

Professional Fire Fighters of Idaho
A Brief History of Significant Events

**By Josh Sutherland
PFFI Historian**

In any organization, history is what defines them. History not only tells the tale of where they have been, but also where they are going. Almost no one holds this truer than the Fire Service. The PFFI is no exception to this. Almost three decades of meeting minutes, records, documents and papers define our organization and what it has been like to fight for the good and welfare of our members, our locals and our profession that is firefighting.

In 1980, the Idaho State Council of Firefighters and the State Pension Committee were merged thus creating what we know today as the Professional Firefighters of Idaho. Since its formation, the main goal of the PFFI has been to give the individual firefighter a stronger voice in state and local government and build stronger camaraderie among the members.

The first conference of the PFFI was held in Boise in December 1981 with 13 locals present. The main purpose of the first meeting was to elect new officials and work out problems associated with the new formation of the PFFI. Business throughout the years at convention has remained relatively the same, focusing on the objectives set forth in Article 3 of the PFFI Constitution and Bylaws as:

- (1) Organization to all firefighters through local in affiliation with the International Association of Firefighters,
- (2) Legislation affecting firefighters such as pension and civil service progress, collective bargaining and arbitration respecting hours, wages, and working conditions, and measures pertaining to health, welfare and safety,
- (3) Cultivation of fellowship among all members, and
- (4) Improvements in firefighting and fire prevention methods through education, instruction and research.

Legislation

Legislation affecting the members has been a top priority of the PFFI. We have traditionally maintained a significant and well-respected legislative presence in Idaho both at the state and local levels. Over the years, the PFFI has been the moving force behind numerous pieces of legislation of specific benefit to professional firefighters in Idaho.



At convention in 1981, it was binding fact finding that would be talked about at the legislative session.

In 1983, a resolution titled the “Right to Know” was brought to the body about the presence and storage of toxic and or hazardous materials and the rights of firefighters and the public to be aware of their presence and usage. The resolution called for a model ordinance and law to be drawn up by the PFFI to be sent to all member locals, the state fire marshal, OSHA and NIOSH to assist in the passage of such legislation.

The early 90’s provided a successful time for PFFI with the so-called “78-80 Bill” that amended provisions in the Fireman’s Retirement Fund Act (FRF) in which a group of firefighters hired within a certain time frame were not receiving the same benefits as others to be entitled to the same benefits.

Idaho Code Section 72-438 was amended to add AIDS, AIDS-related complexes and Hepatitis B to the list of occupational diseases under the Idaho Worker’s Compensation Law. In the years before and following, Cancer presumption, the Heart and Lung Law, binding arbitration, widow pension benefits, smoking policy for hiring, death benefits, and mandatory seat belt legislation were all topics to be discussed and sought after.

Litigation

A problem the PFFI saw facing locals and its members was the possibility of litigation. Attorney fees and other representation came at a high cost - a cost that some locals or members could not handle on their own.

In 1982 a motion was made to use monies loaned to the Coeur d’Alene Firefighters for battles with the city, and paid back, to set up a Legal Dispute Fund to handle possible upcoming litigation over pension laws, threats of cutbacks and lay offs. A vote was taken and thus the Legal Dispute Fund was formed. This proved useful in the ‘80s with two successful litigations of *Nash .vs. Boise City Fire* and *Deoiner .vs. State of Idaho Public Employee Retirement Board* in which retired firefighters employed prior to July 1, 1978, were not given a 3% limitation on annual COLA’s and where a disabled retired firefighter would not receive a reduced monthly pension based on their number of workman’s comp claims that triggered the retirement.

To this day the PFFI retains an attorney on an ongoing basis to provide legal advice and representation regarding matters of general importance to any of its members.



Business

Throughout the years the PFFI has been established, a primary focus has been to provide the best working environment for not only its members at the state level but also members and other state organizations throughout the nation. This focus now drives a significant portion of PFFI business. Examples of such business are as follows:

- ⇒ A resolution brought to the table at convention in 1983 called for a four dollar donation from all of the members. This resolution came fourth after the International Association of Firefighters tried unsuccessfully at the 36th International Convention for a fifty nine cent increase in per capita from its members thus putting them in serious financial difficulty.
- ⇒ In 1984, a resolution was made and approved to support the Twin Falls firefighters to stop police-fire consolidation.
- ⇒ At an Executive Board meeting held in 1987, a motion was made that the PFFI encourage its members to support the “adopt a child in Afghanistan” program in their communities.
- ⇒ In 1991, a motion was made and passed to send all firefighters in the state that have been reservists and have been called up to serve in “Operation Desert Shield” a letter of support from the PFFI.
- ⇒ In 1995, two members of the PFFI showed support of Seattle Local 27 by attending the funerals of four Seattle brothers killed in the line of duty in the tragic Pang Arson Fire.
- ⇒ In 2002, the PFFI found another valuable way of providing information to its members by establishing the PFFI web-site.
- ⇒ In 2003, the PFFI again showed support outside of its own borders by gifting the Professional Firefighters of Arizona \$1,000 to assist in their own legal battles.

To this day the PFFI continues to fight for its members - whatever be the challenge - and will continue to do so for many years to come. This brief history merely touches the surface of what has been accomplished and can truly only be fully seen by reviewing past documents, articles and meeting minutes. The strength of this organization and its members is what makes Idaho one of the best places to live and work. Thank you for your contributions and continuing to make this state union one of the strongest and most respected in the nation.

