



SDFRA

SAN DIEGO FIREMAN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION

SINCE 1907



Fall/Winter 2019 Edition

Caring for our Firefighters for over 100

Photo Credit: Captain Steve

Want to be featured

in our next newsletter?



It's been a pleasure serving you and your families throughout the 2019 year!



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President



Arnell Garcia
Vice President



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Secretary/Treasurer



Dan King
Director



Geof Cummings
Director



Kenneth Barnes
Director



Ryan Hanson
Director



Sean Brambir
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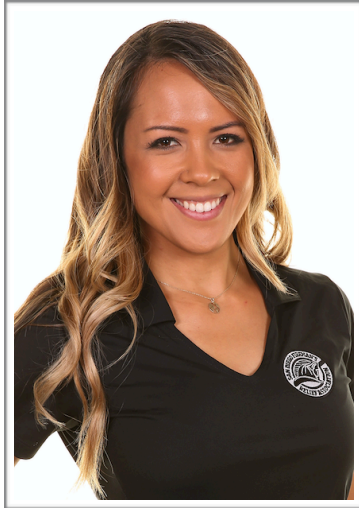


Greg Donnelly
Trustee

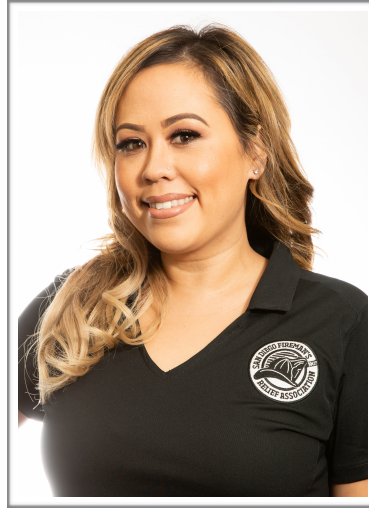


Jon Handley
Trustee

Our Dedicated Staff



Marisa Nunes
Manager of Operations
SDFRA



Jenny Virabouth
Accountant
SDFRA



Jayma Casias
Claims Processor
SDFRA



Carlye Wund
Director of Development
FirefighterAid



Gabby Rockwell
Community Engagement
Representative
FirefighterAid

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Hello Members,

I hope our newsletter finds you and your family well this holiday season. In this newsletter you will learn how we are caring for our Fire Family with exciting SDFRA project updates, stories from active members, a look at the retiree experience, and an overview of what is to come in 2020. Our organization's success relies on you and your support, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for everything. On behalf of the Board and Staff, it is truly an honor to serve you.

As I look back at the year, I am proud of all we have accomplished together. Our membership has lent a helping hand to many of our families by participating in meal trains, various GoFundMe campaigns, bone marrow drives, fundraising for the San Diego 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb, and honoring our Last Alarms at stations and funerals as well as caring for their surviving spouses.

SDFRA recently held an election for active members. With four Board seats open, one current director ran for reelection, and three new candidates ran, all unopposed. This places our current Board at a total of ten members. Formerly, the Board was composed of seven directors, but a recent bylaw revision increased the size. With these additional Board Members, we will be able to fill the committees that are set forth in our Board Governance Policy allowing for a well-rounded board representing the diversity of our membership.

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter. We hope you find the detailed updates and stories from the events of 2019 and a glance at 2020 to be as exciting as we do.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brandt Truver', written in a cursive style.

Brandt Truver
President, SDFRA & FirefighterAid

We're dedicated to you, your families, your profession, and our community.

HONORING THE FALLEN

By: Brandt Truver

Every September, the IAFF and CPF hold their fallen firefighter memorials over the course of a weekend. The weekend is comprised of a full itinerary: events, meetings with dignitaries, and commemorative activities. One of the most important duties of SDFRA is to support families through this difficult process. In September, I had the privilege of attending the CPF Memorial in Sacramento with Board Directors Dan King and Geof Cummings. We were able to show support for other California Fire Departments while training and preparing for if the future need arises for SDFD.

We were there to show support for our fellow fire departments around the state and honor our 34 brothers and sisters by adding their names to the memorial wall. When a name from SDFD is added to the wall, the Board of Directors will send contingent directors to accompany and support the families. We are here to ensure that the family has everything they need and that we take some of the burden and stress off of them.



BOD Directors Dan King, Brandt Truver, and Geof Cummings

CALIFORNIA FIREFIGHTERS
MEMORIAL
SEPTEMBER 28 • 2019 • CAPITOL PARK

The weight of the weekend can be a lot for attendees. However, it's beneficial for our BODs to see the entire event from start to finish to better assist our members when it comes time to put a SDFD name on the wall.



California Firefighters Memorial Capitol Park, Sacramento, CA

Member Services

By: Marisa Nunes



Hello fire family! It's been a pleasure serving you and your families in 2019. We'd personally like to thank you for continuing to be a part of the SDFRA membership. It has been a significant year of growth for our BOD, Staff, and membership. We've focused on improving your benefits, community partner relationships, and keeping you better informed as members. On a day-to-day basis, it's been a true team effort from communicating with members and the BOD to giving assistance where it is needed.

I'm the daughter of a retired San Diego Fire-Rescue Captain, Arnell Garcia. For years, our family has always given back to the Burn Institute, and in 2012 we full heartedly decided to give back to this organization for everything they provided our family with for so many years. There's something about just knowing that there's a team dedicated to helping a family that's in need. Many of you often wonder where your deductions go as a dues-paying-member, and I can truly say in 2019 it went directly to assisting your fellow brothers and sisters. Your monthly

contribution goes much further than your reimbursement benefit. You may not see or hear of the personal impacts that your contributions have, but thinking about the lives of the over 20 families you've impacted this year alone has filled our entire team's hearts this holiday season.



Arnell Garcia with his mom in the hospital after he was burned in the line-of-duty in 1983



The 2018 ACI Golf Tournament



Spreading holiday cheer in 2019

This is just a glimpse at what is to come in 2020! There are a lot of exciting improvements that our Board of Directors and Staff are implementing in 2020. One of the items will be SDFRA reimbursements. Many of the claim receipts we receive today are missing information needed to reimburse you and your families. In some cases, we have to contact you to get that information which also causes delays. We're asking for your help so we can better serve you!

Beginning January 1, 2020, and moving forward, a claim form will need to be completed, signed, and submitted along with your receipts. Any claims received without the completed and signed claim form will be returned to the member and your claim will not be processed.

We know it will be a bit rough at first, but we're moving forward toward our new claims system. The new system will allow you to submit your information directly to us online through a member portal. You will be able to submit claims, upload receipts, check the status of any pending paid or rejected claims, and view your remaining benefits. See below for the benefit changes beginning January 1, 2020. Please contact our team directly with any questions.

Summary of Medical Reimbursement Benefit Changes 2020

We've been looking at the benefits you've been using in the Medical Reimbursement program and are updating them to better suit your life. Outdated reimbursement items have been restructured and simplified. The new 2020 Benefit Description is provided in this newsletter.

Member and Dependent Benefit Increases from \$10 to \$15

"Office Co-Pay" has been updated to a "Medical Visit" and the payment to you has increased from \$10 to \$15. The definition of this benefit has also been expanded and includes services such as lab, radiology, inpatient care, chiropractic, acupuncture, massage, home health, ambulance, cardio-scans, Retiree SDFD wellness, and dialysis to mention a few.

(The benefits for Cardio-Scans and Retiree SDFD Wellness services were being used by less than 1 percent of our membership. We have rolled both of these to benefits under the revised "Medical Visit" benefit and they will no longer be reimbursed separately.)

Pharmacy

Pharmacy and mail order pharmacy have been clarified and combined to reimburse each 30-day supply. Please be sure all of your pharmacy receipts include the number of days supplied for accurate payment.

How to Complete this Reimbursement Claim Benefit Form

Section 1 Member Information

Please enter the member information. (Your SDFRA Account number will be made available in the future and may be left blank at this time.) **Note:** Please enter all claims for the same person in succession before moving to a different dependent or member.

Section 2 Medical and Flex Claim(s)

This section is completed by referencing your supporting documentation which must be submitted for each claim line. **Supporting Documentation (SD or receipt)** such as a bill, invoice, receipt, EOB, or any other documents that may support the expense as submitted and the responsible parties.

Relationship - If the receipt is for you, "M" is entered in this box for member. For your dependents or spouse, please enter a "D".

Patient Name - Refer to your **Supporting Documentation or (SD)** you are submitting for payment.

Medical Services & Flex Medical Services (dental & vision) - Enter the name of the member or dependent that received the services and the name listed on the SD.

Flex Home or Auto - Enter the name of the member or dependent on the SD.

Flex GYM (a member only benefit) - Enter the member's name that matches the responsible party on the bill, statement, or receipt.

Provider Name - This is the name of the provider on the SD you are submitting with the claim form. Examples:

1. CVS - may be your pharmacy provider
2. Name of the dental or vision provider
3. Name of the GYM paid for members fitness club
4. Name of the insurance company if submitting deductible or premium receipt for the home or auto annual \$50 benefit.

Note: If the receipt on this claim line is for a member, select the code in **red** in the “Member Benefit Type” box. If the receipt is for a Dependent, you must use the **red** code in the “Dependent/Spouse Benefit Type” box.

Date of Service - This is the day the service was performed or provided that is documented on the SD you are submitting.

of Services - The number of services is based on the SD.

- Pharmacy quantity is the number of 30 day supplies provided on the receipt. If you have a 90-day supply of medication, the number of services is 3. One for each of the 30 day supplies. If your receipt does not list the number of days, please write it on the receipt as well as on the claim form.
- Office visit co-pay is the number of visits paid for on that receipt.
- Span of Services - In some cases, a receipt will have multiple services on different dates.

For example:

- Chiropractic visits - You may have a receipt for multiple visits on different days. Please enter the total number of visits shown on the statement.
- Admissions - If you or a dependent is admitted into a medical facility and you have a statement that shows the admission through discharge information, please list the number of days in the facility. The date of discharge is not counted so if you were admitted on November 28 and discharged on December 5th you would enter six services

Amount Submitted - The amount you are out of pocket that will be considered for reimbursement.

Total Submitted - Total number of receipts submitted with the form.

Section 3 Authorization and Certification - Is signed and dated by our SDFRA member.

Medical Reimbursement Benefit Summary										
Annual Member Family - Medical Reimbursement Benefit - REVISED for 2020						Services				
\$1,000	Member Eligible Reimbursement				SMAcS Code			Member		
	Member	*Reimb.	Member Only			MCOP	Includes reimbursement for all other medical visits not specifically outlined below and includes hospital (inpatient-per-day), lab, radiology (cardio-scans), chiropractic, acupuncture, massage, home health, ambulance, dialysis, to mention a few.			
		\$ 15	Medical Visit							
		\$ 10	Pharmacy							
		\$ 100	Deductible (per year)							
	\$ 300	*Reimb.	Flex Fund Eligible Benefits					Member & Dependents		
		\$ 300	Dental			FDEN	- Dental and Vision procedures and hardware up to \$300 per family and may be used for your Qualified Dependents.			
		\$ 300	Vision			FVIS	- Dental and Vision procedures and hardware up to \$300 per family and may be used for your Qualified Dependents.			
		\$ 50	Home and Auto Ins Deductible or Premium			FAHI				
		\$ 50	Fitness Club Membership (per year)			MFGYM				
		\$ 300	*Reimb.	Dependent Eligible Benefits			Dependent reimbursement (Reimb subject to \$300 of the \$1,000 family annual max)			Dependents
	\$ 15		Medical Visit			DCOP	Includes reimbursement for all other medical visits not specifically outlined below and includes hospital, lab, radiology (cardio-scans), chiropractic, acupuncture, massage, home health, ambulance, dialysis, to mention a few.			
	\$ 10		Pharmacy			DRXR	- RX drug co-pays, up to \$10/ per 30 day supply			
* Reimb. - Reimbursement amount per claim subject to billed charge amount.								12/3/19		

How you can submit your claims until June 2020:

Submit the claim by walk-in, mail, or fax to the address on the claim form. Send with attention to the Claims Processor, Jayma Casias.



San Diego Fireman's Relief Association (SDFRA)
10509 San Diego Mission Rd. Ste. F
San Diego CA 92108
Phone (619)281-0354 Fax (619) 281-8325
claims@sdfra.org

Reimbursement Claim Benefit Form

SDFRA.V2 1/1/2020

Member Full Name (Last Name, First, MI)		Member SDFRA Account #	
Member Address (Street, City, State, ZIP Code)		Is this a new address? (Please circle one)	
		Yes No	
Email address:		Phone# (Please circle one)	
		Cell Home	

Medical and Flex Claim(s)

Relationship (enter M or D) M-Member/Self D-Child or Spouse	Name of Member or Dependent (that received the service being submitted and that is listed on your supporting documentation)	Provider Name (Name of the medical provider, pharmacy, dentist, Gym etc.)	Benefit Type (1) (*Select the appropriate M or D code below)	Date of Service	# of Services** (2)	Amount Submitted
						\$
						\$
						\$
						\$
						\$

(1) *Benefit Type - Select and enter **one** of these eligible benefit types listed in red for each claim line above. Each claim line must be submitted with a supporting document attached.

Total Submitted

\$

M – Member Benefit Type

MCOP - Medical Visit **FDEN** – Dental
MRXR – Pharmacy **FVIS** – Vision
MDED - Member Deductible **FGYM** – GYM
FAHI - Home/Auto

D – Dependent/Spouse Benefit Type

DCOP - Medical Visit **FDEN** – Dental
DRXR – Pharmacy **FVIS** – Vision
FAHI - Home/Auto

- (2) ** # of services – Enter the number of medical visits services, hospital days or number of months refilled on RX supported by your receipt or document.
Example: RX A-90-day supply would be 3 services for three months. If the patient was in the hospital list the number of days as an Inpatient.
(3) For additional questions please see the instructions **How to Complete "Reimbursement Benefit Claim Form"** on the back or call our office.

Authorization and Certification

To be eligible for reimbursement, you must submit an accurately completed and signed claim form with copies of your supporting receipts/documents within 6 months (180 days) of the date of the expense/loss/service. All claims submitted are subject to membership and benefit eligibility. Do not send medical records identifying medical conditions, diagnosis, or specific treatments. Those records are protected under the the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA)

By my signature I certify that my statements on this Claim Form are complete and true. I am claiming reimbursement only for eligible expenses incurred during the applicable plan year and for my eligible dependents. I understand that it is my responsibility to submit only eligible expenses defined by SDFRA's parameters. I certify that these expenses have not been, nor will be, reimbursed by any other benefit plan and will not be claimed as an income tax deduction. By submitting this Claim Form, I hereby acknowledge that SDFRA will obtain and use such information for purpose of administering my SDFRA benefits.

Member Signature

Date

MEET YOUR FELLOW MEMBERS

In 2019, we welcomed these bundle of joys just in time for the holiday season! If you haven't met them yet, we've got the full scoop on their stories. We hope you enjoy meeting all of our new mini members as much as we do!

Congratulations if you've bought a house, had a baby, celebrated an important life moment, or even a big birthday. Please send us your photos so we can share your exciting news with our members! After all, we're family!

MEET THE MCDANIEL'S FAMILY

By: Firefighter, Austin McDaniel

After spending 6 years in the Navy, I was looking to make the transition from serving my country to serving my community. I took the dedication and work ethic I gained in the military and applied it to my efforts to become a Firefighter for my hometown of San Diego. It was a long road, but it was well worth all of the preparation that led up to receiving my badge and shield.

Looking at it now, there's no other job that could provide the satisfaction and overall happiness that the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department has provided, not only for me, but for my family. On June 19th, my wife Jeni gave birth to our first child, Sawyer Brooks McDaniel, weighing 9 lbs 2 oz., and measuring 22 inches long. Before Sawyer was born, we attended some SDFD functions and talked about how much fun it would be to bring our future kids to those events. I look forward to raising my son within this amazing family. I can't wait for Sawyer to experience station visits, holiday parties, the annual picnic, and the Easter egg hunt.

I'm extremely thankful, humbled, and honored to be where I'm at today and that's due to my fellow firefighters and my family. I look forward to the rest of my career in serving the community that my family calls home.



Wildlife World Zoo, Arizona



Station visit

MEET THE BECKMAN FAMILY

By: Marisa Nunes

Engineer, Justin Beckman chose the firefighting profession because he wanted to provide for his family, have a schedule where he would be able to enjoy family vacations, and create memorable moments with other firefighter families.

He's so thankful for what this career has provided him over the years and the friendships that he and his family are able to cherish. He hopes that his career as a firefighter will show his two sons how unpredictable life can be and to be passionate about what you love.



Engineer, Justin Beckman with his amazing wife Amber, and two sons Bryce and Brody



Firefighter, Darryl Harris Jr. with his two little ones, MacKenzie and Darryl III

MEET THE HARRIS FAMILY

By: Marisa Nunes

Firefighter, Darryl Harris Jr., chose to follow in his father's footsteps and serve his community. His father worked for the Pasadena Police Department and was always an important mentor. Darryl missed the camaraderie that he had in sports while he played basketball at the University of Hawaii. Darryl decided to apply for the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department and has never looked back.

The Harris family recently welcomed their newest edition, Darryl Harris III, on November 18, 2019. He was 8 lbs 12 oz. Darryl loves being a father and hopes that his two kids learn from him what he learned from his father: to always help others, have discipline, good work ethic, and love what you do.

MEET OUR NEWEST MEMBERS

By: Marisa Nunes



Sweet little Sawyer Rae Troncone was born on October 10, 2019



Handsome little Hank Martin was born on October 1, 2019, weighing in at 9lbs 1oz

By: Firefighter, Justin Herzog



San Diego Firefighter Justin Herzog and the Washington, DC, Fire Department

Last November, I was hired as a Workshop Lead by O2X Human Performance. O2X Human Performance was founded by former Navy SEALs with a passion for serving others. From day one, our goal has been to help people learn how to make small, incremental changes daily that lead to sustainable lifestyle improvements.

Their tailored EAT SWEAT THRIVE curriculum targets the specific issues facing tactical populations including high rates of injury, elevated cancer and cardiac health risks, and behavioral health issues commonly associated with high-stress work environments. While originally designed to meet the unique demands of tactical athletes, the science-backed methodology has been successful with Olympians and Division 1 collegiate athletes, professional sports organizations, and top tier corporate teams.

The O2X team is comprised of U.S. Special Operations veterans, tactical athletes, Olympians, professional and All-American collegiate athletes, and human performance experts who are passionate about maximizing human performance and helping others rise higher.

As a Workshop Lead, my role is to coordinate various types of workshops, or classes, around the country. The classes cover injury prevention, proper movement patterns, sleep hygiene, mental performance, nutrition, mindset training, strength & conditioning, yoga, resilience and stress management, among other related topics.

Since joining the company I have been involved in ten workshops with a couple more coming up for the remainder of this year. I've had the privilege of delivering the O2X program to Boston Fire, Washington, DC Fire, Loudoun County Fire in Virginia, and the DOD Fire Academy in San Angelo, Texas, to name a few.

I am honored to be a part of the incredible work O2X is doing around the country and am proud to represent them. O2X means Optimizing to the Target(X), and our aim is to help maximize our students' performance so that they can achieve their goals, both on and off duty.



Loudoun County Fire-Rescue Department



The amazing O2X Team

GIVING BACK IN OUR COMMUNITY

By: Marisa Nunes



On September 13, 2019, Engine 45, B Division made a special visit to the Murphy Canyon Comprehensive Autism Center. The crew, Captain Moloney, Engineer Lacey, Firefighter/Paramedic Sean Putnam, and Firefighter Steven Powell educated kids on what it means to be a firefighter and taught them fire safety.

The kids had a great time touring the fire engine and putting out fake "cone" fires in the parking lot with Captain Moloney. It feels great to give back to our community and bring

awareness to the kids and staff at the center. We'd like to give a big thank you at the Comprehensive Autism Center for allowing the crew to make a difference in these kids' lives. Our hope is that one day they'll want to become firefighters and also give back to this beautiful city.

The staff was wonderful to work with as the crew was able to show that firefighters are a great support system when the community is in need. It's always nice to be able to give back to our community and create lasting relationships with

I KNOW I'M NOT ALONE

By: Captain, Dena Chavez

Hello, my Fire Family. In early 2019, I left Station 40, which had been my home for the last 10 years. I headed out west to the ocean to Station 13. I know 13 wasn't an insanely busy station like 1s or 4s, I was just burnt out.

I began my career with SDFD in 1989 and after 30 years of busy fire seasons, the lack of sleep began to catch up to me. Nights with little sleep, the trauma we experience on the job, coupled with physical injuries I received on the job, two failed marriages and my childhood trauma still hanging around, became a recipe for the "straw that broke the camel's back".

I wasn't drinking excessively, doing drugs, or incredibly unhappy, I just wasn't motivated to do anything at all. For a whole year, I just came home and watched Netflix and scanned Facebook every day when I wasn't at work. I wasn't paying my bills, I wasn't cleaning my house, I wasn't working in the yard, and it took every effort for me to even meet up with friends, which was infrequent. I'm not married, and I have no kids, so I had nobody to be accountable to.

In April, I met Taina Danahy at Healing Our Heroes (HOH) and I began receiving neurofeedback for PTSD symptoms including depression and adrenal fatigue. I also found that I had suffered a concussion at some point in my life. As a result of me sharing my story publicly, HOH is currently helping eight other First Responders in San Diego County, including some retirees.



Captain, Dena Chavez and Retired Fire Captains Willenburg and Rezende with Los Angeles Country Fire Department

This is why I share my story. I KNOW I'm not alone! I've had the pleasure of speaking to retired and active-duty firefighters and military personnel from all over the state who all shared similar experiences. This motivated me to become a Peer Counselor, and with my newfound energy and sense of purpose, I feel like I'm getting back to being a better version of my self.

Thank you to everyone who's been a part of my healing journey. It's been a long road and I'm truly thankful and humbled by the amount of support I've been shown.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SPECIAL AIR OPERATIONS PILOT

By: Marisa Nunes

Lyle Ledoux is a San Diego Fire-Rescue Pilot. He first got his pilot license in Canada in 1985, where he started flying full time in 1986. The first forest fire he fought was in 1987 in Northern British Columbia. In 1997, the company he was working for started getting contracts working for the U.S. Forest Service and that was the first summer where he was dedicated entirely to fighting fires until he was hired by San Diego Fire-Rescue Department in 2008.

He's flown a Bell 206, Bell 206L, AS 350, Bell 205++, Bell UH-1H Bell 212, and a Bell 412. Air Operation with San Diego Fire-Rescue is part of our Special Operations division, in which they operate a Bell 212 and a Bell 412. Both are used for fire suppression, hoist rescues, and night vision goggles so they can do everything that they do during the day.

There have been two rescues that will always stand out to him. One of them was this year when he and his crew saved a rock climber who had fallen. They were able to extract him quickly and the Helicopter Rescue Medic, Scott Pearson, did a great job of managing the treatment. When they left the hospital pad, they were pretty sure their efforts had not been enough. Much to their surprise, about three months later, their patient stopped by to see them. It was a very surreal moment for their crew that they all had the opportunity to see the impact that they had on this individual's life, which made it one of the best days ever for them!

The second event was three years ago in August when San Diego had abnormal weather. They received a call to Blacks Beach where there was a flash flood and they had to transport ten trapped beachgoers within a 45-minute period safely. It was a great team effort between our crew and the San Diego Fire-Rescue Lifeguards to save the lives of those individuals.

Lyle expressed that he's lucky to have the opportunity to help others, and fly all over Canada, the U.S., as well as in Cambodia and Guatemala. We're so lucky to have someone as knowledgeable as he is as part of our team serving San Diego. Thank you for you and your crew's continued dedication in caring for this amazing community.



Pilot, Lyle Ledoux



Photographer: Brandon C. Lopez @shotbycutty

By: Retired Fire Captain, Arnell Garcia



Hello fellow Retirees,

I'd first off like to congratulate those who've recently retired and thank you personally for continuing to help our fellow brothers and sisters. I'd like to review the benefits that you can anticipate receiving as a Retiree. I've had the pleasure of receiving a lot of your feedback at different events this year. It's important to the organization that your Retiree benefits are provided to you in detail. I've provided answers to the most frequent questions that I've been asked over the last several months.

If you should have any questions or require assistance, please feel free to reach out to me.

Arnell Garcia, Vice President
(619) 322-9914
agarcia@sdfra.org

1. How much is the Retiree membership?

\$54.63 a month, totaling up to \$655.56 per year.

2. How much is the Retiree Death Benefit?

\$1,000 and is provided to the Beneficiary or Trust on file.

3. Who else am I helping with my SDFRA deductions?

We have several programs your deduction supports, which include our Last Alarms that memorialize our fallen heroes with an American flag at their last station and help with funeral services. It also allows us to continue to care for the surviving spouses and their needs.

4. What if I'm healthy and never use the benefits?

That's great, and we're happy that you haven't had to use them, and we hope that you never do! Your deductions significantly impact those who require assistance. The best part is, you're a part of an organization that takes care of its firefighters and their families.

5. What if my family is in need of assistance for funeral services?

Our team assists in the process of honoring our Heroes and provides the families with support in honoring their loved ones with the service they deserve.

6. After I die what comes next for my surviving spouse?

In December 2018, the Board of Directors voted that all surviving spouses would be taken care of by the membership and not have to pay a monthly deduction. Our mission is to ensure that someone is there for your family following a significant emotional loss and provide assistance when it is needed. They receive the same benefits, minus the death benefit of \$1,000 that's provided one time for the member.

1st ANNUAL WIDOWS BRUNCH

By: Marisa Nunes



Kathy Reid, Audrey Barnes, and Denise Watkins



SDFRA and FFAID Staff along with our lovely ladies

Our mission is to honor the noble traditions of a firefighter for caring for them and those they leave behind. Our organization was established in 1907 and set the foundation for taking care of our own and their families. When we reached out, connected, and reunited with these amazing ladies who also gave vast pieces of their lives to the same family, we had no idea the effect that it would have on these ladies and our organization.

It broke our hearts to have the women who've supported our firefighters for so many years look us in the eyes and share that they'd felt forgotten. For us, it's unacceptable for any of these women (or significant others) to feel this way, which is why we've started a monthly brunch with these sweet ladies. A big thank you to Evelyn Garza for assisting our team and planning the inaugural brunch in November and for her continued support in helping us build this group. Once a month, the SDFRA and FFAid BOD and Staff meet with the primary goal to fill our hearts with stories of them and their loved ones and build a caring group of surviving spouses who are there for one another.

They've continued to give back in monetary donations and donating their time, and we're so thankful for their caring support. You're loved, you're family, and you're our ladies forever!

FRESH FROM THE GARDEN

By: Marisa Nunes



We love it when our Members stop by and share their hobbies and what they're up to in their spare time. Retired Fire Captain, Jim Palovchik, stops by the office almost every other week to say hello and we always look forward to his big hugs! The best thing about Jim is that he never comes empty handed. He is always looking to keep us full of veggies from his yummy garden! He also brings us fresh picked watermelons that could easily feed a village. We're not sure which is sweeter, Jim or his watermelons.

2019 LAST ALARMS

WILLIAM ADKINS, ENGINEER

32 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM JANUARY 1, 2019

JOSEPH GALEA, CAPTAIN

35 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM JANUARY 10, 2019

JOSEPH DUFFY, CAPTAIN

31 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM MARCH 6, 2019

ROBERT SPITZER, FIREFIGHTER/PARAMEDIC

15 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM MARCH 11, 2019

WILLIAM KLUMP, FIREFIGHTER

23 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM MARCH 21, 2019

RICHARD BLEDSOE, CAPTAIN

26 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM MAY 2, 2019

ALFRED MONTGOMERY, CAPTAIN

18 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM MAY 5, 2019

RICHARD WINTER, CAPTAIN

32 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM MAY 7, 2019

JAMES ENGLISH, CAPTAIN

31 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM JUNE 4, 2019

WILLIAM STOCK, BATTALION CHIEF

28 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM JUNE 16, 2019

EDWARD THORESEN, FIREFIGHTER

20 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM JUNE 23, 2019

KENNETH HANNIBAL, CAPTAIN

29 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM JULY 5, 2019

TAPPIN GORMAN, CAPTAIN

38 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM JULY 24, 2019

LAWRENCE BAUER, CAPTAIN

29 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM AUGUST 2, 2019

GODFREY STEVENS, FIREFIGHTER

29 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM AUGUST 26, 2019

ROBIN CERVANTES, CAPTAIN

29 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM SEPTEMBER 2, 2019

FRANK ALFANO, CAPTAIN

27 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM SEPTEMBER 5, 2019

RICHARD WATKINS, ENGINEER

29 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM SEPTEMBER 13, 2019

THOMAS GARRETT, BATTALION CHIEF

32 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM SEPTEMBER 27, 2019

ALEX ROBLES, FIREFIGHTER

21 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM OCTOBER 24, 2019

ROY MCLACHLAN, CAPTAIN

32 YEARS OF SERVICE
LAST ALARM NOVEMBER 30, 2019

CHECKING IN WITH FIREFIGHTERAID

By: Carlye Wund



Hello and happy holidays to you and your family! I hope this newsletter finds you in the holiday spirit and surrounded by loved ones.

We've had a very successful year at FirefighterAid. We've hired our first official employee, Gabby Rockwell, who has been doing a phenomenal job with our stair climb and out in the community. We had our most successful stair climb event to date. We made some new friends/ community partners and have had some amazing experiences!

The most exceptional experience/fundraiser we had this year was at a state prison, Richard J. Donovan's Correctional Facility, located near the border. That's right, I went to prison! I could write a 50 page article on the amazing experience, but if I had to sum it up into one word it would be... beautiful. To be given the opportunity to meet inmates, serve them Chick-fil-A, and talk to them about the work we do at FirefighterAid in return for their donations, was a once in a lifetime experience. Over the course of the five day fundraiser, we raised over \$12,000. Huge thank you to Chief, Hernandez of the CDCR Fire Department and Chick-fil-A for the opportunity.

We are working on another amazing opportunity with Farmers Insurance. We've been selected to be the charity of the day on January 26th at the Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines. With any luck you just might see us on the Golf Channel during the PGA Tour!

Our goal for 2020 is to stay energized, engaged, and on the course to help as many firefighters in San Diego County as possible! Our goal is also to make sure you know how much we appreciate you and all your support. We can't do the good we do without you!

If you would like to be a part of our End of Year Giving Campaign please visit our website, call the office, or email me and I will be happy to assist you in making a donation. Please join us as we bring the focus of the holiday season to giving, gratitude, and taking care of one another.

Sending you the upmost gratitude and wishing you and your loved ones peace, health, happiness, and prosperity in the coming New Year!



FFAid, Donnavan's & Chick-fil-A Team



9TH ANNUAL SAN DIEGO 9/11 MEMORIAL

By: Carlye Wund



Keynote speaker, Captain James Dowdell

I know I say this every year, but there is absolutely no way around me saying it this year... it really was our most EPIC stair climb yet! This year, our climb crew set an aggressive fundraising goal of \$200,000, and we smashed it. Together, with our unstoppable volunteers, sponsors, community partners and fundraisers, we raised an insane \$208,000 to help firefighters and their families.

This year's keynote speaker, James Dowdell and his Captain, Liam Flaherty, joined us all the way from New York City. James is a current firefighter with the FDNY and the son of FDNY Lieutenant Kevin Dowdell who died in the line of duty on 9/11/01. He shared his heartbreaking and inspiring story as to why he followed in his father's footsteps and became a member of the FDNY. If you missed it, head over to our Youtube Channel, San Diego 9/11 Stair Climb, and check out his compelling speech along with other amazing footage from that day.

This year we had more sponsorships at our event than ever before. Our beer garden was as busy as it's ever been. Our merchandise booth had a line all day long. Captain Marvel and Captain America ran obstacle courses and saved the day with all the kids in our kid's zone while the smooth reggae sounds of Fluid Foundation provided a soundtrack to the perfect day.

As perfect as the day was, nothing could have prepared us for the moment at the end of the day when we were just \$625 away from hitting our \$200,000 goal. Our event emcee, Captain, Jared Cheselske, grabbed the stage microphone and told everyone in the beer garden that an empty boot was coming through and that everyone needed to empty their pockets. In that last half hour of the day we hit our goal! That boot came in with \$600 even. At the same time, Monica Lewis from the San Diego Firefighters Credit Union came running over with her credit card and also donated \$625! That was it! The entire crowd came together and raised the last dollars needed to hit our goal and even put us over. That momentum didn't stop for another two weeks!

There's absolutely no way that we can even begin to express the amount of gratitude that our team has for the supporters of our event! HUGE thank you to our climbers, sponsors, volunteers, and our fire families that travel from hundreds of miles away to make our event what it is. It's because of dedicated fundraisers like you that the most amazing stair climb in the country is right here in our own backyard in San Diego, CA.



GOVX GIVES BACK

By: Carlye Wund

On June 7th, our friends at GovX invited FirefighterAid to a very special evening at a San Diego Padres game at Petco Park. They hosted an entire suite with complementary snacks, treats, and drinks for some of our fire families to gather for a fun-filled game night. It was an enjoyable evening for some of our Board of Directors, community supporters, and FirefighterAid team, but most importantly, for some of our fire families who needed a night out.

It was a First Responder Friday, the pre-game and opening ceremonies were packed with firefighters from the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department, and we all cheered on the Padres against the Washington Nationals. Not only did we have the best cheering section in the whole park, but the Padres won! Dianne Karty's daughter, Lexi, even caught a Pad Squad squishy ball.

The suite was full of emotion due to some life events that some of our members were going through. There were hugs and tears and more hugs. The one emotion that was most prominent was love. The tears that were shed were those of joy and appreciation.



GovX has been a huge supporter of our mission and our fire family for the last five years and counting. We're beyond fortunate to have a national brand like GovX in our own backyard that genuinely cares about giving back to the community in which they thrive and operate. In addition to the Padres night out, GovX was the top sponsor of our stair climb event this year donating over \$20,000. There's not a community partner out there that gives back to us like GovX does. Thank you, GovX for being more than a supporter and sponsor, thank you for being a part of our family.



If you're looking for the perfect holiday gift for the person who has everything we recommend checking out GovX.com

A NOVEMBER TO REMEMBER

By: Carlye Wund & Sean Brambir

This year's SDFD Mustache Bash (new name, same great event) was a gigantic success! Firefighter/Paramedic Sean Brambir has a huge heart and is dedicated to FirefighterAid's Cancer Awareness and Prevention Program. Every year, during the months of October and November, Sean dedicates his time to help support the fight against firefighter occupational cancer. He reaches out to local business and organizations to get donations, awesome raffle prizes, and works hard to create long lasting community partnerships.

The Firehouse Pacific Beach hosted this year's event and had creative drink specials sponsored by Jack Daniels Tennessee Fire. Falck offered our event goers with a special donation matching a goal of up to \$1,000 which we hit that evening! The San Diego Firefighters Credit Union donated \$500 and their own Monica Lewis won the best female mustache award, Sister Stache. There were over 200 in attendance and it was the most attended mustache event we've ever had.



Firefighter-Paramedic, Sean Brambir on the mic



This year's fundraising goal was set at \$10,000, and thanks to a team effort, we were able to raise just over \$13,000! Firefighters and community supporters coming together is the most wonderful way to support each other and unite for such a great cause.

"I began the mustache fundraiser when I found out that one of my academy mates was diagnosed with cancer. Although he himself did not need financial assistance, I thought it would be a great idea to have an event to show our support. It has been successful for five years, and it has been amazing to see the support grow among my fellow firefighters and the impact that it has had on those being treated for all types of occupational cancers. We have to do something to help prevent firefighters' cancers, and I hope by keeping the mustache events going strong we can help support CAPP and together accomplish this goal." -Sean Brambir

A special thank you to Captain Rich Marcello for all his hard work in co-planning the event and managing this year's merchandise design and sales. To the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department for relaxing the grooming standards for all our hairy participants. To the amazing crew at Firehouse Pacific Beach, and to all the incredible mustaches both real and fake that made an appearance at the bash.

If you're looking to help make an impact and would like to be a part of our 6th Mustache Bash in 2020, there are many ways that you can help! Please feel free to reach out to me at SDFDMustacheBash@gmail.com

FIREFIGHTERAID GETS A HOLE IN ONE

By: Gabby Rockwell



This September, for the third year in a row, FirefighterAid was invited back to the American Concrete Institute (ACI) San Diego Chapter's annual golf tournament at Twin Oaks Golf Course. As one of the three event beneficiaries, ACI generously donated \$1,750 to FirefighterAid for our programs! ACI celebrated their 6th year as an official proud community supporter of first responders.

FirefighterAid had an information and donation booth at the tournament's first hole. We were able to share our mission with all 164 golfers and hand out t-shirts from our stair climb event. Each golfer donated \$10 before they teed off at our hole. This is one of the most interactive fundraisers that we get to be a part of, and we really enjoy the opportunity to speak to every golfer as they came by our hole.

Along with our booth and donations, ACI comped a foursome for us. This year's foursome was comprised of two retirees, Jon Handley and Greg Donnelly, and two active firefighters, Alex Elgas and Tim Roy. They had a great day on the course representing FirefighterAid. They placed 9th in the tournament out of 37 teams! We're so grateful for ACI and all our gracious community partners! We can't do the good things we do without you and your Chapter's support.



HELPING OUR OWN

By: Firefighter-Paramedic Andy Vasquez

When you realize how fortunate you've been by landing the career with the city you've always dreamt of, you start to think about what you can do to give back. My wife Nicole and I first got involved with the San Diego 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb event and FirefighterAid because we thought it would be a great way to give back to the fire community. In 2014, we volunteered at our first climb. Like many, we had no idea it was a fundraising event and not just an amazing 9/11 memorial. After we found out the event also served as a platform to raise funds to support first responders and their families in the moments that they need it most, we vowed to fundraise the following year.



The Tres Amigos Photo Credit: Nicole Vasquez

We originally set out to raise \$250 thinking it was a lofty goal. With the help of our family, friends, and supporters we hit \$250 in no time. So, we raised the goal to \$500, then \$1,000, then \$1,500 and on it went. During that first year of fundraising we raised \$7,220. We never had the intention of being top fundraisers. We just wanted to help a good cause, and with the support and generosity of those around us, we have kept coming back year after year for the last 6 years.

Over the years, we've become close to the people who organize the climb and manage FirefighterAid. The people behind the scenes started as friendly faces whenever we stopped by the office to drop off donations. Since then, we've seen that they are a deeply committed team passionate about helping our first responders locally and nationally. We've seen their passion tested with cancer, injuries, deaths, and more. They are all there during the difficult moments, ready to lend a hand any way they can. Seeing the dedication of the FirefighterAid crew is what keeps us coming back to fundraise because we know the money we raise is going to good use.



The Tres Amigo crew at Mailbox, CA in April 2019



Nicole & Andy Vasquez on the 30th floor at the 2019 SD911MSC



Nicole & Andy Vasquez on the road

Last year, there came a point where we realized you can only ask so much of your annual supporters. Sometimes you've got to shake things up and do something different. So, we pitched an idea and partnered with FirefighterAid in hopes of creating a fundraiser to help take FirefighterAid's awareness to the next level. We took our love of travel and their good deeds, and we combined them into a platform to help first responders nationally. We created the Tres Amigos Firefighter Fund to spread the mission of FirefighterAid and their Cancer Awareness Prevention Program nationwide. We knew we couldn't do this alone, so we have also partnered with numerous sponsors who share our vision of supporting those who support us. Thank you to GovX, Mountain Hatch, Rago Fabrications, Baja Designs, Switch Pro, Dirt King Fabrications, fifteen52, Toyo Tires, C4 Fabrications, ROAM Adventure Co., and Tacoma3G.com. Their belief in our project and partnership, coupled with their support have helped us build a foundation for success over the coming years.

Our first year with these new partnerships has been incredibly successful because the off-road community is filled with patriotic and generous people who highly respect the work of our first responders. A large part of this success was due to the patch we created and sold, the proceeds of which went to FirefighterAid. To date we have sold over 200 patches, which helped bring our 2019 fundraising total to \$8,725. The off-road community overwhelmingly showed their support for our fundraising efforts and many reached out to share stories of their own experiences with first responders.

We're very excited about the next few years, so stayed tuned as we do our part to help FirefighterAid become the best it can be nationwide!



The Tres Amigos they travel with purpose!

WHAT'S ABALONE GOT TO DO WITH ALS?!

By: Carlye Wund and Melissa Whipple



This year, FirefighterAid had the privilege to assist Gary and Melissa Whipple with some ADA home renovations. Gary retired from the department 11 years ago, and Melissa is his absolutely charming wife. If you're fortunate enough to know these two, then you know that they are a truly perfect couple. When you're around them, they have this innate ability to make you feel at home and so comfortable in their presence. I felt this since the very first day when I met them and every day since.

In 2016, Melissa started experiencing a minor limp after running a charity 5K. She thought that she may have pulled a calf muscle, so she tried massage therapy, chiropractic care, and many adventures in acupuncture. None of which was able to relieve her pain. So, she finally went to see her doctor. One doctor turned into many doctors. She likens it to taking a "Magical Medical Mystery Tour". That mystery tour lasted a year and a half. Her limp morphed into foot drop causing her to drag it periodically. She also began to fall more often. She was prescribed a medical brace to wear on her right foot to hold it in the correct position. This meant, "bye-bye to cute shoes", as Melissa says. She turned to using hiking sticks, various types of canes, and walkers to improve her mobility and balance.

In February 2018, a year and a half after her first symptoms, Melissa was finally diagnosed with ALS. (ALS or Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, is also known as Lou Gehrig's disease.) Why does it take so long for a diagnosis you may be thinking? Unfortunately, there is no single test to diagnose for ALS, only a lot of other tests to eliminate everything else. From the moment you are diagnosed with ALS, the disease starts robbing you of things and it never stops. It eventually takes your life. ALS is a horrible, horrible thief. This is the part of the story where I had to face the reality and the weight of it all.

There is no current treatment or cure for ALS. Not even a little one that will buy us some more time with our sweet friend, Melissa. ALS is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord. The brain sends messages through the spinal cord to the muscles throughout your body which is how we move. ALS kills the brain's motor-neurons, which eliminates the ability to send messages to the muscles to direct them to move.

I had to face the fact that if things don't change and a cure or some treatment for the prolonging of this disease isn't found, I will lose my new friend that I care for so deeply. We share this story with you to educate, raise awareness, and most of all... in hopes of a cure.

You wouldn't know by looking at her, but Melissa is one of the most fierce and outspoken little warriors I have ever met. She is one to fight, and you will never see her with a bad attitude, sitting alone by herself feeling like her life is happening to her. She knows that her life is hers, that she is in control and she has a say in it, even with an ALS diagnosis.



No two ALS patients experience the same journey. Here are some things that Melissa has taught me about ALS, and I think it's important to share them with you. Some patients progress very quickly, while others progress more slowly. 90% of ALS patients die between 2-5 years after the first symptoms appear. 80% of ALS patients are male. 10% of patients have a "familial link" in which they have inherited a "defective" gene from an immediate relative. The remaining 90% have what is referred to as sporadic ALS meaning there is no clear identified cause, which is what Melissa has. About 30,000 people in the United States are currently suffering with ALS.

This story isn't just about ALS and how horrible of a disease it is. It's a story about new friendships, an amazing woman, her supportive husband, and the organization known as the Relief Association doing all the good things you would expect us to do in this situation.

So back to the day that I showed up at their house to meet the Whipples for the first time to check in on the renovation. I had no idea I'd walk out of their house with two new forever friends. Over the course of 2 months, our team generously donated their time and skills to rebuild a bathroom fit for our retired firefighter and his best gal. During this remodel, the very small bathroom could be accused of containing a few too many Captains and not enough space. Thanks to all our retired and skilled fire family volunteers: Ron Trafton, Scott Trafton, Mark Tex, Jerry Sadler, Don McKinney, and Mike Nuanes. A few Coronas may have been harmed in the making of this bathroom, but that is to be expected.

So, what do abalone shells have to do with any of this?! When the bathroom remodel was finally finished, the Whipples had a small gathering to thank all of the people who came together to work on their project. The theme of Melissa's bathroom is ocean and beach. From the beautiful tiles she picked out that look like ocean water to all the seashell accents, she did a phenomenal job designing her new space. Melissa gives extra special recognition to Susie Trafton who helped select all the beautiful bathroom fixtures, tile, and paint. When I finally saw the bathroom completely finished, a nesting set of abalone shells on a shelf caught my eye. They were so perfect and each one fit into the next as though mother nature had designed them to be found across different locations in the world, but to all come together as one in the end.

As I looked at the nesting shells, I was reminded of a time three years previously when I was walking alone on the beach in Encinitas. On that walk I found what I believed was the world's tiniest abalone shell. It was a bit smaller than a nickel and in perfect shape. I was so amazed that I even saw it, but I knew it was special and held onto it. After seeing those shells in Melissa's bathroom, I knew the small one I had found years before was meant for her. A few weeks later I brought it to her in a tiny bag and left it for her on her counter in a card.



That tiny abalone shell made me really think about a lot of things, fate being one of them. It made me think about friends and the way people come into and leave your life, and ultimately how I will leave this life one day. I started to become very upset that I will potentially lose my new sweet friend, Melissa, someday. I cried. I said to her on the phone one day that I hated ALS and that it is a selfish monster. While she didn't disagree with me, she said, "it's not all bad, it brought you into my life." I cried some more. I didn't understand it, here she is the one fighting this disease every day and she had something *positive* to say about it. This horrible demon of a disease that takes everything from you, even your smile. How could she find something positive to say about it? That's when I realized all the things it can't take from you. Thank you, Melissa Whipple, for being a pure ray of light that shines in my life.

To learn more, please reach out to The ALS Association of Greater San Diego, who provides wonderful support, mobility equipment, and sponsors wonderful events and outings for ALS patients, caregivers, and their families throughout San Diego County.

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HEALTH AND SAFETY

By: Health and Safety Officer, Chief David Picone



Fire-Rescue family,

We'd like to first thank the SDFRA Board for allowing us this opportunity to tell you a little about the Health & Safety Office. Here's a short overview of what we do. Future newsletter articles will be topic driven.

What does the Health & Safety Office do?

Although there seems to be a general understanding, we get this question often. The best way to explain it is that EMS handles the citizens and we assist the workforce both active and retired in Physical and Behavioral Wellness.

Cancer Prevention, Injuries, and Healthy Living:

We've been fortunate to have developed some great relationships with Risk Management i.e. workers compensation, various insurance companies (Cigna, Kaiser, etc...), and their safety division.

Retirees Have Benefits, too!

The department has resources and they are for you too. If you are in need of support navigating either the work comp system (or personally) we can assist. Many of you haven't heard that our contract with Focus Psychological Services is for active, retired, and your families in the home. You are eligible for unlimited free confidential counseling services. We have Retiree Peers on the team available to talk, vent to, or to just get information from. There are now 12 Chaplains assigned to Battalions and different Divisions that are also available.

How to reach any of these services:

Toll free line - 833.SDFD.HSO (733.3476)

Website resources, Peer and Chaplain contacts, and more www.sandiego.gov-fd-pd-wellness Password: support

Cancer is presumptive and many other health issues as well. Don't do it alone - call and we can answer your questions or direct you to the person that can. Contact us below or via email with your suggestions for our future updates or questions @ sdfdhealth&safety@sandiego.gov

Brent Brainard, Wellness Officer 619.980.3574 cell

Kyle O'Neill, Cancer & Health Coordinator 619.549.4821 cell

David Picone, Health & Safety Officer 619.792.9634 cell

Thank you to our Sponsors & Partners who support us all year!



FireHouse Boards loves working with great people! The staff at FirefighterAid are not only great people, they are loving, caring professionals who work hard and love their work. They are the true heroes working day and night, non-stop, helping Firefighters and Firefighter families when help is needed most. The FirefighterAid staff is passionate about what they do. The work does not stop when they go home at night. They work until they are happy with the results and their goals are met.

Firehouse Boards is proud to work with the amazing people at FirefighterAid. We do our very best to nurture our working relationships and make quality custom projects to help FirefighterAid meet their goals. The staff and crews at FirefighterAid really make a difference and we are always happy to help.

Jess Hartnett
Owner FireHouse Boards

Dinners by David
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