WINDSOR PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION
"An Association Run For and By The Membership"
I.A.F.F. L455

President Angelo Gertsakis's Report
OPFFA Dr. Eric G. Taylor
Labour Educational Seminar (Fall 2013)

Our week started out on Sunday October 6th, 2013 attending the Ontario Fallen Fire Fighters Memorial. Once again it was a very moving ceremony, especially with one of our own being added to the wall. (DC Mario Piva). 17 names got added to the wall from all over Ontario and unfortunately with all of the political issues surrounding Fire Fighters in the province it was a very poor showing on behalf of Fire Fighters with only approximately 130 fire fighters present in the march. Some of the guest speakers included the Honourable David C. Onley, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, Honourable Premier Kathleen Wynne and Honourable Madeleine Meilleur, Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. After the ceremony we preceded to the Toronto Local 3888 for a quick get together.

We arrived in Niagara Falls on the Sunday night and registered for the seminar. Our educational session started Monday morning with numerous keynote speakers on topics that are of importance to all of our locals.

Scott Triebitz of the IAFF did a major presentation on communications, branding, media relations and social media. We are doing well in our local but we need to step it up quite a bit and a plan is already set in motion. You will notice on our committee notice that was put out to the membership that we are asking for members to put their names forward for the Public Relations committee. Scott talked about getting the public on our side, developing a communication plan, sending a key message, having a media strategy and understanding the media. Social media will play a huge factor in our near future and we will have to start to prepare immediately for media relations.

After lunch, we had Colonel Rakesh Jetly do a presentation on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). His presentation was an eye opener with PTSD and the Mental Health issues surrounding this topic. Unfortunately, people look at people with Mental Health issues differently then someone who has a knee injury, etc. The message that was delivered to the members was don't be afraid to talk to members and ask how they are doing? If someone gets diagnosed with Mental Health issues or PTSD there is help out there and that person can function just as good as someone who doesn't have a mental health problem. So, be aware of some of the variety of reactions that may be prevalent such as Cognitive, Emotional; fear, anxiety, anger, depression; Behavioral; withdrawal, avoidance, unemployed, impaired relationships, aggressive outbursts and Physical. Again, these are just a few of the signs. There are many, but in the end hopefully you will know if someone you know is hiding or being different then what they normally act like.

To finish off the afternoon we had a Police Panel do a presentation. The panel consisted of the President of the Toronto Association – Mike McCormack, Paul DeSemoni – PAO Administer and Joshua Phillips, Partner from Ursel Phillips Fellows Hopkinson LLP. The panel discussed some of the issues that they have been dealing with in particular salaries and health-spending accounts. They stated that they would be looking at places where you can hide the money, such as vacations, shift schedules, cost of living, stats and specialties. Their members are looking at getting more time off. The panel also stated that we should start looking at contracting out language to be in our Collective Agreements because they have noticed that Cities are trying to contract out IT work, admin work etc to civilians because it is obviously a huge savings. Luckily, most Fire Associations and the WPFFA in particular have good language with regards to contracting out in our Collective Agreements. The panel went on to say that Fire has done very well in the past and that the Police always look to us for our language in Collective Agreements. The final point that they stressed during their presentation was that they are very impressed with the way Fire has lobbied our politicians. Something that they see is very beneficial to the Fire service and they are starting to improve in that area because they see the huge benefits that come along with the lobbying.

At the end of our day we then had a 5th District Meeting with all of the locals in our area, such as Woodstock, Sarnia, Chatham, London, St. Thomas, Amherstburg and LaSalle. We listened to all of the other locals with issues that are affecting them and things that they are doing well. Most of the issues we have down here are the same as others throughout the province.

The OPFFA then held a special meeting from 5:30pm to 8pm with Scott Triebitz of the IAFF. Only one member from each local was allowed to be in this meeting and it was very informative. Scott went in depth with regards to his earlier presentation with regards to Social Media. He went on to say that social media doesn't replace web sites, newsletters, email blasts, text messages and press releases. It is a way to enhance your message and to get the public and members on your side. Social media can move information quickly, educate, advocate and reach a target group.

Further more to this day it is quite apparent that we need to find ways to convince you the membership to be on board with the direction we will need to take and get engaged within this membership. We need to work together to better our membership! Remember, we are valued in the community, because it does matter…. To you!

I took the General Session Course for the next 2 days and again it was very informative. On the morning of Tuesday October 8, 2013 we had a panel made of IAFF Advocates, which included Henry Watson, Carmen Santoro and Jeff Nestor. This was an open mic session which members got to ask the advocates questions. The issues discussed were:

1) 3-panel Interest Arbitration board (Fire) vs. the Police Interest Arbitration board which only has 1 person
2) Benefits and the language surrounding Benefits
3) Sick Time Gratuity
4) 24 hour shift and the judicial review that Ajax is involved in

5) Collective Bargaining – When agreeing to freely negotiated issues please use clear and concise language

After lunch on Tuesday October 8, 2013 Lou Angeli a Fire fighter/ Paramedic, photographer, film maker from Delaware Fire delivered a very moving presentation on EMS "9/11 – After the Towers Fell" and the lessons learned from 9/11. Planning for the worst at the time, Chief, Special Ops Ray Downey, Cpt. Terry Hatton and Deputy Chief Vincent Dunn had foresight. They warned Congress about the WTC Complex as a target for Weapons of Mass Destruction. At a testimony, after the 1993 WTC bombing Chief Ray Downey stated unless you were there in 1993 at the WTC you cannot fully appreciate what fires fighters face during an incident of WMD terrorism. Can the fire service handle the same potential incident now in 1998 as in 1993? His answer, NO! The World Trade Center Complex covered 16 acres! Even though the crews of Engine and Ladder 10 had pre-planned for such an event following the 1993 bombings, nothing could have prepared them for what would soon transpire. Response by PAPD and FDNY was immediate. Hijacked American Airlines Flight 11 flew into the upper portion of the North Tower, slicing through floors 93 to 99 killing many. As the South Tower collapses, Fire Fighters and PAPD reached the 78th floor sky deck.

After the Towers Fall:

1) Nearly all of FDNY's senior commanders are unaccounted for including Chief of Department and head of Special Operations
2) Confusion as commanders are trapped or missing
3) Off-duty members, retired personnel and volunteers join surviving responders
4) Treatment of the wounded begins
5) 500,000 people are evacuated to New Jersey shoreline
6) Freelance search and rescue efforts begin
7) No water to extinguish dozens of blazes
8) No cell phones or radios.

Lessons learned:

1) Everything that could go wrong…did!
2) Prepare for and Respond to extraordinary events
3) The **bravery and dedication** of Fire, Rescue, EMS, Law Enforcement, Medical, K9, volunteers and all of the 50,000 men and women who served at Ground Zero

9/11 continues to take a toll:

1) 50% of all rescuers are sick – 1000's have died
2) WTC was the Perfect Storm of environmental toxins, and now workers are paying the price
3) The EPA lied when it claimed the air at ground zero was safe to breathe in the days and weeks following the 9/11 attacks
4) The dust was highly caustic – in some cases, as caustic and alkaline as Drano

After the 9/11 Presentation a Fire based EMS in Canada presentation/discussion took place. In the USA the National Registry sets standards for pre hospital care for members to get a certificate. You must pass this test and then you would be certified. Everyone believes fire should be involved in EMS and we should be more enhanced with the delivery of services.

Issues with EMS:

1) No centralized dispatch
2) No simultaneously dispatch
3) Tiered response
4) EMS wants to be in charge of scenes
5) Many more

We all have the same goal with EMS and that is to provide the best service possible for the public and if we can help we want to help!

Our last session of the day was presented from Hugh Doherty and it dealt with Human Relations/Conflict Resolution. The goal of this presentation was to provide Fire Fighters with an understanding of basic human rights and conflict resolution principles for our workplace, and more importantly, to relate how those principles apply to real world situations in the Fire Services. A discussion and a brief review of:

1) Ontario Human Rights Code
2) Anti Harassment Policy
3) Ontario Health & Safety Act
4) Bill 168
5) Personal Harassment
6) Bullying or Personal Harassment
7) Poisoned Work Environment
8) Workplace Violence

Remember, individuals, all have a responsibility for their own behavior and the subsequent consequences if their actions violate the OHRC. Supervisors are charged with ensuring the safety of their crew/staff and bear a responsibility for understanding, preventing and defusing conflict. Management's role is primarily responsible for ensuring a harassment free workplace by setting and enforcing effective anti-harassment policies. Everyone should be concerned about harassment, bullying and conflict in Fire Service.

On Wednesday October 9, 2013 – our morning was spent with the District VP's Warren Scott, Carmen Santoro and Brent Hepell discussing the types of grievances that are our occurring across our Province.

Some of the issues discussed are:

1) AD & D payments for LODD (Mississauga)
2) Conduct of our members off duty (If behaviour is inappropriate it most likely will end up with some kind of discipline)
3) Cameras in the halls (Clarington, Markham and Cambridge)
4) Female Facilities (Brampton)
5) Pay Equity (London and Windsor)
6) Attendance Management (Toronto)
7) Benefits

Conduct while our members are off duty. We are in a position of trust and we represent Fire Fighters and we all wear it when something goes bad! It is not safe or prudent for Fire Fighters to act as if their off duty conduct will not impact their jobs. The interrelationships are more and more prevalent and employers are becoming quick to take action if they believe their reputation as a fire service has been tarnished and leave it to an arbitrator to reinstate the employee.

Our next session was delivered from Ted Wieclawek (Fire Marshal of Ontario) and Matt Pegg (OAFC President). The topics discussed were:

1) The role of EMS in Fire. The OAFC is in agreement with simultaneous dispatch with EMS and Fire in notification.
2) The OAFC stated that Sprinkler systems have not, will not and will never replace the value and need of Fire Fighters responding to a scene. What it does is provide a more viable safer structure for Fire Fighters to work in.
3) Integrated Risk Management Program (Public Education, Code Enforcement, Assess every Fire Service capabilities at critical tasks) can you do these things concurrently (all at the same time)

In the afternoon Brian Dalton from Dalton consultation did a presentation on Drug Plans, STD and LTD plans. This is something that the WPFFA has been looking at for a while. As mentioned before, we will be discussing our LTD plan and possible improvements at our December General Membership Meeting.

On the final day, Thursday October 9, 2013 we had few presentations. The first was from the Canadian Fire Fighters Museum, which is located in Port Hope, Ontario. They obviously would like more support, more artifacts and more donations.

We then heard a presentation for Camp Bucko from FF Steve Heidinga (Pickering) and FF Davis McIntyre (Toronto). Once again, this was a very emotional presentation for a very good cause. If anyone knows of any children that could benefit from going to Camp Bucko please let the Executive Board know.

The final presentation of the day was from our Lawyer Jeffrey Sack (QC, Sack Goldblatt Mitchell LLP). He discussed various issues surrounding Fire Fighters in Ontario such as Interest Arbitration, 3 Panel Board, Appointing Arbitrators, 24 hour shift and health spending accounts,

Finally, I know this report is a little long winded, but I wanted to show the membership that there are many issues that the Executive Board and our membership need to deal with at any given time and these educational seminars assist us with the training and education to better serve the members of the WPFFA. It costs money and time, but a better-informed membership and better knowledgeable Executive board truly is the key to success for the WPFFA.

Sincerely,

Angelo Gertsakis
WPFFA, Local 455
President