

Minnesota Firefighters Represented at Groundbreaking NVFC Meeting

Board holds elections, addresses topics including legislation, EMS, and international relations

The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) held its annual spring meeting on April 3-6, 2011, in Alexandria, VA. Shane Schmidt, Ulie Seal and Tony Bronk represented Minnesota at the landmark meeting.

The NVFC is the national organization that represents the interests of the volunteer fire, rescue, and emergency medical services. The NVFC Board of Directors consists of representatives from 49 state fire associations and meets as a whole twice a year. Minnesota was among 42 states in attendance at the 2011 spring meeting.

“MSFDA and MSFCA are the organization that speaks for the volunteers in Minnesota and it is critically important that we have a voice in decisions and discussions at the national level,” said MSFDA President Shane Schmidt. “I was honored to represent Minnesota at the NVFC spring board meeting and work with this group of fire service leaders from across the country to enhance and further our nation’s volunteer fire and emergency services.”

The meeting marked the 35th anniversary of the NVFC. “It’s really exciting to reach our 35th anniversary and look back at how much the organization has grown since it began in 1976,” said NVFC Chairman Philip C. Stittleburg. “It is the hard work and dedication of our board of directors that has enabled us to be so successful and accomplish all that we have. When I look at the challenges in the volunteer emergency services that this organization has met and overcome in the past, I have no doubt that we will continue to rise to meet any challenges that come before us now and in the future.”

The NVFC board meeting featured many historic elements, including the election of EMS/Rescue Section officers, the presentation of an EMS roundtable discussion, the creation of an International Relations Committee, and more. The NVFC also held elections for its Officers and Executive Committee, made important legislative decisions, and presented its prestigious annual awards for excellence in the fire and emergency services.

Below are highlights from the 2011 spring meeting. More information about each of these items can be found on the NVFC’s web site at www.nvfc.org.

Elections

The NVFC held its Officer and Executive Committee elections. Terms of office are two years. The 2011-2012 NVFC leadership is as follows:

Chair – Phillip C. Stittleburg (WI)

First Vice Chair – Jeff Cash (NC)

Second Vice Chair – Jack Carriger (OR)

Secretary/Treasurer – Allen Metheny (DE)

Elected Members of Executive Committee – Mike Bird (MA), Pat Hlavaty (TX), Suzie Hill Koklich (AL), Bob Timko (PA), Kevin Quinn (RI)

Appointed Members of Executive Committee – Jerry Johnston (IA; liaison from NAEMT), Bob Kilpeck (VT; liaison from NVFC Foundation), Ken Knipper (KY; liaison from EMS/Rescue Section), John Lyman (RI; liaison from Legislative Committee)

Legislative Initiatives

The NVFC board voted on the following legislative issues:

- The board reordered its Legislative Priorities to make the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program its top priority and the National Broadband Communications Network its second priority.
- The board voted to oppose the concept of designating firefighters as “contractors” for the purpose of taxation of benefits, as was done in a bill in the last Congress.
- The board voted to support H.R. 815, the Justice for Public Safety Act.
- The board voted to support H.R. 1348, the Fire Police Fairness Act.
- The board voted to support H.R. 607, the Broadband for First Responders Act, based on the understanding that the bill sponsor, Rep. Peter King, intends to remove language requiring public safety agencies to vacate radio frequencies that they are currently operating on as the bill moves forward.

EMS/Rescue (EMS/R) Section

The NVFC’s EMS/R Section announced the results of its officer elections. This is the first leadership elections held by the new EMS/R Section, which was created at the 2010 spring board meeting. The section leadership for 2011 is as follows:

Chair – Ken Knipper

Vice Chair – John Lyman

Secretary/Treasurer – T.J. Nedrow

NVFC Director – Lee Sachs

Directors At-Large – Juan Bonilla, Richard Huff, Adam Ochs

Committee Meetings

Nineteen NVFC committees met to discuss topics ranging from membership and bylaws, to homeland security and legislation. Chief Ulie Seal (Bloomington) serves on the Homeland Security and Tony Bronk (Hugo) serves on the Health and Safety committee.

Several groundbreaking decisions were made at the meeting, including the following:

- The Health and Safety Committee expanded the scope of its mission to include training as a vital component as well as more thoroughly incorporate the NVFC’s B.E.S.T. Practices for volunteer firefighter health and safety.
- The board voted to create an International Relations Committee. The committee will have the mission to promote a positive exchange of ideas within the international Fire, Rescue, and EMS community and will represent the U.S. volunteer Fire, Rescue, and EMS services worldwide to promote professional, health and safety, and B.E.S.T. Practices in the volunteer Fire, Rescue, and Emergency Services.
- The 1-800-FIRE-LINE Committee was renamed the Recruitment and Retention Committee to enhance its ability to address the critical issues relating to retention and recruitment in the volunteer emergency services.

- The NVFC Foundation voted to provide a grant to the NVFC to assist with the Firefighter Arson Project the NVFC is working on with support from the U.S. Fire Administration. The grant will allow the NVFC to create an online database as part of the project, which also includes developing resources for departments that encounter a situation involving firefighter arson. The NVFC Foundation also held a silent auction at the spring meeting that raised \$2,742 for the Foundation.

Educational Sessions

The spring meeting featured a series of educational sessions and roundtables to expand the board's knowledge regarding several critical topics. All sessions featured topic experts and included a question and answer component.

The NVFC gathered together an impressive roster of EMS leaders for a roundtable discussion on EMS issues and initiatives. Moderated by the NVFC's EMS/R Section Chair Ken Knipper, the participants included Drew Dawson from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Dan Manz of the National Association of State EMS Officials, and Terry Markwood of the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians. One of the key focuses of the discussion was the EMS Education Agenda for the Future. "It is a true testament to how far we have grown in the area of EMS that we were able to have such a prestigious group of EMS leaders to participate in the roundtable," Knipper said of the session.

The NVFC also held a roundtable session on building capacity in a department. Facilitated by the NVFC's Second Vice Chair Jack Carriger, the panelists included Paul Andrews from Go Forward Media, Steve Austin from the Cumberland Valley Volunteer Firemen's Association, Eric Bernard from the Montgomery County Volunteer Fire Rescue Association, and Fire Corps State Advocate Candice McDonald. The session explained how innovative outreach efforts can have a significant impact on retaining and recruiting volunteers. The discussion focused on social media, marketing, reputation management, and out-of-the-box recruitment ideas.

In addition, the board participated in a volunteer leadership session presented by attorney Ben Tesdahl. The session focused on board fiduciary obligations, governance, and other legal issues.

Awards

The NVFC board presented its five annual national awards to dedicated and innovative leaders in the fire and emergency services. Recipients are as follows; learn more about each recipient at www.nvfc.org.

- The NVFC Lifetime Achievement Award, sponsored by Scott Health and Safety, was presented to Chief Glenn Jernigan of Faison (NC) Fire and Rescue.
- The NVFC Fire Prevention Award, sponsored by First Alert, was presented to Kenneth Pagels of the Akron (NY) Volunteer Fire Company.
- The NVFC Junior Firefighter of the Year Award, sponsored by Tyco International, was presented to Brendan Finley-Davis of the Hackberry Township (KS) Volunteer Fire Department.
- The NVFC Junior Firefighter Program of the Year Award, sponsored by Tyco International, was presented to Lake Carmel (NY) Fire Department Explorer Post #2041.
- The NVFC Legislator of the Year Award went to U.S. Representative Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D-NJ).

In addition, Ron Coleman, the NVFC's Alternate Director from California, was awarded the Mason Lankford Fire Service Leadership Award by the Congressional Fire Services Institute (CSFI), becoming the second NVFC board member to receive this prestigious award. The award was presented at the annual CSFI National Fire Services Dinner held the day after the NVFC board meeting ended.

Partnerships

Chairman Stittleburg and Sarah Yerkes from the International Code Council (ICC) signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) between the NVFC and ICC. This is the second MOU between the two organizations and strengthens the partnership. The NVFC and ICC are currently collaborating on the Sound the Alarm campaign, a rural fire prevention and smoke alarm installation campaign that is being piloted in Alabama, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee.

Bob Jacobs, General Manager for Duracell, provided an update on the Power Those Who Protect Us partnership between the NVFC and Duracell. Through the program, Duracell is donating millions of batteries to volunteer fire departments across the country as well as conducting an outreach and awareness campaign to promote the volunteer fire services. Jacobs announced that Duracell has increased its battery donation commitment from 10 million to 20 million batteries. He also said that the second phase of the program would launch in late April with a special re-recording by Grammy Award-winning artist Cee Lo Green of his song "Forget You." The new version is entitled "Thank You" and recognizes the critical and heroic work of the volunteer fire service.

Washington Updates

The board received many updates on federal initiatives, including the following.

The Public Safety Officers Benefit Program (PSOB) has partnered with the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation to create a PSOB Beneficiary Form. PSOB pays a federal death benefit to eligible survivors of public safety officers who fall in the line of duty and meet the criteria for PSOB. The form can be used for public safety officers to designate a beneficiary if there is no surviving spouse or 'eligible' children to receive the benefit. Before, there was no way for a public safety officer to designate adult children or other beneficiary in the case that there are no surviving spouse and dependent children. The form is available on the NVFC web site at www.nvfc.org/lodd and should be kept on file at the first responder's department.

Cathie Patterson, Branch Chief of FEMA's AFG Program, provided the board with an update on the AFG, SAFER, and FP&S grants and answered questions from the board. The AFG program has a new web site at www.fema.gov/firegrants. The program has now reached its 10 year anniversary, and improvements continue to be made based on fire service feedback.

Learn more about the NVFC at www.nvfc.org. Learn more about MSFDA or MSFCA at www.msfd.org and www.msfc.org.

Have a safe summer and remember to take the time to ensure safety is your # 1 priority.

Respectfully submitted,

Chief Ulie Seal and Tony Bronk