Canada came together to form the Civil Rights Committee, which would later become the Human Relations Committee. Also in 1987, the first Human Relations Conference was held in San Antonio—its theme: Change from Within. It was at this time, the IAFF decided to create and fully maintain a dialogue about the human relations issues that for so long have troubled the fire

service. The IAFF's membership has recognized and supported the mission of the Committee, passing every resolution on human relations issues brought to IAFF Convention.

In 2004, the Human Relations Conference was named for Ernest A. "Buddy" Mass, one of the founders of the committee, who worked tirelessly to change minds and attitudes about diversity across the IAFF. The IAFF continues its human relations efforts through education, research and technical assistance, with its goal of making the union an organization that anyone wants to be a part of.

1991 First Canadian Legislative Conference

A few dozen IAFF members gathered around a table in May of 1991. Preparing to speak to Parliament about issues affecting fire fighters, their meeting marked the first Canadian Legislative Conference and the beginning of a powerful voice for professional fire fighters in Canada. The first issues they discussed included the need for Public Safety Officers Benefit (PSOB) legislation in Canada, the creation of a national emergency response information system on hazardous materials, and protocol for dealing with infectious disease notification.

The Conference's grassroots efforts have made the difference as a voice for fire fighters in Canada. In 2003, IAFF members were behind adjustments to the Federal Income Tax Act amendment for an increased pension accrual rate. Then, after several fire fighters were injured while entering drug operation houses set up to hurt people entering, the IAFF sought to increase penalties to protect rescue workers. In 2004, the Conference was behind the passage of amendments to criminal codes increasing penalties for setting traps inside illegal drug operations.

2001 9/11

Answered the Call

On the morning of September 11, 2001, hijacked planes were flown into the World Trade Center towers in New York City, the Pentagon outside Washington, DC, and a Pennsylvania field. In the ensuing operations and collapse of the smoldering towers, 343 IAFF members died.

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The Aftermath

The IAFF was at Ground Zero—providing vital administrative and logistical help to Locals 94 and 854. Critical Incident Stress Management teams made up of IAFF members from across the union traveled to New York City to help their brothers and sisters cope with the grief of the tragedy. The IAFF also helped the families of members through the New York Firefighters 9-11 Relief Fund . In 2002, the IAFF distributed more than \$96 million to the families of fire fighters killed on 9/11.

Since 9/11, the IAFF has worked to increase funding for emergency response. The IAFF participated in the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, and was one of the first groups to call for its creation. The IAFF worked to ensure fire fighters would have a prominent role within the Department.

Never Forget.

On October 12, 2001 the IAFF and FDNY held a memorial service for fire fighters who lost their lives on 9/11. IAFF President Harold Schaitberger and local union leaders led the procession of 356 honor guard members from around the country, each of whom carried a flag for a fallen fire fighter.

2002 Protecting the Nation through SAFER

In 2000, two Houston fire fighters, Kimberly Smith and Lewis Mayo III, died fighting an arson fire. In 2001, Jay Jahnke of Houston died while fighting a fire in a high rise apartment building. In both cases, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health reported inadequate staffing at the scene as the contributing factor to these tragic deaths.

Through federal government studies and tragedies like those in Houston, the IAFF found that operating with below minimum staffing is a leading cause of fire fighter fatalities. Recognizing that the foremost need of the fire service is adequate staffing, the IAFF proposed and convinced Congress to enact the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters Act of 2003 (SAFER). This law authorized funds to hire up to 75,000 new fire fighters over a seven-year period. Under SAFER, fire departments can apply for federal grants to help pay the costs associated with hiring new staff. Previous to SAFER, the IAFF worked to secure federal grants under the Firefighters Investment and Response Enhancement (FIRE) Act which provides federal grant money to increase staffing.

2002 Project HEROES



As first responders, fire fighters face tough enemies: weapons of mass destruction, chemicals, radiological, nuclear and biological attacks. The IAFF knew fire fighters needed improved protection for their current turnout gear for responding such attacks. This initiative became Project HEROES (Homeland Emergency Response Operational and Equipment System) and was part of a long process to

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develop state-of-the-art protective clothing and equipment to protect modern fire fighters.

The challenge behind Project HEROES was to incorporate added protection into current turnout gear without adding weight or separate gear. In addition, the IAFF wanted to ensure that the breathing apparatus would provide the same protection as the gear. Prototype PPE went into field testing in 2005.

Prior to Project HEROES, the IAFF had begun to develop personal protective equipment (PPE) in the 1970s. The IAFF and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) had begun a technology transfer program to develop state-of-the-art protective clothing and equipment. This program became known as Project FIRES (Fire Fighter Integrated Response Equipment System). Under the program, new materials and performance requirements were incorporated into NFPA standards on PPE.

2005 Hurricane Response

More than 200 locals and their members felt the impact of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma, which hammered the Gulf Coast in 2005. IAFF leaders and district service representatives immediately established a command response headquarters in the Gulf region to provide assistance to IAFF members and their families. The IAFF supplied food, water, clothing, medication, transportation, shelter, and money to help members. The IAFF also assisted as part of the nation's official response as members of USAR teams and FEMA response personnel. To date, \$1.6 million have been given to locals and their families whose lives have been impacted by the hurricanes.

2010 Economic Crisis

In 2010, the IAFF convinced Congress to amend the grant requirements so that federal funds could be used to rehire fire fighters who had been laid-off due to the troubled economy. Thousands of IAFF members have returned to work as a result.

Today

The IAFF's role in national politics has given the IAFF increasingly more power and influence -- and the capacity -- to create and support legislation on behalf of first responders, as well as play an active part in the United States and Canada in electing politicians who support the IAFF and fire fighter issues. The IAFF's political action committee -- FIREPAC -- was formed in 1975 as a means for fire fighters to have their voices heard on legislative matters, and is now in the top one-half of one percent of the nearly 6,100 federally registered PACs in the country.

Today, the IAFF remains the primary advocate for providing fire fighters and paramedics with the tools they need to perform their jobs. Our history is our legacy. Collecting and sharing the beginnings of this union is more important than ever in order to continue that legacy of achievements and political accomplishments.