



SDFRA

SAN DIEGO FIREMAN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION
SINCE 1907

2016 Winter Edition

IN THIS ISSUE

Message from the President

By George Duardo



As 2016 comes to a close, so much of our fraternal make-up has stayed the same and yet so much of our organization has gone through a mindful transformation.

I typically take this issue to give you a state of SDFRA and emphasize the issues before us. We have put tremendous energy into making tangible gains to understanding occupational cancers and mental health although I can't overstate none of this would be possible without those that come before us!

What **hasn't** changed is the kind gestures that each one of you show on a daily basis. With so many of our brothers and sisters struggling

to uphold their responsibilities under an increasing set of demands, you still find time to deliver food or offer a ride to a doctor's appointment. Having had conversations with four generations of firefighters battling cancer, they have relayed how much good that comes from the Fire Family. Never underestimate the simplest gesture of kindness. Our youngest firefighters are watching and have become very engaged. I am proud to see them carry on our noble traditions.

What **has** changed is our ability to serve YOU into the foreseeable future. It starts with a Board that has reflected inward and asked ourselves tough questions. I've always been an advocate of internal customer service, and I can say unequivocally, that the volunteerism showed by your Board reinforces all that is still good within the fire family. Many have asked, "How do we uphold our mission with a primarily volunteer Board?" The answer is our civilian staff that loves to open up the doors of the Relief each day. The duty to serve is not lost on our staff and they feel a true obligation to listen, learn, and act in a respectful and responsible way.

In this issue you will read in their own words how much this career choice means to them.

Be safe and continue to give us your valuable feedback.

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Board in Action

By Brandt Truver, Board Director

The past few months have been quite busy here at the Relief! After wrapping up our most successful 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb yet, we started meeting to develop some new programs for our members, more to come on that soon. Most recently the Board represented SDFRA at the IAFF National Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Colorado Springs (Sept. 17) and the California Firefighters Memorial in Sacramento (Oct. 15).

These memorials honor those who have lost their lives in the line of duty, or job-related illnesses. At the IAFF Memorial, 123 firefighters were honored, and at the CPF Memorial, 29 brothers were honored. The SDFD Honor Guard sent members to each of the memorials to represent the department and express our condolences to the families of the fallen.

National City Fire Department added one name to the wall during the CPF Memorial. They asked the SDFD Honor Guard to honor their brother by flying the Local 145 flag over them as they presented the American flag to the Ewert family.

As we go out into the country to support the families of our fallen brothers and sisters we go humbly, knowing that one day we will need the same support. As the Board, we thank you, the Members, for trusting us to represent you and make those connections. I highly encourage any SDFD Firefighter to attend next year's Memorials. It is a great reminder that this is much more than a job, we are a Fire Family. As difficult as it may be, we are there for each other during those incredibly hard times.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please feel free to visit cafirefoundation.org and iaff.org to learn more about the 2016 Memorials.



Cadet Spotlight – Trevor Lack

By Michael Colafrancesco, SDFD Cadet Coordinator

The San Diego Fire-Rescue Department Cadet Program was proud to honor Cadet Trevor Lack as the Cadet of the Quarter for Third Quarter of 2016.

Cadet Lack is a Battalion Chief in the program. In this position, he displays excellent leadership skills, while mentoring younger Cadets.

Cadet Lack has completed over 600 hours of Cadet ride-alongs and works as an EMT for Maxcare Ambulance. He is also pursuing an Associate Degree in Fire Science from Miramar College.

His work ethic and dedication are strong indicators that he will be

successful in the pursuit of his career goals within the Fire Service.

The San Diego Fire-Rescue Department Cadet Program is very appreciative of the constant support from the San Diego Fireman's Relief Association.

The Relief provides funding for the Cadet website (sdfdcadets.com), as well as refreshments for the Cadet Summer Academy Graduation Ceremony. Most importantly, the Relief Association provides a Cadet Scholarship Program, which awards funds for Cadets to achieve their educational goals.

All in a Day's Work

By Jennifer Ornelas, LCSW, Director of Fire Family Services

Hello from Fire Family Services. The coming holidays can be a time to reflect, give thanks and celebrate. Looking back at 2016, I am overwhelmed with the love and joy with which I have been gifted. So much of that is due to my strong connection and shared experience with the many fire families with whom I have the honor of working. I've come to learn that we, the members of the fire community, know better than anyone else that firefighters are exposed to events involving human pain, loss and suffering on a daily basis. Many of us are also aware that psychologists, clinicians and researchers have long contended that exposure to death and destruction can result in acute stress, anxiety disorders, depressive symptoms, as well as profound physical and emotional exhaustion. What we are beginning to understand is that the impact of exposure to trauma is now very strongly linked to the potential development of Post-Traumatic Stress. In fact, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: Center for PTSD, estimates that between seven and thirty-seven percent of firefighters meet current diagnostic criteria for PTSD.

Traumatic Events in the Line of Duty

While most of us can imagine that a firefighter would be affected by an event involving mass casualty, it is important to know that it is frequently the smaller less sensational events that trigger an emotional or trauma response. In fact, I commonly hear from firefighters that it is one particular, seemingly small, event that has had the most lasting impact. Such events as the lonely death of an elderly person, the abuse or neglect of a child, or the suicide of a desperate individual do not always make the news or capture public attention. Consequently, such tragic happenings go unmarked, become

routine and are tacitly expected to be filed away without further mention. Yet, in my practice with firefighters, I have found that it is these quieter unnamed tragedies that very often leave the deepest marks.

In his book *Bulletproof Spirit*, retired La Mesa Police Captain Dan Willis, concisely captures PTSD, when stating that "PTSD is a complex injury to the brain's coping ability in which the affected person's memory, emotional responses, intellectual processes and nervous system have all been disrupted." He goes on to explain that symptoms can indeed appear within days following the incident. However, forty percent of sufferers do not experience symptoms until months, and often times, years later. PTSD can result from just one major traumatic incident, or it can be the effect of cumulative and repeated exposure to stressful incidents. After the critical situation, an individual suffering from PTSD may begin to re-experience the trauma through flashbacks or recurrent dreams/nightmares. Commonly, such persons display an exaggerated startle response, as well as experiencing feelings of detachment, dissociation, guilt, anger, irritability, agitation, depression, and memory or concentration impairment. These symptoms tend to have a profound negative effect on the overall quality of life and tend to result in poor coping skills or risk-taking behaviors, such as excessive drinking and drug use. Other maladaptive coping includes problems in personal relationships, as well as isolative and avoidance type behaviors.

What You Need to Know

If there is one thing I wish to impart to individuals suffering from PTSD, it is the absolute knowledge that the symptoms you are experiencing are a completely natural and normal physiological reaction as the mind attempts to process trauma/trauma

exposure. It is so important to know that PTSD is not about what is wrong with you, but instead about what happened to you. I think something that we can all do, whether firefighter or fire family member, is to strive to drive out the antiquated expectation that it is a sign of weakness or being unfit for duty, for one to be affected by, and/or have a response to, the suffering and loss with which our firefighters are exposed and immersed. Demanding such is as absurd as demanding someone to walk through water without getting wet.

The staff members at SDFRA are bound to one another by our individual and collective journeys to care for those who care. We are committed to seeing that our firefighters and their families are fostered in support and wellness. If you or someone you care about is suffering from job-related distress, come to us. We can help.

MANAGING THE EFFECTS OF PTSD

Things you can do:

- Set Up a Support System
- Get an Annual Emotional Wellness Checkup
- Self-Care: Healthy Eating, Stay Hydrated, Rest
- Discuss/Debrief Incident
- Be the Expert of Self and Get Help When Needed



New Members of Our Team

By John Allen, Director of Operations

Hello SDFRA Members! It has been an amazing 6 months since joining your Fire Family. I can't begin to tell you how wonderful and proactive the Relief is; you have some awesome people. We also have two very exciting additions to our organization to announce.

First is Sierra Lawrence, our new Member Services Representative. Sierra has replaced Joan Arrigo, who left our organization in April of 2016. Sierra brings a strong background into her position with an extensive past in office work, computer skills, Human Resources and payroll management.

Sierra's responsibilities at the Relief include, but are not limited to, collecting, organizing and processing medical co-pay receipts for reimbursement. Answering questions regarding membership and benefits in person, over the phone and by email. Sierra works closely with Local 145 regarding active members and with the Retirement Office regarding retired members. She is responsible for keeping the active and retired member databases up to date. She also creates and updates our enrollment packets, with benefits guides, for new members. Sierra has also been given the responsibility to revive our SDFRA newsletter (the one you are reading now). This is just a snapshot of how Sierra is making your Relief Association a better place!

When asked why she chose the SDFRA, Sierra replied:

"Being a part of the Fire Family myself...it's the least I can do to give back to those that I see as family. Plus, I got engaged at the SD911MSC...so the organization holds a special place in my heart!"

She has participated in two of our 9/11 Memorial Stairclimbs as a civilian, prior to joining our SDFRA family. Sierra has lived in the San Diego area for 2.5 years with her

fiancé Dylan Dabasinskas and their German Shepard, Tiller.

Make sure you take a moment to say "hello" to Sierra next time you stop by the office.

Next up is Jared "Cheese" Cheselske. Jared was appointed to a vacant Board Director position in September of 2016 to finish out a three-year term vacated by Chris Babler. Jared, who is a United States Army Combat Veteran that served in Iraq during Desert Shield / Desert Storm, grew up in San Diego. He has a total of 22 years in the Fire Service, 15 of those years being with the City of San Diego, he is currently assigned as Captain on 11/A.

In his new Board position, Jared will be responsible to participate as part of a team, establishing goals and monitoring outcomes of our organization. He'll be monitoring the organizational performance and fulfilling the mission of SDFRA while assuring that SDFRA has the necessary resources needed and is fiscally healthy.

Jared has been married for 20 years to his lovely wife Patti and they have 3 beautiful daughters: Gabbi, Olivia & Andi. When asked why he wanted to get involved with the Relief, Jared responded:

"I have been given much so I always try to give back when and where I can. I have volunteered with SDFRA for the last 10 plus yrs. My passion is helping others in need, that's why I became a Firefighter. We, as Firefighters, are so busy taking care of others, our families and strangers. I feel it's important to look out for our own Firefighter brothers and sisters when they need our help. That is why I am involved with SDFRA."

Next time you see Cheese, take a moment & say "thanks" for all he does!



Jared Cheselske

San Diego Fire-Rescue Department Captain, SDFRA and FirefighterAid Board Member, and San Diego 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb Co-Emcee.



Sierra Lawrence

Member Services Representative at San Diego Fireman's Relief Association/ FirefighterAid and San Diego 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb Event Coordinator.

Give Cancer the Boot

By Kurtis Bennett, CAPP Manager



As readers of the SDFRA newsletter, it's likely that you are aware of the fact that the incidence of occupationally acquired cancer is on the rise in the Fire Service. In fact, several of our own firefighters are currently battling the disease. Hence, the creation of the Cancer Awareness & Prevention Program (CAPP). CAPP's mission is to reduce the likelihood that you will develop occupationally acquired cancer and will make it to retirement healthy and enjoy the fruits of your labor.

Because firefighters are consistently exposed to a diverse group of hazards, the exact cause of occupational cancer in firefighters is unknown. However, the association between firefighting and cancer is well-established and likely results from exposure to known carcinogens, including the byproducts of combustion and diesel exhaust. The good news is that there are actions we can take today to reduce our risk of developing occupational cancer, these include: adopting a culture that embraces safe work practices, wearing our SCBA throughout overhaul, engaging in gross and personal decontamination after firefighting, washing our PPE regularly and using the exhaust extraction systems. The CAPP addresses each of these issues through promotion of culture change, infrastructure upgrades and operational policy changes.

Promotion of cultural change is priority #1 for the CAPP, because a culture that prides itself on 200 years of tradition unimpeded by progress is making us sick. The highly esteemed "smoke-eater" look with soot covered faces, charred helmets and filthy turnouts needlessly exposes us to carcinogens. Remarkably, the fact that byproducts of combustion cause cancer is not a new idea. In 1775, London surgeon Percival Potts noted that chimney sweeps had a significantly higher incidence of

scrotal cancer when compared to the general population. Soot on the skin was later determined to be the causative agent. Dr. Potts was responsible for passing the first industrial hygiene/occupational safety laws, requiring chimney sweeps to shower at least weekly. Clearly, the fact that soot and smoke causes cancer is not new, rather it has simply been ignored by firefighters who view themselves as invincible and hang their hat on "looking the part". I know, because I was that firefighter for the vast majority of my career, taking great pride in my "salty" look. Thankfully, I have turned the corner and now realize just how wrong I was. Please learn from my mistakes and embrace the new "Mr. Clean" culture, it may just save your life.

Infrastructure improvements comprise the second leg of the CAPP triangle, as firefighters need the right tools to get the job done safely. To that end, Chief Fennessy has committed to two key infrastructure improvements. First, we will be purchasing heavy-duty, programmable, commercial washing machines that comply with the PPE cleaning recommendations of Lion Manufacturing, NFPA 1851 and Citro-Squeeze PPE cleaning solution. Secondly, exhaust extraction systems will be upgraded to wireless operation, requiring only a tap of the brake pedal for activation and hose drops will be provided for all vehicles, gas and diesel. Lastly, future stations will be designed in accordance with the latest recommendations in regards to reducing unnecessary exposures.

Operational changes are few, but impactful. Most notably is the change to wearing SCBA's throughout overhaul, regardless of CO levels. Research has conclusively proven that using CO as a marker for the presence or absence of toxic, airborne carcinogens is a flawed practice. Therefore, it's going to be

SCBA "on-air" 100% of the time. In addition, firefighters will be expected to engage in gross decontamination by hosing themselves and their gear off after firefighting to remove soot and then utilizing "Action Wipes" to engage in personal decontamination to limit dermal absorption of toxins.

The establishment of the CAPP and the aforementioned changes are a reflection of a wonderfully productive, collaborative relationship that exists between the primary CAPP stakeholders, including Fire Chief Brian Fennessy, the SDFRA and Local 145. The commitment of the various stakeholders is evident in several ways, first and foremost is the establishment of a stand-alone program solely focused on occupational cancer. Secondly, the financial commitment to upgrading our infrastructure in order to reflect the latest recommendations from occupational safety professionals speaks volumes. This collaborative relationship sets the SDFD, SDFRA and Local 145 apart as leaders in the fire service, as caring for our own is a core principal of all stakeholders, in word and deed.

In closing, to those that have stepped up to lend assistance to our sick brethren, thank you. The bond we share as firefighters is special, and our willingness to help one another sets us apart from others. Volunteer opportunities abound at the Relief, as we provide support in numerous ways, ex: rides to the doctor, food deliveries, lawn mowing and more. Please consider being a part of the SDFRA team as a volunteer and helping those in need.



Benefits Recap

By Sierra Lawrence, Member Services Representative

I hope everyone is having a healthy and happy holiday season!

As 2016 comes to a close, so will the Benefit Year. Which means that all claim reimbursement allowances will be reset as of January 1st, 2017. If you have yet to hit your 2016 reimbursement maximums, you can still submit claims dated within the 6-month deadline.

Each benefit year, Members receive: \$300 towards dental, vision, home/auto insurance, and gym memberships; \$300 towards Dependent copays, prescriptions, and office visits; and \$400 for

Member copays, prescriptions, and office visits. Totalling \$1,000.

With the new year, comes change. To ensure we have the most current and up to date information, please be sure to notify me if you have a change of address, change of email, change of phone number, change of dependents, change of beneficiary, or change of status (Active/Retired). Plus, I'd love to hear from you!

If you have any questions regarding your Membership or Benefits, please feel free to contact me via email (slawrence@sdfra.org) or via telephone (619.281.0354).



UPDATE YOUR INFORMATION

To update your Member Information, please scan the QR Code above or email slawrence@sdfra.org to fill out a new Enrollment Form.

FirefighterAid

By Carlye Wund, Director of Development



Hello friends!

2016 proved to be a very prosperous year at FirefighterAid! We've had so much support and many successful events...we can't help but grin from ear to ear. Let me tell you why we're grinning.

In July, we were able to send Mason back to camp for his third year in a row. At camp he was able to take his first stroll without the assistance of canes! We also had the chance to partner with our friends at Quickstop Tools to embark on a journey to the 2017 Baja 500 with Team Racing for Mason.

We also made a new friend, Grace Melanson, and we were able to help build her a proper bathroom fit for the princess that she is. A big thank you to XP Builders for helping us!

We also were invited to be the beneficiaries at the Celebrity Sweat Softball Game and a North County Battalion Soccer Game.

But the project we are most excited to share with you in 2017 is our Cancer Awareness & Prevention Program (CAPP). The CAPP program promises to attack Firefighter job-related cancers and save lives.

Let's not forget we had the most successful San Diego 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb event in our six-year history! Thanks to our fundraisers and volunteers, we raised over \$138,000 and smashed our goal. We are already hard at work planning the 2017 Climb.

We can't do the good that we do without our Volunteers and our giving Community Partners. A HUGE thank you to the Hilton San Diego Bayfront, Fox 5, GovX, Firehouse Boards, XP Builders, Barnes & Noble - Mira Mesa, Shore Rider, Surfrider Pizza, and the San Diego Padres.

In closing, FirefighterAid wishes you and yours a prosperous 2017!



FirefighterAid

Retired Corner

By Arnell Garcia, Board Director

Hello from the Retired Corner! We have been very busy since my last article...

Retirees in Motion

We are very excited to share that we have purchased a former San Diego Fire-Rescue Department engine. Apparatus #1114 is a 1943 Seagrave Pumper. In the coming year we will be raising money to restore the rig for parades, funerals, the Stair Climb, and other Relief Association functions.

In October, a group of Retired Firefighters gathered for a luncheon at Admiral Baker Golf Course Restaurant. It was the first outing for Tap Gorman, Retired SDFD Captain, since his hospitalization. It was a great time visiting with him. A HUGE thank you to Jerry Cannon for helping us with the smooth transportation from his home to the event.

Please note that the Retired Fireman's Club at NTC is seeing lower attendance at their monthly meetings. We would love to have all recently retired SDFD show up in

order to keep this club and the tradition alive.

All Hands on Deck

Do you have a car? Are you a Master Chef? Do you have a special skillset? Have a little extra time on your hands? With a growing need for help within our Fire Family, we would greatly appreciate your assistance and volunteerism.

We have had a handful of Widows in need recently. The request for help around the home, especially with repairs, is growing. If you have any construction, electrical, or basic home repair knowledge and would like to help these very special women, please feel free to contact me at 619.322.9914 or agarcia@sdfra.org.

As the increase in job-related illness grows, so does the need for assistance. One of our Active Firefighters is currently recovering from a battle with cancer and the Relief has set up a web-based meal delivery system for those that would like to help provide for their family. Another Active Firefighter will be undergoing radiation and will need



rides to and from treatment. If you would like to contribute a meal or participate in the carpool, please feel free to contact Kurtis Bennett at 760.845.6243 or kurtise29@gmail.com.

Rest Easy

With deepest sympathy, we would like to acknowledge a few members of the Relief Family that have recently passed: Dick Alvernaz, Hal Seelig, Jack Horner Sr., Jack Lundstrom, and Patricia Lombardo, Wife of Tony Lombardo. May they rest in peace; they will surely be missed.

Until next time, stay safe and healthy.



Upcoming Events

- **San Diego Fire-Rescue Department Holiday Party** – December 17th, 2016
- **82nd Academy Graduation** – January 26th, 2017
- **Firehouse World Expo** – February 5th – 9th, 2017
- **2017 San Diego 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb** – September 9th, 2017

A Letter to Gerry Jose

By Carlye Wund, Director of Development



Dear Gerry,

It's only been a year; we still miss you. We think of you often and though we are sad we try our best to remember the good times we had with you. We remember the laughs around the station, training, code 9, running drills and your big white smile. We remember your crazy diets and how hangry you would get when you were training for a body building competition. We remember your green thumb and your love of succulents. We remember Charger games and all the fun times at The Q during football season. We still yell at the TV screen when the Chargers are up and about to lose the lead "Come on Chargers, win this one for Gerry!". We remember our last trip to Hawaii with you. We remember the last time we saw you, the last text you sent us and the last hug we shared with you. We still miss you.

We check in on your family from time to time to make sure they know we are here for them and that we love them. We hope that your son Rey and your daughter Jordon know we care about them and that they are part of our family and always will be. We lay flowers on your grave site, we still talk to you because we know you can hear us.

As the holidays fast approach we know you won't be joining us for Christmas dinner, but we want you to know you still have your seat at our table along with all our brothers and sisters who have left us. Your seat will always be here and we will always remember you.

You are eternally loved,

Your SDFRA Family

