



***The Voice on the Job for Greensboro's
Bravest!***

**Professional Fire
Fighters of Greensboro**

July-August 2008

Another Quiet Victory for PFFG

If the Professional Fire Fighters of Greensboro are consistently guilty of anything, it is not always conveying our accomplishments and victories with our membership. There are many times the Officers, Executive Board members, and active members diligently follow a project through to the end which has positive implications for the members of our department and we drop the ball when it comes to getting that important information to our members out in the stations.

This year we have made a concerted effort to remedy that by increasing the production of this newsletter as well as keep-

ing the website up to date.

Many times our victories are not large or dramatic. Nonetheless they are accomplished through quite hard work, dedication, time away from our families, and diligence.

One such victory came on August 2, 2008 when Governor Easley signed into law our City Firefighters/ Overtime Pay bill. This is the law we detailed in a previous issue of *The Feederline* that was initially opposed by a Chief Officer of this department. The law mimics the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act 7 (k) exemption for paying overtime to municipal firefighters working over 53 hours in a week.

Until this month, the NC Department of Labor simply administered the Federal law governing our overtime. If that Federal law had been struck down, without this recent victory, we would have been subject to a return to pre-1985 overtime abuses. That translates into longer working hours with no obligation on the City's part to compensate firefighters.

The new law acts as an added layer of protection in the event the Supreme Court revisits the issue of municipal firefighter overtime. This is a scenario that is not that far fetched considering the Chief Justice at the time opposed

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Around Our Department

Congratulations to the following Local 947 members on the new additions to their family:

Captain Van Wert on the birth of his son.

FF Nick Holder on the birth of his daughter.

FF Ryan "Wojo" on the birth of his daughter.

Local 947 would like to welcome the following new members into the PFFG family!

FF Kevin "Slingblade" Clendenon, Engine 5, B-Shift

PFF Josh Arnold, Quint 43, B-Shift

FF Phillip Chism, Engine 18, C-Shift

Local 947 would like to recognize the following companies for having 100% union membership:

- **Engine 5, B-Shift**
- **Engine 18, C-Shift**
- **Quint 5, C-Shift**

Do you have some news you would like included in the *Around Our Department* section? Send it to us a pffg@bellsouth.net

GFD Receives Custom Double Expandable Base of Operations Special Ops Trailer



On July 23, the Greensboro Fire Department took ownership of a custom 2008 Double Expandable Base of Operations (BoO) Trailer. This trailer, the first of its' kind to be delivered to Greensboro, will function primarily as a BoO for NC Task Force 6 during Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) operations.

On deployments the USAR team is

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Endorsement

From the Desk of the President...

Politics and political endorsements are not the easiest of subjects to broach with such a large, diverse group of members. You see, we have to go there because we really don't have a choice. When each of you was born, politicians required that you get a birth certificate, and when you die a death certificate will be a requirement. Like it or not, politicians over the years have made decisions that impact you and your family in your daily lives. In between, you decided to become a firefighter for a local government run by, you guessed it, elected officials. **You can't escape it, but you have taken the first step to make it better and that was becoming a member of the International Association of Fire Fighters.** The IAFF is the oldest public employee union in the Country. It has over 290,000 members and represents 85% of the full time paid firefighters in the U.S.. At a time in this Country's history when other unions have seen decreases in membership the IAFF has grown!

The IAFF has a strong history of supporting political candidates that support firefighters on firefighter issues that impact their member's jobs, economic lives, and workplace rights **regardless of party affiliation.**

The IAFF researched extensively the voting records of the candidates for President of the United States on legislation vital to its membership. It also commissioned Zogby International (a non-partisan firm with a reputation for accuracy) to conduct a poll to help in the decision process of our Presidential endorsement. You should visit the IAFF website and review the results of the polling data.

The IAFF has made its endorsement for President and I suggest you go again to the IAFF website to find out more on the endorsement. You may be getting information from the IAFF on our endorsed candidate be-

tween now and the General Election in November. This information will be to further educate you on the reasons for the endorsement and to dispel myths and rumors that have emerged.

The IAFF sticks to job related issues when making their decisions on endorsements. And this is the way it should be. They stay away from what many refer to as personal issues which often times are used by political parties and candidates as wedge issues used solely to try to divide the electorate. You don't want the IAFF involved in fringe issues that have nothing to do with your job.

The IAFF realizes that many of these personal issues are important to some of our members. The IAFF simply wants to educate you on the candidates by making an endorsement so that you will know the differences between the candidates as they relate to your job and what you may expect in the next 4 to 8 years depending on which candidate is successful in November. The IAFF is not going to go into the election booth with you and tell you how to vote. They are simply trying to educate you on our issues. Please visit www.iaff.org and learn more about our endorsed candidate.

You expect the IAFF to accomplish job related gains on Capitol Hill ranging from health and safety issues to benefits. You can't bind their hands if you expect results.

There are other candidates that Local 947, the Professional Fire Fighters and Paramedics of North Carolina, the Triad Central Labor Council, and the North Carolina AFL-CIO have endorsed and they will need our help. We realize that all of you are not necessarily going to agree with all of our endorsed candidates but you may agree with some. All of you, if you haven't already, need to go to www.pffg.org and sign up for the members only section so that you will be able to get political information there. We will include in this newsletter § 160A-169. City employee political activity. This NC General Statute was explained in an earlier edition of the Feederline, however, as we enter deeper into this General Election cycle I feel it warrants repeating. If there is something you don't understand about the law do not hesitate to contact me.

Your Local needs your help to help you!

(City Employee Political Activity Rights are listed on page 6)

Your Local Officers and Executive Board

President

Capt. Richard O'Brien
(Ret)

Vice-President

FF Dave Coker
Q5, B-Shift

Treasurer

Capt. Bob Oakley
(Ret)

Secretary

FEO Justin Price
Q57, C-Shift

Executive Board

FF Michael Brownell
E7, A-Shift

FF Trayveawn Goodwin
E10, A-Shift

Capt. Bo McMasters
E18, C-Shift

FEO Michael Page
Q5, A-Shift

FF Kevin Preston
E4, A-Shift

Your Local Officers and Executive Board members are here to serve the membership. If you have questions, comments, or concerns do not hesitate to contact any one of your elected union representatives.



Building the Brotherhood Through Blogging the Fire Service

The following interview was conducted with Lt. Rhett Fleitz of the Roanoke (VA) Fire-EMS Department. He is the Secretary/Treasurer of the Roanoke Fire Fighters Association IAFF Local 1132. Lt Fleitz has authored one of the first visible firefighter blogs on the web since 2005. In 2006, he completed his first book, *Firefighting in Roanoke, a pictorial look at the history of the Fire Service in the City of Roanoke*.

How long have you been in the fire service?

I have worked for the Roanoke Fire-EMS Department since March of 1999. I worked for the Richmond Ambulance Authority from 1998-1999. I began firefighting with the Midlothian VFD in Chesterfield County in 1994 while in high school. Technically, since 1994 which is 14 years.

Why did you join the IAFF and become active?

I joined the IAFF because I saw some of the great things they were doing while I volunteered in Chesterfield. Once I realized I wanted to become a Professional Firefighter, I soon understood that joining and being active in the IAFF was a necessity.

It is one thing to join the IAFF for the benefits, but to fully understand the capabilities of an active IAFF

Local is another. I became active in the IAFF because I wanted to. I wanted to be a part of the bettering of my job, my career, and my department. In 15 years, I don't want to look back and think that if I had done this or that I might be retiring with better benefits. Many of my Brothers/Sisters will probably be thinking that, but I was there and I got involved. I might not have moved mountains, but I was part of the solution and I have fought for what is rightfully mine.

When did you start your blog and why?

I started the Roanoke Fire Blog (<http://www.roanokefire.com>) in March of 2005. I had recently been promoted and moved to the ARFF Company at the Roanoke airport...so I had a lot of idol time. I began the blog as a tool to uncover the history of the department as well as chronicle the current and future happenings. I got into Maurice Wiseman's collection he left the Local of pictures and data. I soon realized he had worked on it for 40 or so years. He had done a lot of the work, and I started blogging about the history. This later turned into the Maurice Wiseman Project and finally the book "Firefighting in Roanoke".

The blog, from its inception, has always been unofficial to the Roanoke Fire-EMS De-

partment and Local 1132. This became a little bit of an issue once I was elected Secretary/Treasurer, and still guys hold my opinions on the blog as the voice of the Union.

I created the blog for my Brother and Sister Firefighters. They deserve to be recognized for the work they do.

Soon after I started the blog, I began to realize that it was a very powerful tool and began to interject my opinion occasionally. With that power comes a lot of responsibility. First and foremost, I do not want to be slanderous or libelous to anyone. I want to make sure I report the facts. I believe I have attained a level of professionalism, readership, and truthfulness that is respected and not questioned anymore.

It can be a pretty risky prospect to put your thoughts out on the web for all the members of your department to read. What are some of the negative things and positive that have happened directly as a result of some of your posts?

You have to take the good with the bad. Well that is so true with my blog. Early on, it seemed as though there were two kinds of readers within the department; those who loved it and understood my rational,

and those who hated it and disagreed with me completely. The ones who didn't like it read it more than the ones who do. I think that in all, the ones who didn't like it or didn't like me came around to understand that it is my opinion and they can leave their opinion in the comments. We don't have to agree, we don't have to disagree. All I ask for in the comments is a little bit of professionalism.

As far as the negative and positive things that have happened because of the post exactly. Negative - Well I was retaliated against and place back on the ARFF crew, an assignment they knew I didn't like.

Positive - Many people read the blog. I hear from firefighters all the time about bumping into someone and being asked if they know me and if the stuff on the blog is true. The blog has also been recognized by the media as a place for information. Reporters check in with the blog daily and call me every couple of weeks to check on things.

What are your thoughts on the growth of fire service related websites and blogs?

I think it is great. It has been really interesting watching them grow in number and popularity. I helped a lot of them with ideas, trial and error from my experience, and bounced ideas off a lot of the other authors. I helped Danville and Bristol VA start their blogs, and I remember when STATter 911, FireGeer, Firefighter Hourly, *Continued on Page 5...*



Local 947 member FF Micah Christman (Q5 A-Shift) works to set up beds in the new GFD Special Ops Trailer

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required to be fully self-sufficient for operational periods of 72 hours. This trailer gives the team a secure, climate controlled environment that has the ability to serve as sleeping quarters, a classroom, a many other functions related to USAR operations in settings where vital infrastructure is damaged beyond immediate use.

The Special Ops trailer pictured right cost approximately \$600,000 and was paid for through a grant from the Department of Homeland Security. Local 947 would like to congratulate everyone of our members, Administration, and the City personnel who worked hard to obtain this vital resource.

Pictures and information for this article were provided by Local 947 members Capt. Craig Smith (R5 A-Shift) and FF Steve Couturier (E5 A-Shift)

Many of the other USAR teams from around the state utilize the Western Shelter Tents to house USAR team members. While this system works it is much more labor-intensive, requires more manpower, and detracts from the vital time necessary to begin potentially life saving USAR operations. Ultimately, the tents can detract from the primary mission of USAR.

From inception to the day the tractor and trailer pulled into the PSTF members of the USAR team have played the primary role in specifications for the trailer. All told, it took approximately a year and a half from the time specifications were started to the date of completion.

Other potential uses of the trailer include; satellite training classroom, emergency fire station, special events within the city and much more.





Blogging Continued from page 2...

TheHouseWatch, and others began. I was sure to get a hold of these other authors to let them know I was willing to help and wanted to see them succeed. Some I was able to assist, but all of them have become friends through the sites and email.

I think that the blog type websites offer a real candid and emotional view of our service. That is what has been missing. Firefighters have taken over their own media coverage. No longer do firefighters just go to Firehouse.com to see the news, now the travel around the blogs to see what is really going on. If there is a tragedy or big fire you can hit the news agencies to see the reporters view of the fire, but what do they know? Turn around and check the blogs for the real story and account.

What are some of your favorite fire service websites/blogs?

I guess the ones I hit every day are my favorites. As far as blogs I would say Firefighter Hourly, STATter 911, Fire-Geezer, TheHousewatch, Bristol Firefighters Blog, Danville Firefighters Blog

There have been many which have come and gone that were really good.

Quiet Victory from Page 1...

our overtime protection and stated in a dissenting opinion that the issue would be revisited.

While this is not a flashy victory that is going to garner time on the evening news or in the papers it is an accomplishment that serves to protect our wages, hours of work, and working conditions. In the event this law is struck down at the Federal level, municipal firefighters all over North Carolina,

The websites I check out every day are, FireNews.net, SconFire.com, PhillyFireNews.com, and FireEngineering.com.

How did you come to write your book and what was the process?

I was working on the blog and then created the Maurice Wiseman Project which was an online timeline of the history of the department with pictures. That developed into the book.

Once I decided to write a book I looked into the process. I knew it would take years to write a complete history of the department. I saw a book on a VFD in Maryland and inquired about it. The publisher was Arcadia Publishing and they are a turnkey publisher; meaning they give you a template, edit, proofread, create the proof, publish, market, and sell the book. There is no money up front, you just won't get

rich on it. It was perfect for me. I wasn't looking to get rich and I have given the profit to the Local.

I dragged my feet with Arcadia waiting to sign the contract. I didn't want to get in over my head. Once I finally took the plunge they handed me the deadlines I had to meet. I was able to meet all the deadlines and in turn they were able to publish the book 4 months in advance.

I must say that I am very proud of the book, but I am more appreciative of what he book did for the older guys and the Retirees of the Department. They absolutely loved the book. We had a breakfast for them when the book came out and they signed each others like yearbooks.

Of all of the things I have been able to do for the department and Local, I think I have created a little bit of camaraderie and helped boost the brotherhood.

If nothing at all, the firefighters are kept up to date on what is going on, and the citizens and others who read the blog and book have learned who we are and what we are about.

The blog has also provided a viewpoint for our Administration to see what we feel and what we think. They read it all the time, it may not change ideals or initiatives of Administration that the firefighters are against but it gives us a piece of mind knowing that they know we are not stupid and we understand what they are doing and we have taken a stance against it.

whether they are union members or not, benefit from this victory and others like it.

Simply put, this is why you pay your union dues. PFFG, along with our State Association, (The Professional Fire Fighters and Paramedics of North Carolina) are the reliable work horses that quietly plug along at the NC Legislature and Greensboro City Council meetings on your behalf. We're not always flashy but rest assured that we're always working for you.





Professional Fire Fighters of Greensboro

Professional Fire Fighters of Greensboro
International Association of Fire Fighters
Local 947
129-B Industrial Avenue
Greensboro, NC 27406
336-275-3044



Quote of the Issue...

"On the fireground, if you become involved in a crisis situation, you will not rise to the occasion but, rather, default to your level of training"
-Lt. Andy Fredericks FDNY Squad 18, Killed on 9/11

Calendar of Events

8/25– PFFG Executive Board Meeting, 1800 hrs. **PFFG Monthly Membership Meeting,** 1900 hrs.
Both held at 129-b Industrial Ave.

9/11-12– NC State AFL-CIO 51st Annual Convention, Raleigh.

9/22-PFFG Executive Board Meeting, 1800 hrs. **PFFG Monthly Membership Meeting,** 1900 hrs.
Both held at 129-b Industrial Ave.

10/1– VIP for a VIP at Northeast Guilford.

10/22– VIP for a VIP at Western Guilford

§ 160A-169. City employee political activity.

(a) Purpose. The purpose of this section is to ensure that city employees are not subjected to political or partisan coercion while performing their job duties, to ensure that employees are not restricted from political activities while off duty, and to ensure that public funds are not used for political or partisan activities.

It is not the purpose of this section to allow infringement upon the rights of employees to engage in free speech and free association. Every city employee has a civic responsibility to support good government by every available means and in every appropriate manner. Employees shall not be restricted from affiliating with civic organizations of a partisan or political nature, nor shall employees, while off duty, be restricted from attending political meetings, or advocating and supporting the principles or policies of civic or political organizations, or supporting partisan or nonpartisan candidates of their choice in accordance with the Constitution and laws of the State and the Constitution and laws of the United States of America.

(b) Definitions. For the purposes of this section:

(1) "City employee" or "employee" means any person employed by a city or any department or program thereof that is supported, in whole or in part, by city funds;

(2) "On duty" means that time period when an employee is engaged in the duties of his or her employment; and

(3) "Workplace" means any place where an employee engages in his or her job duties.

(c) No employee while on duty or in the workplace may:

(1) Use his or her official authority or influence for the purpose of interfering with or affecting the result of an election or nomination for political office; or

(2) Coerce, solicit, or compel contributions for political or partisan purposes by another employee.

(d) No employee may be required as a duty or condition of employment, promotion, or tenure of office to contribute funds for political or partisan purposes.

(e) No employee may use city funds, supplies, or equipment for partisan purposes, or for political purposes except where such political uses are otherwise permitted by law.

(f) To the extent that this section conflicts with the provisions of any local act, city charter, local ordinance, resolution, or policy, this section prevails to the extent of the conflict. (1991, c. 619, s. 2; 1993, c. 298, s. 2.)