**2017 VCOS Report on Seminar in the Hilton of Clearwater Beach, Florida on November 8-12, 2017 by DVFA 1st VP Bill Betts**

President Richard Perillo, 2nd VP Jay Jones, and myself traveled to Clearwater Beach, Florida to attend the Annual Volunteer/Combination Officers Seminar on the above dates. Having been in the Fire Service in Delaware for over 50 years, and having attended many national seminars such as FDIC and FRI, I personally consider this event as the best I have attended for educational content, and the opportunity to network with some of the best minds of the country’s fire service leaders. The Seminar was sold out with over 630 attendees from all over the United States and Canada. In addition to the three of us, Keith Bowman, Dave Majewski, Les Warrick, Mike Shaw, and Steven Maichle also attended from Delaware. Since it was hosted by the VCOS section of the IAFC, there were all of the officers of the IAFC present, and I got to meet with several of the ones I know well from my previous term as President of the Eastern Division.

On Thursday, and Friday morning, there were general sessions that everyone attended in the ballroom of the Hilton and was moderated by Vickie Pritchett of the National Fire Sprinkler Association.

Thursday’s session started out with Former Navy Seal Chad Williams as the keynote speaker. Mr. Williams spoke on the difficult missions of the Seals, and their need for good leadership skills of their commanders, and the need for everyone to follow the leader for performing a successful mission safely. One of the main points of the Seal credo is that if you aim at nothing, you will hit nothing, and emphasized the need for good planning. There were also presentations from Steve Gower on implementing information received, without irritating the troops, and Greg Smith, President of the Shell Pipeline, on the top ten leadership points. Gary Ludwig gave his presentation on over 30 scenarios, and how you would handle them, using feedback from the audience. There was a welcome reception that evening, with interaction between the attendees outside on the patio of the hotel.

Friday Morning’s general session in the ballroom started out with an attorney speaking on the balance of firefighter free speech, and the right of the administration to maintain order and discipline within the fire department. This was determined to be a very fine line, especially with social media. The second presentation was on Barn Boss Leadership, in which was designed to provide a guide for self-awareness in all of the ranks from the firefighter to the Fire Chief. The last session of the day was a presentation by Bill Webb of the CFSI, who did a great job of discussing the history of D-Day, and all of the planning that went into the attack, and on the leadership skills of all of the various generals involved, and how General Eisenhower, had to make all of those egos work toward a common goal. The afternoon was open, and Pierce had a tour of their Bradenton plant. We spent most of the afternoon having discussions, and unwinding, after a day and a half of back to back seminars.

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Saturday featured break-out sessions, and we tried to go separate ways to maximize our ability to share each of the presentations. Some of the most memorable were the one by Tom LaBelle on using social media as a successful means of Communication, and the challenges ahead. There was also a presentation on marketing your fire department, which dealt with making your department to increase our ability to recruit new members. Bill Jenaway of VFIS led a Recruitment and Retention presentation after lunch, and VCOS talks had three speakers, on medical screenings, PTSD awareness, and the Houston floods with footage of the areas not shown on the TV news, and the challenges that the fire service faced. There was also a presentation on the Yellow Paper which deals with PTSD, and firefighter suicides.

Saturday evening, we attended a two and a half hour round table with approximately 70 people with John Buckman and Fred Windisch as moderators. There was an active discussion on various subjects as bullying and hazing, the opioid problems, recruitment and retention, and firefighter suicide. This led into some strong discussions on the differences in the generations, and how each generation is looking for different motivation.

On Sunday morning, the general session featured a presentation by Howard Cross on building excellence in the leadership team. On an interesting note, Richard and I enjoyed it, and Jay was not impressed, showing our generational differences. The last presentation was by Doug Cline of South Carolina, who spoke on how to develop the next generation of fire service leaders.

While the seminar was very useful to the Officers that attended, as we received a lot of information we can pass on to the Delaware Fire Service, through the Chief’s meetings, and seminars in Delaware, the DVFA officers would like to make this program available to the younger members in the fire service to attend, and to lessen the generational gaps. Please contact us if we can be of any assistance in passing this information on at a meeting or with an individual contact.

You can be assured that we attended all of the Conference presentations.

On Thursday morning, they had their opening ceremony and business session. Out of State coordinator Steve Austin was also there, and President Walius gave greetings from Delaware when we were introduced. It was surprising to learn of the poor attendance at the Conference as West Virginia has 55 Counties and 413 Fire Departments, and there were only 34 companies in attendance with 83 delegates, 3 alternates, and 11 guests. We sat with the Maryland delegation of 1st VP Rick Blair, and PP Bob Cumberland, who is also their out of state coordinator.

The discussion at the conference was centered on problems similar to Delaware with Funding, Recruitment & Retention, and how to attract the millennials to join the departments. They were going to attempt to spend money on Google to put them higher on the search list, when people would search for Fire Departments, and especially West Virginia Fire Departments. I also picked up their 3 page of legislative bills that were submitted, and I will turn them over to our legislative committee to see if we can benefit from any of the bills in their legislature.

The meeting lasted all day with a break for a buffet lunch that we were charged $5.00 for. That evening, we attended a BBQ at the Clear Vue Park, and they had a Fire Chief from Benwood that was honored for in 50 years as Fire Chief. There were several dignitaries there from the WV Legislature, and a Fox news cameraman. Ted and I were both on the news at 10 pm that evening after the event.

On Friday morning, we got up and drove back to Delaware for the 7-hour drive.