

Wisconsin Fire Journal

Change is in the Air

Change is here again and there have been a number of changes concerning the Wisconsin Fire Inspectors Association. Our Association's Executive Board developed some vacancies and these were filled at our last quarterly meeting on February 23, 2009.

I appointed Sue Phillips to be our new 1st Vice President. Sue was our 2nd Vice President and next in line for this promotion. Sue has a take charge personality and a positive attitude. I have enjoyed working with her in the past and know that she will achieve many accomplishments for the betterment of our Association.

I nominated, and the Board approved, Tom Clark to take over the 2nd Vice President position. Tom has been very active in our Association over the years. He is a member of numerous committees and has donated many hours of his time representing our Association. He is dedicated to the fire service and is a great example for our members to look up to.

I nominated, and the Board approved, Laurie Frey to the position of Executive Secretary/Treasurer. Laurie has been a valuable member of our Fall Conference Committee and a big contributor to the success of this event. She has a computer background and will do a great job for our Association handling all of the many financial details involved with the day- to-day operation of our Association. I would like to extend a special "Thank You" to Gilbert Hucek, who held this position for many years. His countless hours of dedication to our Association will not be forgotten.

The Board of Directors would like to welcome Joe Gabe to his newly elected position as Area 7 Chairperson. Joe is an enthusiastic promoter of the State of Wisconsin Fire Inspectors Association and is a great addition to our board.

The Association would like to congratulate Sue, Tom, Laurie and Joe. Their dedication and hard work makes the State of Wisconsin Fire Inspectors Association a quality organization. It is my goal to constantly increase the quality of our Association so that it will continue to grow and inspire our State of Wisconsin Inspectors.

In other State of Wisconsin news, the Department of Commerce has passed an emergency rule affecting building contractors in Wisconsin. The rule was effective on March 2, 2009. The rule will require building contractors whose work is regulated under any of the Commerce codes affecting commercial buildings, places of employment, one and two family dwellings, and public swimming pools to become registered with the State. The fee will be \$25.00 per year. The emergency adoption of this rule requires that building contractors be registered by July 1, 2009 in order to accommodate the 2009 building season. At the time of this writing, the Department of Commerce is working on making this rule permanent. Building contractors that already hold one of nine business credentials issued by the Safety and Buildings Division of the Department of Commerce are exempt from this new registration.

What will this new registration do for building contractors? This registration process will allow the Department of Commerce, Division of Safety and Buildings to contact building contractors informing them of new updates. These updates concern changes in health codes, safety codes, taxes, workers compensation insurance and unemployment insurance among other issues of importance to them. Having building contractors identified publicly is good for the industry. It encourages building contractors to take responsibility for their work, and evens out the playing field so that when building contractors bid for a job, they are all using the same set of rules. Building contractors can now proudly say that they are registered with the State of Wisconsin when they submit a bid for a project.

Fire Inspectors and the general public will appreciate working with registered contractors because registered contractors will be knowledgeable of all new rules and codes. The idea of registration is nothing new. Several states surrounding Wisconsin currently have rules similar to this already in place. To find out more detailed information on Building Contractor Registration and why it is good for all of us, go to the State of Wisconsin Department of Commerce web site <http://www.commerce.state.wi.us/SB/SB-BuildingContractorProgram>.

This year, I will have the honor and privilege of attending the Congressional Fire Services Institute in Washington D.C. I will be representing our Association for this event and look forward to discussing our concerns with our congressional leaders. The mission of the Congressional Fire Services Institute is to educate members of Congress about fire and life safety issues. This is a very important event for the fire service because it gives our elected leaders a conduit into what our needs are and how they can help resolve them. When our congressional leaders have a question or an issue concerning the protective services in our country, the Congressional Fire Services Institute gives them a means to get information from several sources within the Institute. The Congressional Fire Services Institute is one of the organizations that helped Congress create the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program. This Fire Act program has provided over \$4 billion in direct grants to the fire and emergency services over the years. The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program comes up for reauthorization in 2010. It is important that we as emergency and protective services stand up together and advocate for the support of this valuable financial program. The funding from this program improves the fire services with updated equipment and training. We need to increase the consensus building between the fire service and our legislative leaders to insure that these valuable programs become a higher priority. My goal is to network with as many of our State of Wisconsin leaders as I can so that our message will be heard, nurtured and acted upon.

Finally, there are many fire departments in our state that are not members of our Association. We need to change this by showing them, all the benefits that the Association has to offer. Membership means that fire department personnel will have access to education and networking. These are the two vital components that are required to keep fire departments current in new technologies and fire fighting techniques. The Association has initiated a scholarship program that will help to encourage an increase in membership by decreasing the cost of attending our Fall Conference. This is a great start. We must do more. The Association is constantly looking for new ways to increase our membership. I would like to appeal for your help through this article, for any new ideas that you may have to accomplish this task. Please contact me at Ronald.Omernick@ci.wausau.wi.us

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