

President's Message for April 2018 by Richard C. Warbrouck

A few weeks ago the Seattle Firefighters Union Local 27 celebrated their Centennial Year, 100 year Birthday. Local 27 was organized in 1918 the same year that the IAFF was organized. Local 27 celebrated by hosting an open house in the recently remodeled union office building.

The IAFF is celebrating its Centennial 100 year birthday this year 2018 at the 54th IAFF Convention here in Seattle hosted by the Seattle Firefighters Union Local 27. The convention will be called to order on Monday August 6, 2018 for 5 days ending on Friday August 10, 2018. The host hotels are the Westin Hotel and the Sheraton Hotel in downtown Seattle. There will be several events scheduled for the spouses and children of the delegates (registered firefighters). I am sure the union will need some volunteers to assist with the logistics. Stay tuned if you would like to participate. We will post the dates and times when volunteers are needed.

There may be a little confusion over which organization was established, first, Local 27 or the IAFF. In 1978 when I was President of Local 27 I did some research on Local 27, a very low union local number. I also want to point out that Local 29 Spokane and Local 31 Tacoma were also very low firefighter union local numbers, way out here on the west coast, far from the large industrial eastern cities. When researching the history of Local 27 I was able to locate a former Seattle firefighter by the name of Edward (Ed) Wedikind who was a charter member of Local 27 and lost his job with the Seattle Fire Department because of his union activities. Mr. Wedikind told me now he walked through the streets of Seattle with a Seattle man who became President of the International Teamster's Union, Dave Beck when Dave Beck was organizing the laundry drivers, or laundry workers. He also told me that Mr. Beck talked tough and used bad language Mr. Wedikind shared a lot of history associated with the union movement but when he told me that he was a charter member of the IAFF, the International Association of Firefighters, I began to feel that he may be stretching the story. After I verified that he was a charter member of Local 27 I contacted the IAFF and they confirmed that he was in fact a charter member and if my memory is correct his name and maybe his signature is on the original IAFF charter.

The IAFF President and Secretary-Treasurer were delighted that I located Mr. Wedikind, a charter member of the IAFF. They extended an invitation to Mr. Wedikind to attend the 1978 IAFF convention in Las Vegas. They said that they would reserve a room in the host hotel and pay all expenses. They also said that he would be seated up front on the convention floor and be introduced to the delegation. I agreed to escort Mr. Wedikind to Las Vegas and home to Seattle and also look after him while in Las Vegas. Ed was 91 years old at the time. A short time after we returned home Local 27 gave him the Red Helmet Award but before I could deliver the award I was notified that he had passed away. Can you imagine traveling in February 1918 to Washington to the

American Federation of Labor (AFL) headquarters to attend the first IAFF convention? There were delegates from 24 of the 65 firefighter unions affiliated with the AFL in attendance at the first IAFF convention.

In the 2018 winter Firefighter magazine President Schaitberger explained how Chicago Local 2 President James Tracy and Pittsburgh Local 1 President Ralph Sicuro agreed to a coin toss to determine which local would receive the Local 1 designation because Pittsburgh and Chicago were the first two locals to join the IAFF and were organized on the same day. Pittsburgh won the coin toss and became Local 1 and Chicago received the Local 2 designation. President Schaitberger also highlighted all the gains we have made over the years. At first it appears to be a long time ago but a lot of our accomplishments have been since World War II and even more recent.

I began my career in the fire service in 1958. I was elected to the Executive Board of Local 27 in 1962. In 1962 the union office was located in the basement of the home of the elected secretary-treasurer. A union firehouse steward had to collect the union dues and forward the collection to the union secretary. Not everyone belonged to the union making it necessary for the steward to keep a record of who was a member and who had paid their monthly dues. There was no collective bargaining, no union contract, longer work hours, no employer paid medical, no disciplinary procedures, no safety brakes at fires, no safety procedures, no masks or SCBA's, no overtime pay, no specialty pay, and last but not least, no time off for union business. I retired in 1987 from the department and continued as an officer in the union. I can't begin to list the gains and accomplishments the local unions, the WSCFF and then IAFF have made since my retirement. We don't have to look back 100 years, only to when your father or grandfather began their careers. Hard to say what may be in the future.

We will have a special Directors meeting on Tuesday April 10th with representatives from the Retired Seattle Police Officers Association to continue the discussion on Police and Fire LEOFF I and II retiree representation. The Seattle Retired Firefighters began in 1935. In 1970 when the state LEOFF I Retirement System was enacted the Seattle Retired Firefighters expanded to the Retired Firefighters of Washington, RFFOW. At one time there were 3,000 to 3,500 members. In the year 2000 when I became President of the RFFOW we had about 2,000 members. We now have about 1,000 paid members. Early on the membership remained about the same. As the older members passed on their widows, usually younger, continued as members. There were also a large number of LEOFF I members still working who joined the RFFOW as they retired filling the vacancies created by those who passed away. The RFFOW is also open to LEOFF II members but for some reason they don't feel the need to belong or the desire to stay in touch. This is short-sighted on their part as this is an opportunity for the LEOFF II members to inherit a well-established retiree association. Remember that the RFFOW was once a Prior Act retiree association and gradually became a LEOFF I Association and should be destined to transform into a LEOFF II retiree association, particularly if there is ever a LEOFF III retirement system enacted. Who thought there

would be a LEOFF II retirement system? Who knows what a future legislator will consider. Some current legislators have, when looking at pension funding, mentioned a statewide defined contribution retirement system. This type of retirement system is more prevalent today in the private sector than it was five years ago. You don't have to look any further than the Boeing Company. Even if the current LEOFF II system continues well into the future the LEOFF II retirees should retain the RFFOW or a like organization for the camaraderie and to stay in touch through the Newsletter with other retirees and current events.

During our meeting on Tuesday we will continue to discuss our future representation and the fact that the RFFOW cannot continue into the future at the level it has in the past. We will discuss the following:

- Development of one statewide retiree association, Police-Fire LEOFF I or LEOFF I and LEOFF II
- Develop one statewide Law Enforcement Officer Association LEOFF I or LEOFF I and LEOFF II
- Open and expand the RFFOW to include Law Enforcement Officers LEOFF I or LEOFF I and LEOFF II with Law Enforcement Officers having the right to vote and hold office
- Develop a statewide Firefighter Law Enforcement Officer Political Action Committee (PAC) with elected officers

Any other thoughts or ideas can and will be discussed. The RFFOW now have some police officer retirees and LEOFF II retirees as members. The police or law enforcement retirees are associate members and cannot vote or hold office. LEOFF II retirees are regular members with the right to vote or hold office. The Washington State Retired Deputy Sheriffs and Police Officers Association (WSRDSPOA) recently amended their by-laws to make LEOFF II retirees eligible for membership.