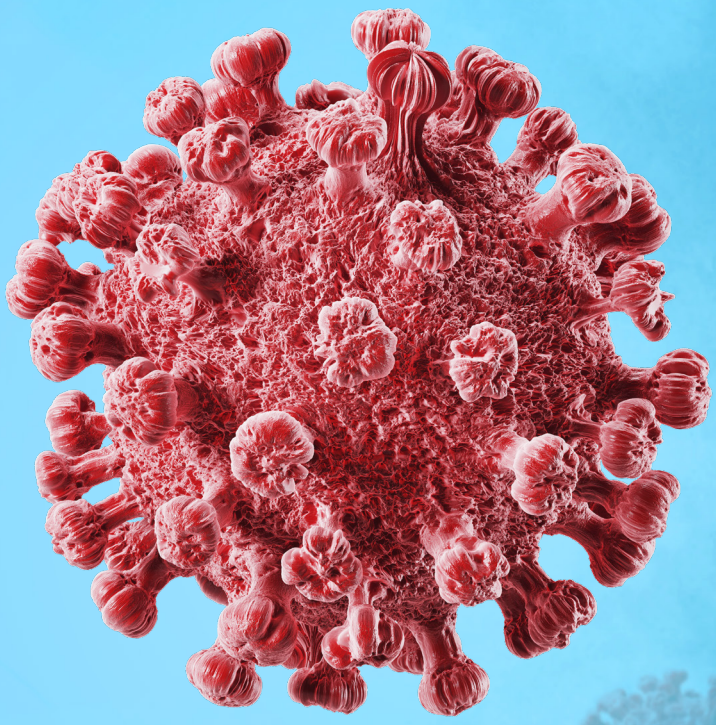
TEXAS FIRE FIGHTER

3rd Quarter 2020 | www.TSAFF.org



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COVID-19 AND BEYOND

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The Texas Fire Fighter Magazine

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CUSTOM LOGO WORK GLOVES

We are a Texas firefighter-owned business. We know your hands are vital to your work and must be protected. You can count on our customized all-purpose work gloves – on and off the job. Our long-lasting products will serve you well and help you show off that department and company pride! More information is available at **www.kewellwerkdesigns.com**.

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From the President

Texas Fire Fighters Respond to the Demands of 2020

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In these challenging times, I hope this report finds you, your families and your brother and sister fire fighters well. From the Coronavirus / COVID-19 pandemic response to the new personal and professional issues we all have faced recently, the demands of 2020 have been extraordinary, to say the least

At the TSAFF, we have not lost focus of our responsibilities to our 190 affiliates and 18,000 members. Like you, your families and friends, and our brothers and sisters in the fire service, we have strived to adapt to the times. The daily business of the state association goes on. Through it all, I continue to be amazed by the generosity, creativity and work ethic of Texas fire fighters.

TSAFF Operations

Our relocated office in downtown Austin has reopened, but most TSAFF board members and staff continue to work remotely. We look forward to fully occupying the office as soon as possible. Thanks to Cindy Gonzalez and Liz Wright for keeping our office administration and financial operations on track.

The TSAFF quarterly meeting was held on April 22 by video conference. The two-hour call was held with the executive board, staff, liaisons, and trustees

TSAFF Advocacy

The COVID-19 pandemic response presents new challenges daily for all of us — from PPE and testing availability to quarantine, staffing and budget issues. Like you, we're staying vigilant to help find solutions. Our work at the capitol and around the state continues. Legislative Director Glenn Deshields met last week with legislators and staff to update them on emerging workers' compensation, fire fighter quarantine/exposure, COVID-19 testing, PPE availability, and other issues. We're working the phones daily to help resolve issues statewide. We also are assisting Texas locals with CARES Act information and resources.

So far, most Texas cities and ESDs appear to be treating suspected COVID-19 exposures as presumptive illness. With some exceptions, mandatory firefighter quarantines are being covered by paid administrative leave (and not with sick leave or vacation time). A growing number of locals have requested and received TSAFF service, political, legal or communications support on COVID-19 issues.

Again, for firefighters that contract COVID-19, we recommend that workers' comp filings be submitted as both presumptive and regular claims. If you have questions or concerns, please contact your district vice president.

Our normal service, political and communications activities have slowed down only minimally. More work is being handled by video and phone. Other work is being postponed, setting up a very busy fall and winter. Along with ongoing contract negotiation and grievance preparations and commitments, TSAFF has provided communications support for 19 projects around the state recently. Some of the issues with cities and ESDs have been resolved quietly. Others required political and news media activity. We remain available to provide service and communications support — from strategic counsel to news releases — as you address COVID-19 and other issues in your community, of course.

In May, we provided analysis to the Houston Chronicle regarding COVID-19 issues at Texas nursing homes. Firefighters are "proud to be on the front lines on the pandemic response," I told the Chronicle. But TSAFF also questioned whether firefighters had access to needed tests and training, and we urged the state to clarify response protocols. "No matter what, we'll be there when the call comes in," I told the Chronicle. "We just want to ensure we can deliver excellent service as safely as possible."

Please contact your TSAFF district vice president if we can help — or if you just want to share practical advice of what's working well right now with your local and city or ESD.

TSAFF Education and Training

In April, Brandon Day hosted an online secretary-treasurer workshop. The workshop covered management of local financial operations, budgeting and planning, tax filing

From the President

(continued)

requirements and financial communications. Our traditional lineup of workshops, service training, and seminars will be restarted as soon as possible, but we are committed to providing Texas-focused education and training as well.

In June, we held the first session of a year-long program of interactive, 60- to 90-minute video workshops on issues important to Texas firefighters leaders. The topics include politics, legislative issues, union management, financial operations, and communications.

Early in July, we announced an expansion of our training program with more workshops and classes. Our annual Service Training program in the fall will be online this year as well.

Cooperation with IAFF

Along with local leaders around the state, TSAFF board members and staff have participated in several video conferences with the IAFF on COVID-19. This week, we're scheduled to participate in six video conferences with IAFF leaders and staff. The IAFF also is introducing new resources to help navigate the political, financial and operational issues in the post-COVID-19 environment.

For the latest IAFF information on COVID-19 developments, please go to:

https://www.iaff.org/coronavirus/

TSAFF Charitable Activity

The TSAFF Charitable Foundation, in partnership with the 6th Street Winery, is offering a wine gift box set for $85. Each set includes TSAFF-branded cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay. The Foundation will receive $30 from each order. The gift box set can be ordered online at:

https://sixthstreetwinery.com/tsaff

As soon as travel restrictions lift and transportation can be scheduled, TSAFF Charitable Foundation will be sending donated gear, equipment and medical supplies to firefighters in the Lake Chapala area of Mexico. TSAFF is working with Lakeside Assistance Group, a Mexican firefighter charity, with an excellent record. If your local would like to participate in this project, please contact epowers@tsaff.org for a list of requested items and specs. TSAFF has vetted the charity and met its leaders in Mexico.

We appreciate your support and your efforts to keep TSAFF informed of important developments in your local. Please let your district vice presidents know what we can do to help. Please take care of yourselves, your families and friends, and your station crews, and stay safe!

Preserve the Past

Please help ensure that the extraordinary work of TSAFF firefighters is included in our history.

We seek recent and historical fire and EMS incident photos and video for display at the upcoming TSAFF and the 2021 state association convention.

We will ensure original materials are handled carefully, credited if used, and returned. An FTP link to conveniently upload videos and photos is available.

If you can help or have questions, please contact us at your convenience.

Photo Credit: Plano Firefighters Association

From the Editor / Secretary-Treasurer

Amidst Challenges, TSAFF Operations Go On

Secretary/Treasurer and Editor of the Texas Fire Fighter
Brandon Day

What a change we have had to adapt to in recent times. As we all begin to find new norms, we have been working hard to continue to find ways to ensure every TSAFF member is taken care of across Texas. We have begun to use virtual meetings to confer with firefighter leaders and have expanded to web meetings for training and workshops for multiple online users.

The TSAFF's first Secretary-Treasurer Online Training was held on April 24. This was a good basic overview of the secretary/treasurer position. We covered effective management of local financial operations, budgeting and planning, an overview of tax filing requirements, and improving financial communications. Plans for additional online classes have been announced as well. While we much rather would be visiting, teaching, and helping our locals in person, this is the way we must do business now. As always, we will prevail and come out stronger!

Many of you should be filing, or have already filed, your taxes for the 2019 fiscal year. Failure to file for three consecutive years will result in losing your non-profit status. This means that if you are audited by the IRS, those years will be calculated on a business rate and your local could face fines of up to 30 percent of your income over that period. If you are not sure where you stand with the IRS, or need help getting your local reinstated, please call (214-415-0201) or email (bday@tsaff.org) me and I will get you the help you need.

In recent months we have also expanded our training to include a focus on internal financial reviews or audit. Every local should perform an audit or financial review yearly. There is a good template put out by the IAFF for locals to use. The IAFF has requested that a filled copy should be sent out to the IAFF within 180 days of the end of your fiscal year. This is a good practice to ensure that your local's funds are being handled in accordance with your constitution and spending policies. These financial reviews should be performed by two members that do not have the authority to spend money in your local.

Just before the impact of COVID-19, the TSAFF board and trustees had decided to move into the AFL-CIO Building, close to the state capitol. This move, which was recommended by our trustees and researched for about a year, will give us better access during the session to our office. We are in the process of trying to sell the building on Radam Street as well. Our new address is 1106 Lavaca Street, Suite 100. If you are in Austin, after things are reopened, I encourage you to stop in and see the new office.

I also want to take this time to thank Liz Wright and Cindy Gonzalez. They have not only had to adapt to moving into a new office, but have successfully transitioned to working from home, if only temporarily. These are huge changes that they have met head on and found ways to continue to support our organization and members. If you get a chance, please drop them a note to thank them for their good work. They keep this organization moving forward and running efficiently.

In closing, I want each of you to know I have an open-door policy. If you need anything, feel free to call or email me – even if it is just to catch up. One of the greatest honors in my life is serving you the members of the TSAFF. I am always looking for new ideas to help make your job and local run smoothly and efficiently. Stay safe and enjoy the times you have at home right now with loved ones.

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Per Capita Changed on Aug. 1

As a result of 2019 convention action, our TSAFF per capita is now $9.53 per member per month. This went into effect on August 1, 2020.

TSAFF offers ACH debits, or auto-pay, to all locals for monthly dues. An ACH debit form is available by email from lwright@tsaff.org. Dues will be automatically debited from your account on or around the 20th of each month.

Please be sure to make any membership changes or updates to the IAFF by emailing membership@iaff.org. If you have questions, please call Brandon Day at (214) 415-0201 or bday@tsaff.org.

Fire Fighters Help Rogers Win in HD 60

TSAFF's political program helped Dr. Glenn Rogers prevail in the run-off in Texas House District 60 race.

A veterinarian and rancher, Rogers trailed opponent Jon Francis after the primary vote, but overtook him in the run-off, earning 52.4 percent (11,956 votes) for a 678-vote win. No Democratic candidate ran to replace current state Rep. Mike Lang, so Rogers is the presumptive winner of the seat.

HD 60 encompasses Brown, Callahan, Coleman, Eastland, Hood, Palo Pinto, Shackelford and Stephens counties. Towns in the district include Dr. Rogers' hometown of Graford, along with Albany, Breckenridge, Clyde, Coleman, Eastland, Granbury and Mineral Wells.

Brownwood L-2863, Mineral Wells L-4674 and other fire fighters in the HD 60 area focused on the race. Working with West Texas political consultant Mike Stevens, TSAFF conducted two surveys in the district and identified Rogers as the emerging candidate in the run-off.

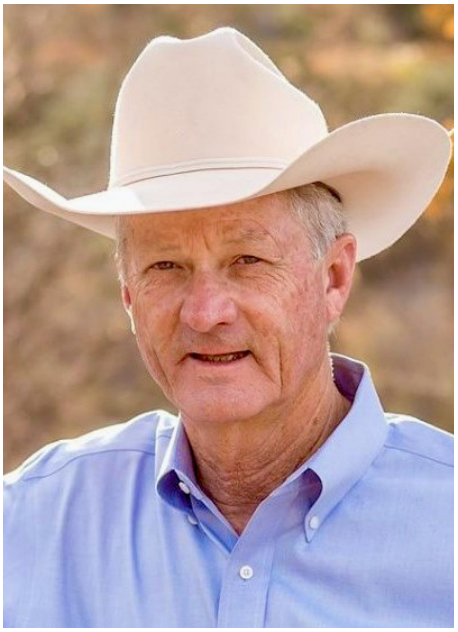
TSAFF Political Director Joe Tellez said, "TSAFF made a difference in the race. Dr. Rogers was significantly outspent by his opponent, but our research and ground game, especially in Brown County, was a factor in the outcome. Fire fighters in Brownwood and Mineral Wells got active in the political process."

Research led the TSAFF political team to conclude that whoever won Brown County would win the race. A Republican, Rogers lost Brown County in March to businessman Francis, a son-in-law of the billionaire Wilks family. Rogers won the county in the run-off.

Tellez added, "The election data showed us that about 1,000 of the 3,900 that voted in Brown County in the run-off had not voted in March. We helped drive them to vote and win the election."

TSAFF provided communications support and lists of likely voters to the HD 60-area firefighters that made phone calls and other outreach on behalf of Rogers.

TSAFF President John Riddle said, "This race is encouraging on several levels. We didn't have the most money to spend, but we were effective in our research and our choice of a candidate. By adding the voter research and ground game components to our resources, the TSAFF political program is gaining momentum. Looking ahead, we seem set to go into the next legislative session with a new friend in Dr. Rogers."



Dr. Glenn Rogers

Preparing for a COVID-19 Economy

TSAFF representatives participated in a series of IAFF conference calls regarding planning for challenges that will come with a weakened economy. The IAFF has prepared a toolkit to help affiliates PREPARE for possible cuts to jobs and benefits resulting from the coronavirus pandemic. These PREPARE principles are designed to ensure the highest level of success in the COVID economy. Affiliate presidents are asked to complete a economic impact survey to help the IAFF get a better picture of the effects of the financial fallout on our members. Your responses will help us provide the resources and tools you need to avoid and minimize cuts during these challenging times. More information and the survey are available at www.iaff.org/covid-economy/.

COVID-19 Tracker Survey:

Here's How You Can Help

Texas locals are urged to complete the IAFF COVID-19 tracker survey. TSAFF is working to align the IAFF and TSAFF data to better coordinate our outreach with local, state and federal elected officials and agencies.

Thanks again to the locals that have continued to provide email updates regarding your firefighter exposure and quarantine counts, COVID-19 testing info, and workers' compensation claim info. Please keep sending that information to epowers@tsaff.org.

TSAFF Introduces Online Workshops and Training

Beginning in June 2020, TSAFF began offering online workshops and training while in-person meetings remain restricted due to local, state and government pandemic response guidelines.

All TSAFF-affiliate locals are welcome to register members for the online sessions. There's no cost to participate.

Registration is easy. Please send an email request to training@tsaff.org with your name, your Local name, your cell phone number, and the session title. The registration will be confirmed, and a link to join the online Zoom meeting will be provided by email.

Here's the workshop and training schedule for 2020-21:

On July 30, more than 50 Texas firefighter leaders participated in an online presentation of "COVID-19: What Firefighters Should Know About Workers' Comp Claims." The workshop was presented by the TSAFF Health and Safety Committee, along with TSAFF leaders and staff, legal counsel and other advisors.

Upcoming Sessions

- **TSAFF Service: Processing Discipline/Fit-for-Duty Testing at the Local Level**
  Rafael Torres
  Tuesday, August 18, 2020, 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.
- **Preparing for and Managing Your Local's Crisis**
  Erin Powers
  Wednesday, September 16, 2020, 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.
- **Election Preview and Update**
  Glenn Deshields, Joe Tellez and Mike Stevens
  Monday, October 12, 2020, 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.
- **Secretary-Treasurer Workshop: Budgets and Audits**
  Brandon Day and Liz Wright
  Tuesday, November 17, 2020, 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.
- **Legislative Preview**
  John Riddle, Glenn Deshields, Joe Tellez and Mike Stevens
  Tuesday, December 15, 2020, 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.
- **Update / Q&A with TSAFF President John Riddle and TSAFF DVPs**
  Thursday, January 7, 2021, 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.
- **Building Your Political Program**
  Joe Tellez and Glenn Deshields
  Friday, February 12, 2021, 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.
- **Five Ways to Raise Your Local's Profile in the Community**
  Erin Powers
  Thursday, March 18, 2021, 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.
- **2021 Convention Preview**
  John Riddle and Brandon Day
  Thursday, April 8, 2021, 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.
- **TSAFF Service: Processing Grievances for Your Local Labor Agreement**
  Rafael Torres
  Wednesday, May 19, 2021, 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.

11 Locals Welcomed to TSAFF

Since the 2019 TSAFF convention, 11 IAFF locals have joined TSAFF, taking our total membership to an all-time high of 190 affiliates.

TSAFF President John Riddle said, "We're proud to have these new affiliates and we're working hard throughout the state to add new members. If you get a moment, please welcome the leaders of these locals to our state association."

The locals that have joined TSAFF are:

- Cibolo L-5117
- Colleyville L-5268
- Cy-Fair L-5248
- Hutchins L-5157
- League City L-5275
- Melissa L-5250
- Mexia L-5273
- Murphy L-4465
- River Oaks L-5264
- Sansom Park L-5269
- Tomball L-5249

TSAFF Urges Rep. Briscoe Cain to End Political Attack on Firefighters

So-called 'First Amendment' inquiry to Texas Attorney General over 2018 'Janus' Supreme Court decision renews fight over association dues deduction in Texas

Rep. Briscoe Cain's recent request that Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton "clarify" the statewide implications of the U.S. Supreme Court's 2018 Janus decision is an obvious attempt to restart a legislative fight over public employee association dues deductions, TSAFF said.

In a letter to Paxton, Cain raised purported "First Amendment" issues regarding the Janus case that "highlight the need for guidance and clarity here in Texas." Nearly two years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in Janus that non-union workers cannot be forced to pay fees to public sector unions that require membership as a condition of employment. Texas, however, is a right-to-work state, meaning that there are no such workplaces here.

TSAFF President John Riddle said, "Texas firefighters wish Rep. Cain had taken even a moment to better understand the implications of the Janus case. Because Texas is a right-to-work state, there is no involuntary deduction of association dues. Rep. Cain knows better, or at least should. To raise so-called 'First Amendment' issues now is an obvious resumption of political attacks on firefighters and other public employees at the state capitol. We wrongly thought Rep. Cain had learned from his mistakes on this issue in past legislative sessions."

Calendar of Upcoming Events

Dates of events are subject to change.

- **TSAFF Executive Board Meeting** *(Virtual Event)* August 14, 2020, 9 a.m.
- **"TSAFF Service: Processing Discipline / Fit-for-Duty Testing at the Local Level"** *presented by Rafael Torres,* August 18, 2020, 10 a.m.
- **"Preparing for and Managing Your Local's Crisis"** *presented by Erin Powers* Sept. 16, 2020, 10 a.m.
- **IAFF Fallen Fire Fighter Memorial** *(Virtual Event)* Colorado Springs, CO Sept. 19, 2020.
- **"Election Preview and Update"** *presented by Glenn Deshields, Joe Tellez and Mike Stevens* Oct. 12, 2020, 10 a.m.
- **"Secretary-Treasurer Workshop: Budgets and Audits"** *presented by Brandon Day and Liz Wright* Nov. 17, 2020, 10 a.m.

continues next page.

TSAFF to Cities: Do Not Deny Texas Firefighters COVID-19 Medical Coverage and Paid Quarantine Leave

As more Texas firefighters face line-of-duty exposures to Coronavirus / COVID-19, TSAFF urged city and emergency services district (ESD) administrators and insurers to follow state law and cover ill or quarantined firefighters' medical expenses and paid leave or face harsh political and legal consequences.

To press the point and prevent insurance disputes, TSAFF – which represents 18,000 professional firefighters in 190 communities – contacted state legislators, state agencies, and the Texas Municipal League Intergovernmental Risk Pool (TMLIRP), the largest workers' compensation administrator for Texas cities and ESDs. For weeks, the TSAFF executive board and staff have been monitoring COVID-19 developments, advising state and federal government officials, and consulting with legal counsel.

TSAFF President John Riddle said, "State law is clear: Like cancer and other line-of-duty injuries, COVID-19 claims by firefighters are compensable. Firefighters in Texas likely have been exposed to COVID-19 from Day 1 of the pandemic and presumably would be among the last people exposed when the outbreak wanes. Hundreds of firefighters around the state, including more than 600 in Houston, are monitoring possible line-of-duty exposures to the virus. We expect the next several weeks to be a critical period in the pandemic response in Texas."

Riddle said most Texas fire departments have instituted policies to ensure that firefighters who are exposed to COVID-19 are properly quarantined, educated as to self-monitoring for symptoms, and immediately placed on administrative leave with pay. This helps ensure at-risk firefighters are sufficiently monitored for their health and do not infect family, fire station crew members or others in the community.

"The problem is," Riddle said, "some Texas cities are preparing to fight their firefighters' COVID-19 exposure claims. They are toying with departmental policies that essentially punish quarantined firefighter by denying them administrative leave, proper medical care through the workers' compensation system, and quarantine away from their community. In our view, it's reckless, terrible public health and safety policy – and illegal. We are quietly working to convince them to reverse course for the good of all involved."

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said he "waived certain statutory provisions" so that "public safety employees who contract COVID-19 are not also financially penalized." Riddle said, "We appreciate Gov. Abbott's order, and are hopeful it will be clarified to mean a firefighter will be fully covered from quarantine and testing through recovery. The last thing a firefighter or paramedic at this time needs to worry about is his or her family's job or economic security. Our firefighters want to be on the frontlines of the pandemic response and their employers must back them up to make sure their minds are where they need to be when they are on duty."

Calendar of Upcoming Events

(continued)

- **"Legislative Preview"**
  presented by John Riddle, Glenn Deshields, Joe Tellez and Mike Stevens
  Dec. 15, 2020, 10 a.m.
- **"Update / Q&A with TSAFF President John Riddle and TSAFF DVPs"**
  Jan. 7, 2021, 10 a.m.
- **IAFF 55th Convention**
  Las Vegas, NV
  Jan. 25-29, 2021
- **"Building Your Political Program"**
  presented by Joe Tellez and Glenn Deshields
  Feb. 12, 2021, 10 a.m.
- **"Five Ways to Raise Your Local's Profile in the Community"**
  presented by Erin Powers
  March 18, 2021, 10 a.m.
- **"2021 Convention Preview"**
  presented by John Riddle and Brandon Day
  April 8, 2021, 10 a.m.

District 1

Urging Communications with Elected Officials, Administrations

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Bobby Whiteley

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I don't know where to start with this newsletter due to what we are all dealing with. We have all the same issues we had a few months ago, but now we are concerned with a whole new set of issues.

First, our Fire Fighter Family has had its share of tragedy. Our members in Lubbock have dealt with a LODD and still are dealing with another severely injured brother. Our brothers and sisters in El Paso recently did the same with the death of Eduardo Ramirez. Under the severe circumstances we are dealing with, we are not sure of how the funeral will be handled. Thoughts and prayers to these locals and the families of our Brothers who passed too soon doing the good work for their communities.

I wish I knew what the future holds for the fire service in these unprecedented circumstances. Now, more than ever we need to be communicating with our administrations and elected officials. The coming weeks and months will be so important to our profession. We simply don't know if we will be advocating for pay and benefits or trying to stop layoffs and pay reductions. Just know that we will be fighting for you in whatever comes forth. I certainly don't want to be pessimistic, but we need to prepare for the worst and your relationship with your elected officials will be paramount.

Please, please answer the surveys from TSAFF and IAFF that come your way so we can better serve you. I know it takes a bit of time, but it takes all of us to move forward to take our profession to the next level.

I could report so much more about what is going on in the 1st District, but I think we have our plate full for the moment. Be safe and contact me if we can be of service to you in any manner. These are historic times in our profession, and we need now more than ever to come together and pull through. We will!!

Virtual 'Fill the Boot' Campaign Set for 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many TSAFF affiliates to postpone or cancel traditional Fill the Boot events that help raise funds for critically needed services for families in need.

With these fundraising drives on hold, the IAFF launched a new virtual Fill the Boot campaign to help affiliates continue to support MDA and the more than 250,000 people living with neuromuscular diseases across the country. The virtual Fill the Boot is also a great opportunity to highlight your local's commitment to supporting MDA and community goodwill. Plano L-2149's John Burch is featured in national communications about the virtual campaign.

This campaign makes it simple for every local and member to participate across all social media platforms. The IAFF's virtual Fill the Boot toolkit has everything affiliates need to get started, including social media graphics, a sample press release, fundraising ideas and video PSAs. More information is available at www.mda.org/ftb.

District 2

Welcome to New Local Leaders

Vice President
Steve Dorris

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District 2 Vice President
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Well, the Coronavirus pandemic has certainly thrown all of us a curveball for 2020, but I hope this newsletter finds you and your families safe and doing well.

As we continue to try and find a "new normal" during this time, know that your TSAFF is working diligently with our friends in the state legislature, and others, to ensure that all our members receive the protections and benefits they deserve while operating on the frontlines of this crisis.

Locals across the 2nd District have been working closely with their departments to develop and implement new policies and procedures to limit exposure while still providing the excellent service our citizens have come to expect. Both your TSAFF and IAFF have been working to collect certain data that will assist us moving forward both during and after this difficult time. As a local leader, if you haven't already done so, please carve out some time to respond to those requests. Additionally, if you don't already utilize the NFORS mobile app to document exposures and other critical incidents throughout your career, I would encourage you to do so.

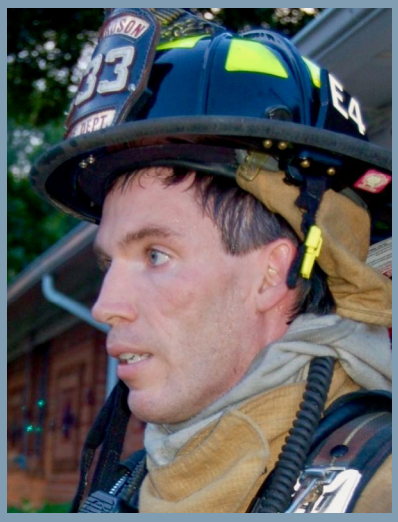
If you have any issues or concerns related to how your department is responding to this pandemic please do not hesitate to contact the TSAFF.

In closing, I'd like to welcome and congratulate the following new local Presidents:

- Denison - Landon Lindsey
- Balch Springs - Chad Morgan
- Richardson - John Martin
- Forney - Jeremy Hughey
- Athens - Aaron Munn
- Hutchins - Tyler Fain
- Princeton - Garrett Phennel
- University Park - Jason Sailsbury
- Duncanville - Kevin Bragg
- Longview - Wesley Teague
- Mt. Pleasant - Stuart Thompson
- Murphy - Billy Cook
- Paris - Nick Blount

Richardson L-1954 Honors Fallen Stephen Hill

Captain Stephen Ronald Hill, of Richardson L-1954, passed away on May 29 at the age of 42, after a courageous battle with cancer. A a devout Christian who loved music, comic books, reading and being with his family and friends, Stephen was a loving husband and father. Captain Hill is survived by his wife of 17 years, Natalie; daughter Ellie, 12; son Jack, 9; parents, Ron and Mary Hill; brothers, Daniel (Lindsey) and Patrick; and other family members and many friends. TSAFF President John Riddle and TSAFF District 2 Vice President Steve Dorris attended his memorial service.



District 4

Workers' Comp Issues Arise

Vice President
Mark Medrano

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During this difficult time, I hope you are doing well and staying safe. There are various items to report in District 4:

- Belton L-4506 was having trouble getting people to test due to their pay compared to other local departments. After a year of no applicants the City decided to contract out EMS to AMR allowing them to use the City ambulances and run out of the fire stations which caused call volume to drop drastically.
- The Missouri City L-4063 civil service referendum, slated for May, was postponed until November due to the COVID-19.
- Met with Port Neches L-3713 to discuss a possible Civil Service Referendum and Temple L-846 to discuss the importance of political involvement.
- Lufkin L-3034 and Galveston L-571 are having issues with members who had been out of the country and told that they would have to quarantine at home for 14 days on their own time. Baytown L-1173 had three members required to quarantine but the City let them utilize admin leave.
- Texas City L-1259 was told that during a declared emergency that their contract was null and void. This is completely false.
- On March 28, Galveston L-571 has three and Baytown L-1173 two confirmed positive for COVID-19.
- Leander L-4298 Local had a worker's comp cancer claim approved and the member is being given their time back and reimbursed for all medical expenses.
- League City L-5275 and Mexia L-5273 have organized and are my two newest Locals. Please welcome them with me to our TSAFF Family.
- Locals are running into problems with their employers not wanting to follow the law and allow COVID-19 claims to be workers' comp.
- I held a Zoom meeting with my district officers to connect with each other and keep communication lines open. The networking is great! We discussed holding a Zoom meeting for the District once a month. You will get a meeting invite about a week in advance, they will be around the first week of the month.

ADVERTISE WITH US

TEXAS FIRE FIGHTER

Advertising in the Texas Fire Fighter newsletter is a great way to reach more than 18,000 professional Texas fire fighters in 190 communities.

For more information, please contact Cindy Gonzales at the TSAFF office at (512) 326-5050 or cindy@tsaff.org.

District 5

Calling for Public Safety Mandate

Vice President
Pedro "Pete" Martinez

At the TSAFF Legislative Convention in January, the delegation voted to pursue legislation in the next session which would help to offset the fallout of unintended consequences of the HB2/SB2 passed in the 2019 legislative session which requires taxing entities to hold a referendum election if their revenues exceed 3.5 percent from the previous years' revenue. This resolution calls for legislation in the 2021 session that would mandate municipalities to fund their public safety sector before funding other departments, initiatives, and projects. It also mandates that cuts to fire and police not be larger in either value or percentage than the cuts to any other department; and that, revenues used to fund fire and police departments not be counted under the threshold that would trigger an election. My home local, Arlington L-1329, wrote this resolution and has already begun working with local legislators to gain support.

The idea of this legislation is to protect fire departments and to ensure that they are fully funded before any pet project from a rogue council or mayor. I would be curious to know how many times mayors have stated that if revenue did not go up, firefighters would be laid off or they would get pay cuts. I have never heard of one mentioning defunding the streets or libraries. It is always us. We are always the ones who are offered up on the sacrificial table to earn political points.

Now, with COVID-19, many cities across the great State of Texas are facing financial shortfalls due to only 6 cities directly receiving funding from the CAREs act. Once again, mayors and councilmembers have taken to media outlets and threatened fire and police furloughs, layoffs, pay cuts, and hiring freezes.

It was already important to ensure the passage of this funding bill. But now with a national disaster killing municipal funding, it is imperative. As I stated above, we are always the ones who are offered up on the sacrificial table to earn political points. I say, "no more!"

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TSAFF 5th District Vice President Pete Martinez and IAFF 11th District Vice President Sandy McGhee welcome new IAFF and TSAFF members from Colleyville L-5268.

District 6

Firefighters Take Lead on Houston COVID-19 Response

Vice President
Patrick M. "Marty" Lancton

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After local news media reported that the administration of Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner intended for Houston firefighters to use of vacation or sick time while in mandatory COVID-19 quarantine, the City reversed course and announced affected firefighters would be placed on paid administrative leave. This was good news and the right decision by the City despite the late timing. So far, dozens of Houston firefighters have tested positive for the virus.

However, regarding workers' compensation claims related to suspected COVID-19 exposures, the City continued to hide behind TRISTAR Risk Management, its workers' compensation administrator. Tristar refused to acknowledge that an exposure and City order to quarantine causes an exposure claim and is presumptive regardless of COVID-19 test results of patient(s) or firefighter(s). And while Sylvester Turner's public comments suggested the presumptive issue was resolved, he and TRISTAR are not in agreement in their statements.

The bottom line is, the coverage announcements by the Turner Administration are misleading. To claim that if you test positive and/or the "source patient" is positive, only then will the City "presume" line-of-duty exposure. If this is not corrected, we expect more denials by the City and TRISTAR. Our position, like that of TSAFF and knowledgeable legislators, is that the state presumptive law does not require ANY proof or a source patient. We also have raised serious concerns that, for example, if a firefighter is not tested but is ordered to quarantine, TRISTAR and the City would deny claims not based upon a negative test (because there was no test) but other arbitrary factors. If something were to then happen after 14 days upon an automatic denial of workers' comp exposure with no test given, it raises our level of concern for your health and safety down the road if this pandemic gets worse or if you have future complications unknown to us today.

More than 400 firefighters have left the Houston Fire Department for better jobs or retirement recently. HFD now has a severe staffing shortage that has been worsened by COVID-19 quarantines. Houston L-341 has alerted the public to service cuts at fire stations throughout the city.

District 6
(continued)

Again, while we are encouraged the City reversed course on the benefit time usage, information later sent out by the fire chief was apparently intended to suggest the City is responsive to firefighter concerns, it was not an HFD or City order or an official memo from TRISTAR regarding its COVID-19 coverage policy or decisions. With that in mind, until the City or TRISTAR puts in writing a statement that COVID-19 mandatory quarantines or exposures are presumptive, we will continue to advise all of our members to fill out and submit the exposure forms daily.

There is good news in Houston. We're driving the dialogue with our city council regarding local use of federal CARES Act resources earmarked for the fire service. With IAFF support, we're setting the record straight on available federal aid. Through our charitable foundation and the support of generous supporters around the city, we provided hotel rooms for quarantined firefighters, hundreds of gallons of hand sanitizer, personal protective equipment (PPE), and meals for HFD stations. We are grateful for the fantastic support of Houstonians.

Fire Fighter Capistran Recovers from COVID-19

We are proud to report that hospitalized Houston fire fighter Albert Capistran recovered from COVID-19. This message from his wife Kristen puts the COVID-19 fight and the support of our brothers and sisters in perspective:

"My family and I are so grateful for the outpouring of support from the Houston Fire Fighters, the doctors, the nurses, the staff at Memorial Hermann hospital and our friends. It has been very difficult to not be able to have family present in the hospital therefore the firefighters' presence today helped to lift his spirits and provided him with much needed support. Everyone please take this virus very seriously. If this can put my husband in the ICU it can affect anyone. My husband is in great physical shape with no underlying health problems. Social distancing is key. Please keep our Houston Fire Fighters, Police, Doctors, Nurses, and staff in your prayers as well as those sick with COVID-19."

Houston L-341 Mourns Loss of Leroy Lucio

Leroy Lucio, who served 29 years in the Houston Fire Department, passed away on July 20 after valiantly fighting Coronavirus / COVID-19 for several weeks.

Lucio, who was a captain at HFD Station 103, had been hospitalized in San Antonio. His death will be classified as a line-of-duty death by HFD, according to Houston L-341. He is the first Houston firefighter to die from complications of COVID-19.

Houston L-341 President Patrick M. "Marty" Lancton said, "Please keep the family, friends and station crew of Leroy Lucio in your thoughts and prayers. Capt. Lucio leaves behind a loving family, many friends and a long list of Houston firefighters who respected and enjoyed serving with him. We mourn the loss of our friend. His tragic death is a reminder to be vigilant in our efforts to keep our families, friends and station crews safe in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic."

IAFF District 11 Report

IAFF Adapts to COVID-19, Progress Continues

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IAFF 11th District Vice President
R.L. "Sandy" McGhee, III

The work of the union never rests. Even during this pandemic our union has not missed a beat. Thanks to the work of the IAFF lobby team the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Safeguarding America's First Responders Act of 2020. This law will establish presumptive benefits under PSOB for members who contract COVID-19. This bill passed the House by unanimous consent. The bill previously passed the Senate in May and is now expected to be signed into law. This important new benefit will ensure that the families of members who die or are permanently disabled from COVID-19 need not prove an occupational link to the disease to receive federal death or disability benefits. Shannon Meissner and her team crafted S. 3607, with Senators Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Cory Booker (D-NJ), and have worked tirelessly for the past four months to secure its adoption.

Congratulations to Texarkana L-367 firefighters for successfully negotiating their first collective bargaining agreement. The three-year agreement is pending ratification by L-367 members and the city of Texarkana. Kudos to IAFF DFSR Joe Tellez and TSAFF Service Director Rafael Torres for their work during what turned out to be a long contentious negotiations process.

We are teaming up with TSAFF Secretary-Treasurer Brandon Day to work with Texas locals whose 501(c)5 status has been revoked by the IRS. If a local union does not file a tax return for three years in a row, their 501(c) 5 status is automatically revoked by the IRS. Re-establishing not-for-profit status is somewhat challenging but can be successfully accomplished, and it need not cost a fortune. Secretary-Treasurer Day and I will also be working with district locals that do not currently have an Employee Identification Number (EIN) from the IRS. Every local, regardless of size needs an EIN number for their general fund. Every PAC fund needs an EIN number separate from the local's EIN.

The next round of Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grants will allow departments to use these funds to rehire or retain fire fighters, as well as waive the local cost share. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator Peter Gaynor made the announcement at a House Homeland Security hearing, noting that acting Secretary of Homeland Security Chad F. Wolf "exercised his discretionary authority to relax certain requirements within the SAFER grant program." We urge you to work with your departments to apply for these grants. Our IAFF grants department is also available to assist affiliates with applications. We urge you to work with your departments to apply for these grants. Our Grants Department is also available to assist affiliates with applications.

The 2020 Fallen Fire Fighter Memorial will be conducted as a respectful, virtual remembrance on Sept. 19 to honor our fallen whose names will forever be etched onto our Wall of Honor. As IAFF General President Harold Schaitberger said, "We are all disappointed that we are unable to hold our traditional ceremony this year, but this is the safest and best path during the COVID-19 pandemic. Members are reminded that no IAFF or Colorado Springs L-5 staff will be at the site on the day of or days leading up to this year's virtual remembrance. We will be providing more details on the virtual event in the coming weeks."

For many years, the Mighty 11th District has raised more MDA Fill the Boot funds than any other IAFF district. While this is not a normal year, our efforts are more important than ever. Because of your help, three promising, FDA-approved drugs are fighting muscular dystrophy. This year, our Fill the Boot drive is online. Please join our Mighty 11th District brothers and sisters and set up your virtual Fill the Boot plan today. Information is available at IAFF.org. If you need more assistance, please reach out, and I'll get you in touch with our IAFF/MDA team.Together, we can continue to raise awareness, raise money, and bring us all closer to the cure.

Finally, the work of our members and leadership during this pandemic is nothing short of inspirational. Your dedication to service, community and each other is commendable.

Please remember, stay vigilant, the precautions that we must take to protect ourselves cannot ever be taken lightly.

If I may be of assistance, please contact me immediately.

Take care and stay safe.

Legislative Report

Anticipating a Very Different 87th Legislature

Legislative Director
Glenn Deshields

The coronavirus has changed things in the legislative world. At this time, we would normally be meeting with members concerning elections and legislation for 2021 session. Instead, we are rat killing issues popping up around the state related to the pandemic. The issues have varied from fighting departments that refuse to pay quarantine costs and reinforcing workers compensation coverage to obtaining PPE.

Anyone that is having trouble with their departments on coverage for anything related to the coronavirus, please call your District Vice President immediately. Quarantine, isolation, and medical treatment should all be covered by your department. You should not have to pay to work. The coronavirus is an on-duty illness and is covered under the Presumptive Act at Section 607.054 Government Code. If you have a positive case, please file immediately for coverage. It does not matter if they are symptomatic or not. We do not know of long-term damage that could occur. We have unfortunately had a LODD in Houston from the coronavirus. Captain Leroy Lucio lost his battle and we will ensure his family receives the benefits that he earned.

Our other issues still exist. I expect renewed attacks on our pension systems. We have had a reprieve over the last few years but, the groups opposed to retirement security have started to reactivate at the hint of economic turmoil. Similar to the time after the Great Recession of 2009, anti-pension organizations and large financial companies use the downturn in the stock market to make claims that pension systems are not well-performing. This is a tactic that completely ignores the facts, but it looks bad on a graph. We are organized with multiple other groups to fight this battle.

Another important issue we expect to fight this coming session is our basic ability to organize and contract. The police issues and protests earlier this summer will have blowback for us. Cities, the far left and the far right have all come together to express their disapproval of police unions. Their complaints focused on pay levels, contracting and the inability to be able to fire employees at will for any reason. This is not an attack just on police unions. They want to destroy fire fighter associations also. This is an attack on your ability to organize and hold a department to their word. Collective bargaining, civil service and meet and confer are all on their chopping block. This is as serious an attack as we have had in years.

The 87th Legislative Session will be much different than previous ones whether the pandemic is over or not. First, it is a redistricting year and that could take up a large portion. Second, there will be less money. In normal times this would cause problems. Throw in a ton of disaster legislation and we will have a lot of fights going on at once. This will no doubt affect our ability to work and will make our jobs much harder.

Please contact me or your DVP if you have any questions. We are there 24-7 for you.

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Pflugerville L-4137 relaunched its community outreach program with public safety information and periodic introductions of members, including Jonathan Gonzales, Kyle Deal, Logan Stehling, and Doug Keeling.

Political Report

Political Activity Goes On Despite COVID-19

Political Director
Joe Tellez

With the primary elections and subsequent runoffs behind us, we now look forward to the November general election.

As far as the runoff elections were concerned, we had five endorsed candidates in the mix. Incumbent state Representative J.D Sheffield and Representative Dan Flynn were defeated. In the three other races, our endorsed candidates were Glenn Rogers in Texas House District 60, Roland Gutierrez in Texas Senate District 19 and Eddie Lucio Jr. in Texas Senate District 27. All were successful in their elections. I would like to thank the DVPs and the DLAs as well as the locals around the state for their work in these house and senate district run-offs.

As everybody is aware, everything has come to a screeching halt due to the Coronavirus / COVID-19. The "plans" we made have since been scratched, we patiently wait for the day in which we can resume normal activity and move forward. At this time, many of us are focused on surviving the pandemic and keeping safe, keeping our families safe, all the while serving our communities by doing the job that they depend on us to do. It is often said that we don't get paid for what we do but for what we're willing to do. This is evident and happens every day that we report to duty at times not knowing what the shift will bring.

Politically, the same has happened. The "traditional" way of campaigning involves connecting with people and having those face to face interactions your message. Traditional fundraising and fundraising events have all been scratched and have moved to a virtual format. Candidates are relying on email, social media and other forms of digital campaigning to fund their campaigns as well as get their message out. Most people have other things on their minds at this point and political campaigns are not part of the mix. We have had to drastically alter our lives in such a manner that is uncharacteristic and unfamiliar to us.

It will be vital to keep building on our political program by remaining involved and engaged with our decision makers. These relationships are key to our survival and allow us to have a seat at the table as decisions about our health and safety, equipment, staffing, and our livelihood are made.

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Longtime state Sen. Eddie Lucio, Jr. prevailed in a July run-off in Senate District 27 with the help of fire fighters from Brownsville L-970, McAllen L-2602 and Mission L-3609. Fire fighters worked the polls in the primary and run-off, block walked and made phone calls in support of the senator, who won with 54 percent of the vote.

Service Report

Adapting to COVID-19: Service Q&A

Service Director
Rafael Torres

I hope this newsletter finds you all safe and healthy during this unprecedented pandemic crisis. Over the last few months, the crisis has continued to grow, face-to-face hearings have been postponed but service has been remarkably busy nonetheless with many questions ranging from Governor Abbott's disaster declaration to the impact of COVID-19 with state statute 607. We have put together a few of the questions and answers we have received regarding COVID-19 issues affecting firefighters and their performance of their duties.

The handling of this virus has everyone adapting to the day-to-day changes and sometimes hourly changes caused by cities shutting down non-essential services like Civil Service Commissions and most hearings across Texas. Many city attorneys are sheltered in place and still working through issue that arise via emails and teleconference.

With that said, here are a few of the calls and emails we have been fielding regarding issues that have come to light since the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the state of Texas and its fire departments:

Do I fill out workers compensation paperwork for possible exposure to corona virus while at work?

Yes, while each case will be different it is always important to make sure you document your potential exposure in case the patient is confirmed later. Do not hesitate to fill out the documents making sure that you are covered in the event of a later positive result in the days ahead. It also provides proof of presumption if denied.

Can the city force me to use my own sick leave for a department required quarantine?

This is a complex question and if presented with this situation we recommend that you contact the TSAFF for assistance. The answer requires your Local to be proactive in establishing base line operating policies and know how your local department and city policies and procedures work. If your department is under Texas Local Government Code 143, the answer is NO, If the city/department head requires you to isolate for the fourteen (14) day period because the department heads suspects you have been exposed to Covid-19 thru a medical call or someone at work testing positive then it is incumbent upon the city to provide administrative leave for their required quarantine. The city cannot make you take sick leave as it is reserved for an actual illness or injury of the employee. Remember if you are responded on a possible covid call make sure you document that on the report and filling out workers comp paperwork. We are supposed to fill out the paperwork for near misses as well as actual accidents and exposures. If it is not in writing it did not happen.

Can my paid time off (vacation) be canceled by the city?

Yes, emergency preparedness is covered in the disaster declaration by the governor that allows cities to plan and schedule staffing needs to provide enough protection for the city.

Can the fire chief suspend our Meet and Confer or Collective Bargaining agreements because of the governor's state disaster declaration?

No, as of now the governor's disaster declaration does not authorize the suspension of any of these statutes that allow for bargaining.

Can the city make me stay in my home or request I ask permission and receive approval to leave the city under penalty of discipline?

Yes, given that the city is your primary employer and you are an essential employee these are going to be enforceable.

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Can fire cadets in a Fire and Police Civil Service City (TLGC143) be placed into service even though they have not been given and passed their state certification test and the statute requires?

Yes, the governor signed an order allowing for cities that have firefighters that are waiting to take their Texas Commission on Fire Protection certification test to enter the fire service with the requirement that these firefighters hired under this provision be required to take and pass their test within 60 days after the order is withdrawn.

Can the city or fire chief cancel my permission to work my part-time work because of the pandemic?

Yes, these are one of the times that most cities health officials are telling their employees to limit their off-duty exposure and for sure a part-time job falls into this category.

These are a few of the major questions that have been coming in and if you have question please do not hesitate to call us to have your questions answered.

Stay healthy and safe.

Communications Report

Lubbock L-972 Produces Cancer Prevention Mini-Documentary

Communications Director
Erin Powers

As Brian Gross recovered from cancer and got back on the job, his Lubbock L-972 brothers and sisters wanted to share his important message with fire fighters everywhere.

Led by Tyler Henderson, Jake McCain and Joseph Wallace, L-972 undertook the production of a mini-documentary, "Whisper Through the Keyhole." Motivated by a donation of video equipment to the local, Henderson, McCain and Wallace worked to overcome the learning curve of video production. Their finished product was published in July and can be viewed on L-972's Facebook and YouTube pages.

The introduction of the 15-minute video states, "Cancer is one of the biggest threats facing firefighters today. 'Whisper Through the Keyhole' follows one of our own from diagnosis to treatment, all the way back to duty, and shows the steps our department has taken to curb cancer exposure in the future."

L-972 President Chris Kemp credits the cooperation of the local and the City of Lubbock in cancer prevention efforts and other issues. The city provides fire fighters with seconds sets of bunker gear and extractors throughout the city, Kemp said, adding "We're all on the same page in this fight. Maintaining a good relationship with the city has been important."

The video project had strong support from Kemp and Jack Todd of L-972, Fire Chief Shaun Fogerson, Deputy Chief Nick Wilson, Mayor Dan Pope, and City Manager Jarrett Atkinson. We spoke with Henderson and McCain about the project and Lubbock's cancer prevention efforts:

Why did you produce the video?

Jake McCain: "Cancer in the fire service is becoming more and more rampant, and we've seen the antagonistic stance some cities in the state and across the nation have taken towards their fire fighters and their workers' compensation claims for on the job cancer. With that context in mind, we realized our program here in Lubbock seems to be light years beyond what other departments are doing. We wanted to highlight not only the project itself but also the foundation our association has put in place to make that happen."

Lubbock fire fighters Jake McCain and Tyler Henderson interview City Manager Jarrett Atkinson.

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Tyler Henderson: "Given the success of our department's new annual physical screenings, we saw an increase in early detection of cancer that has led to multiple positive outcomes. As we fight at the local, state, and national levels for presumptive cancer issues, we felt it was a great opportunity to highlight our success as a department and show the community we serve and the state what we are doing to reduce our risks of cancer."

McCain: "We would love our program to be a blueprint for other departments to use and to approach their city leadership with ways they can protect the next generation of fire fighters all across the state and the nation. Cancer in the fire service is going to be a huge hurdle

Communications Report

(continued)

Lubbock fire fighter Brian Gross: "We have over 400 members of this department. There's no one that doesn't know somebody active or retired that either has cancer or has died from it. It affects everybody."

we're all going to have to overcome, and we're going to have to work together and with our government leaders to beat it."

How much work did the video require?

McCain: "Initial video interviews took approximately two days. Then another two days filming B-roll to go along with the story we wanted to tell. From there we sat down as a group and re-watched all of our footage. We actually went through and transcribed the interviews so that we could determine the best way to proceed with a cohesive narrative. That also took a couple of days. After that the majority of the work was in the editing. I'd say there was probably six to seven days of editing, maybe more. Most of that was me trying to figure out the ins and outs of the editing program. I learned a lot from editing the video itself and, if I had to do it again today, I think I could do it faster now."

Henderson: "Jake did an incredible job of editing and condensed hours of footage into a short, impactful video."

Thoughts on the experience?

McCain: "Initially, I was intimidated. I've done a small amount of video editing work here and there, but nothing of this magnitude, and definitely anything along the lines of these more 'professional level' interviews. After working with Tyler and Joseph with the equipment, I felt a little better, and honestly felt much more at ease with the help of the TSAFF assisting us every step of the way."

Henderson: "The experience was great. We have a media team at Local 972 that has a desire to produce content that shows who we are and our commitment to our members and community."

McCain: "In the end, I think it was a very good experience, albeit with a bit of a learning curve. However, I can without a doubt tell you that this video was good for our association, our department and our city. I think we brought this issue to the attention of many citizens who had no idea, and I hope it continues to impact our community in a positive light."

Reaction in the community?

McCain: "The video was received very well throughout our community. Initially, we were done with the final edits toward the end of January and beginning of February, but we decided to wait to release it. This was due to a couple of things; our department was still reeling from a LODD that occurred on Jan. 11, coupled with the uncertainty and looming threat of COVID-19, we decided we did not want this story to get lost in the 'buzz.' Looking back, I think that was the right decision."

Henderson: "The reaction has been positive!

TSAFF is presenting two communications topics in upcoming online workshops and training:

Preparing for and Managing Your Local's Crisis
Wednesday, September 16, 2020
10-11 a.m.

Five Ways to Raise Your Local's Profile in the Community
Thursday, March 18, 2021
10-11 a.m.

There's no cost for TSAFF members to participate in online workshops and training. Registration is easy. Please send an email request to training@tsaff.org with your name, your local name, your cell phone number, and the session title. The registration will be confirmed, and a link to join the online Zoom meeting will be provided by email.

Communications Report

(continued)

I think a lot of reason that these issues aren't well know is lack of education. As locals and associations, we control our destiny when it comes to educating those we serve."

McCain: "After releasing the video, we received praise from our chain of command within both the fire department and the association, and we've managed to do two local news interviews covering the threat of cancer in the fire service and the steps we've implemented to curtail that. Overall, I'd say it was a success."

Lessons learned? Suggestions for others?

McCain: "Having the right tools for the job makes everything much easier. Something I found especially important was the ability to interview city officials and fire administration and have them speak candidly on this topic. That kind of trust comes from a foundation of relationship and it was very instrumental in every aspect of making the video. As far as suggestions go, I say jump in and do your best, figure everything out as you go. If you need help, which you will, contact the TSAFF."

Henderson: "The biggest thing I learned was that video editing is hard work and takes countless hours. I strongly suggest finding someone with knowledge on the subject or receiving training in basic video editing techniques. I encourage locals to send members to the communication training provided by TSAFF. Without that foundation, I don't believe that we would have been as successful. Be patient with yourselves and those put in media production roles. We are fire fighters first and the learning curve of media can be steep. Lastly, I would say invest in media and communication. Most of the citizens we serve will never utilize their firefighters in an emergency capacity. The best way to connect with them is to create a presence across multiple social media platforms. It takes commitment and time, but the return on investment with our citizens is worth it."

CONGRATULATIONS!

10 TSAFF Scholarships Awarded

TSAFF awarded 10 college-bound students scholarships, according to Michael Anderson, director at large for TSAFF's Texas Fire Fighter Relief and Scholarship Fund.

"We had an extraordinary group of applicants this year," Anderson said. "TSAFF is proud to provide support for these 10 college-bound students from firefighter families throughout Texas. We wish them all the best as they pursue their educations around the state."

The girls winners are:

- Madison Ashley Burton, Arlington L-1329 (*KAAGA)
- Lucy Alejandra Elizondo, Brownsville L-970, University of Texas - RGV
- Kaitlyn Brooke Koteras, Houston L-341
- Emma Rae Tilley, Fort Worth L-440, Dallas Baptist University
- Jasmine Kiara Star Vasquez, Pharr L-4213

The boys winners are:

- Mario Ehrenzweig Jr., Laredo L-872
- Hayden Feist, Houston L-341, Texas A&M
- Jeremy William Heiner Jr., Mesquite L-1518, Texas A&M
- Chandler Wayne Hosch, Round Rock L-3082 (*KAAGA)
- Trey Austin McPherson, Mesquite L-1518, Denny Burris Award

Pictured, clockwise, are Lucy Elizondo, Emma Rae Tilley, Madison Burton, Hayden Feist, Jeremy Heiner, Jr., and Jasmine Vasquez.

** Sponsored by the Korean American Association of Greater Austin (KAAGA)*

Health and Safety Committee

COVID-19 Prompts Better Planning, Coordination

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I hope this newsletter finds you, your family, and crews well as our fight on the frontline continues to move forward. Now more than ever, fire fighters across Texas share a new bond as we face a challenge that affects every community, fire house, and firefighter equally. SARS-COV-2 (COVID-19) has added one more element that our members must bear on their already overburdened shoulders. The mental, physical, and emotional stresses during these times are a true testament of the sacrifice our members make daily. It is during these times its important for our fire fighters to stand tall, stand united, and fight to protect our rights.

From day one, your TSAFF has worked vigorously to ensure that coverage for Texas fire fighters has been a priority. Our TSAFF executive board has been able to provide our members with statements from TML, TSAFF attorney opinion Letters, information about the CARES Act, and guidance to tackle the deliberate denials of coverage to protect the health and safety our local government's most vital resources.

As first responders, we are protected under Texas Government Code Chapter 607 that outlines benefits relating to certain diseases and illnesses. This piece of legislation was created to protect the health and safety of first responders because of their sacrifice through service. Too many times before have our brother and sister fire fighters been denied treatment by local governments in efforts to avoid fiscal liability. SARS- COV-2 (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) is defined as a "viral respiratory illness" by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Section 607.054 categories COVID-19 as a "other disease or illness of the lungs or respiratory tract." T.G.C 607 goes on to outline the rebuttals a city can make to deny a claim which shifts the burden of proof from the first responder to the city. The Department of Labor labels "law enforcement, first responders, and front-line medical and public health personnel" as a "high-risk employment." The U.S. Department of Labor also states, "there is an implicit recognition that a higher likelihood exists of infection due to high-risk employment. Therefore, the employment-related incident of COVID-19 is more likely to occur among members of law enforcement, first responder and front-line medical and public health personnel." Furthermore, the Department of Labor acknowledges "it is difficult to determine the precise moment and method of virus transmission."

We must educate ourselves, elected officials, and city management of our governed rights to limit the ignorant denials that threaten the health of our members, and the wellbeing of their families. We must not take anything less then what our state association, legislators, and the sacrifice that our brothers and sisters before us have made to protect first responders throughout our state. These are the moments that we must band together and share our triumphs, our failures, and build off of the practices that our neighbors have employed. If your local has successfully implemented response policies, methods to secure coverage for your members, tools for educating the public, and securing PPE, contact your district's health and safety representative. Together, we can build a system to share our resources across the state to fit the needs of our individual department.

We cannot let our fight stop there. We must continuously watch the horizon for the next threat towards our members and their families. Across Texas, our local government's greatest minds are meeting to draft budgets for the upcoming year that can inadvertently be detrimental to the safety of our fire fighters if we fail to recognize their actions. We need to prepare ourselves for attacks on staffing, PPE, apparatuses, and basic benefits for our members. We will also need to continue to pressure our department's administration to implement strategies to identify, report, and proactively protect our members against occupational cancer. From there, we must create change by protecting our member's mental health, and build programs that recognize behavioral health for first responders.

With the current chaotic pandemic environment, elections drawing near, and our members pressing on while juggling the challenges that blur the lines of home and work life, it can be difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Now is the time to utilize the exceptional services and staff that our great state association has to offer. It is up to our local leaderships to build a strategic communications plan, stay connected with our district vice presidents, and deploy IAFF toolkits to protect our shares as public safety stakeholders. As you read this, our members are proudly answering the call for help from our communities. It is through their heroic actions that public safety is maintained in the communities we serve. Remember your TSAFF has employed a brilliant set of directors to aid you in your fight. For any assistance, please contact your district's vice president. Be safe. God Bless. Stay united.

MDA
MDA to Fire Fighters:
Thank You!

Becky Prine

Thank you for all you are doing to keep your communities safe during these unprecedented times. We've never been more proud to call each of you a friend and part of the MDA family. We hope you and your families continue to stay safe. Don't hesitate to reach out to us if there is any way we can support your Locals – we are here for you!

News About MDA Summer Camp

Due to the COVID19 outbreak, MDA has made the difficult decision to cancel all in-person MDA Summer Camps for 2020 for the safety of our campers and volunteers. Stay tuned though as we are working hard to provide virtual components to help supplement the best week of the year for our incredible families!

Fill the Boot

We are excited to announce that the IAFF and MDA worked together to launch a Virtual Fill the Boot platform. Your Local can raise funds online for Fill the Boot this year and we have all the tools to help you be successful. Your coordinator has received information and will be getting a follow-up call soon from the MDA team. Let's keep Texas the top Fill the Boot state! Click here for the state page and find your Local:

https://filltheboot.donordrive.com/team/Texas

Many of you have contacted our staff about rescheduling your collections – thank you! We hope things improve across the country and here in Texas, so that Locals can Fill the Boot this fall. Our staff will stay in touch with your FTB coordinators as we learn more. We look forward to organizing our collections with you when the time is right!

Our Impact

Thanks to you, MDA is making a difference around the nation. As we all reflect on a challenging 2020, we want to remind you of our mission.

Families are at the heart of MDA's mission. We wake up every morning to create more hope and answers for families living with muscular dystrophy and related diseases that take away physical strength and mobility. We do this by finding research breakthroughs across diseases, caring for kids and adults from day one and empowering families with services and support in hometowns across America.

Becky Prine
MDA Regional Manager/
Fire Fighter Partnerships
Cell: (918) 855-3993
Email: bprine@mdausa.org

Here are the ways we're helping achieve these goals so families can live longer and grow stronger:

Innovations in Science

At MDA, we take a big-picture perspective across the full spectrum of neuromuscular diseases to uncover breakthroughs that accelerate treatments and cures. The power in our research approach is that we can often apply learnings from one disease to achieve progress in others to bring urgently needed answers to our families.

MDA

(continued)

Here are some of our current highlights:

- Research: MDA is the largest source of funding for neuromuscular disease research outside the federal government and has committed more than $1 billion in funding since its inception.
- Treatments: Research we have supported is directly linked to approved, life-changing therapies across multiple neuromuscular diseases.
- Technology: Our MOVR platform is the first and only data hub that uniquely aggregates healthcare, genetic, and patient-reported data, transforming health outcomes and drug development in neuromuscular disease.

Innovations in Care

We know that early diagnosis, highly specialized care and access to promising clinical trials help ensure the best possible outcomes for individuals and families facing muscular dystrophy, ALS and related life-threatening diseases. That's why MDA is here to provide care for kids and adults from day one. Our MDA Care Centers offer families best-in-class, comprehensive care from a wide variety of health care specialists at one location on the same day, while our trained information specialists and educational resources are available to offer guidance and support through every step of the journey.

Here are some of our current highlights:

- MDA Care Centers: We support the largest network of care centers providing best-in-class comprehensive clinical care at top health care institutions.
- MDA Resource Center: Our national Resource Center is staffed by a dedicated team of knowledgeable specialists offering one-on-one support at no cost.
- MDA Summer Camp: Every year thousands of children and young adults learn vital life skills and independence at MDA Summer Camp and other recreational programs at no cost to families.

Let's Make a Difference: Donations of Texas Firefighting Gear Sought for Fire Fighters in Mexico

TSAFF is working with Lakeside Assistance Group (LAG), an international charity in the Lake Chapala area near Guadalajara, Mexico. We hope to provide decommissioned equipment and apparatus to firefighters at some of the 70 fire stations in the Chapala area. LAG is well established and registered with the Mexican government and has tax/tariff exemptions and legal releases from the Mexican government regarding donations. TSAFF will coordinate transportation of donated equipment with LAG. Here's some of what the Chapala-area firefighters need:

- Personal protective equipment, including helmets, hoods, boots, gloves, self-contained breathing apparatus sets, pass/man-down alarms, and breathing air compressors
- Hose lines and nozzles (1 1/2" and 2 1/2") and adaptors (Stortz)
- Road traffic collision and rescue equipment
- Paramedical equipment - AED, airway and suction tools, and oximeters
- Paramedic uniforms
- Hand tools, pry bars, hydraulic and screw jacks, wire stretchers, and backboards
- Stabilizing equipment
- Rope rescue equipment sets
- Ladders - 10', 20' and 35'- 45'
- Water pumps - portable and gas-powered
- Hose reel units off of decommissioned fire trucks (with or without small-bore hose reel tubing)
- Thermal imaging cameras
- Ventilation fans for smoke extraction

For more information, please contact Erin Powers (epowers@tsaff.org) or Brandon Day (bday@tsaff.org).

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