



Alachua County Department of Fire/Rescue Services

Backdraft

A Monthly Newsletter

July/August 2005

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ACFR Firefighters recently participated in the first grueling series of USAR classes offered at the new Florida State Fire College USAR training facility. The new facility provides firefighters with hands-on opportunities to work with highly specialized equipment and to practice shoring, breaching, breaking and cutting techniques in a controlled, safe environment.



Caring People Providing Quality Service

Continuing the Tradition for ACFR

For more than 150 years, bagpipes have been associated with the fire service. As large numbers of Scottish, Irish and Welsh poured into the U.S. in the mid-19th and early 20th centuries, extensive prejudice prevented these new immigrants from finding employment. With families to feed, many of these men became firefighters – a dirty, dangerous job no one else wanted. As the first professional fire departments were established, these Celtic firefighters brought their traditions to the fire service. When firefighters died in the line of duty (a frequent occurrence in the 19th century), bagpipes were played at the funerals. And, a tradition was born.



Carrying on that tradition in our own department is Robin Hendrickson. Robin, who grew up in New York City, became interested in the pipes after seeing them played in the St. Patrick's Day parade on 5th Avenue. Ten years ago, when he felt that he had the proper time and right attitude, he decided to take up the pipes. According to Robin, "Playing the pipes is different from other instruments. It is very difficult and takes a long time to learn how to do it correctly." He added that the learning process is slow and painful and cannot be successful without a lot of commitment concluding that there is no instant gratification in piping.

Recently, Robin was asked to serve as the Florida Fire Chiefs Association pipe line coordinator – a task he takes very seriously. "A skilled and talented pipe

line cannot be pulled together easily, so I help organize pipe lines for performances throughout the state," Robin said. He and several other pipers recently played at the FFCA 48th Annual Meeting and Executive Development Conference in St. Pete Beach. In addition to his work for the FFCA, he also works as the pipe line coordinator for the Florida State Fire College Fallen Firefighter Memorial and has been the festival piper for the Florida Folk Festival for the past five years.

So you've spent nearly a decade learning to play the pipes, but what does it actually take to be a piper? Well, according to Robin, at least five days a week to practice. He usually spends two days a

week playing the big pipes and at least three playing the small pipes which he uses at festivals. He also performs twice a month and still finds time to give piping lessons.

When performing for the fire service pipers wear traditional Scottish dress including a kilt made from the Black Watch tartan. Robin explained that the Black Watch plaid is not associated with an individual Scottish family like other tartans. Instead, the Black Watch is a formal, regimental tartan which makes it ideal for firefighter memorials and ceremonies.

Robin plans to continue playing for a very long time. "There will always be more music than time," he said. We can expect to see him in pipe lines throughout Florida for many years to come.

Public Education Program Recognized for Excellence

At the recent International Association of Fire Chiefs Meeting in Denver, Colo., our Public Education program was recognized for its continued excellence. Out of more than 500 entrants, the ACFR program was one of only seven finalists.

The Fire Service Award for Excellence which is co-sponsored by U.S. Fire Safety Technologies and the IAFC recognizes innovations and achievements in managing resources to reduce the loss of life and property in fire and other emergencies.

According to Shirley Copeland, the Public Education Program Manager, the ACFR program works every year to reach more pre-kindergarten through fifth grade children than the year before; and, given that Shirley sees 15,000 children a year, this is no mean feat. Working in both public and private schools, Shirley strives to reach kids in their formative years. Shirley believes that, "When you reach the child, you reach the family."

Perhaps one of the most innovative aspects of the ACFR program is the large number of strong corporate partnerships Shirley has established over the past eight years



Chief Will May and Shirley Copeland accept recognition of the ACFR Pub Ed Program for innovation and excellence

which enable her to more easily reach a larger number of children, parents and elderly with her public safety messages. These partnerships include Lowes, McDonald's and the Safe Kids Coalition just to name a few.

Through the efforts of people like Shirley Copeland and Melissa Muegge (our Public Education Intern) our Public Education Program is truly one of the best in the nation. The recent recognition in Denver reinforces that our program only grows better with each passing year.



FAEMSE Appoints New President!

Captain Danny Griffin recently became President of the Florida Association of Emergency Medical Service Educators. On July 20th, Captain Griffin succeeded outgoing President and former ACFR employee Geoff Miller from The University of Miami. In addition to serving a 12-month term as President, Danny will also represent the Association as a member of the State of Florida EMS Advisory Council's Subcommittee on Education.



Training Captain Daniel Griffin

After eight years of membership and a three year tenure as the Association Vice President, Danny is enthusiastic about his new role. Although he has been the new president for less than a month, Danny has already begun discussing some of his long-term goals for the Association. Specifically, Danny plans to work toward extending the Association's community outreach by introducing

low-cost continuing EMS education opportunities to emergency personnel in Florida's smaller, more rural counties.

Ultimately, Danny believes that his goals will support and promote FAEMSE's mission to provide resources to individuals and organizations that will foster excellence in EMS education and training.



Special Recruit Felter Graduates

On July 29th, Special Recruit Blake Felter graduated from the Fire College. After successfully meeting the challenges of fire school, Blake will be tackling EMT School this fall with Special Recruits Fritz Bonhomme and Allen Williams.

As paramedics and firefighters, we are routinely confronted with grief. Often it comes from those we serve, but sometimes it is our own. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the grieving process is natural and an important part of the healing process. Bearing this in mind, ACFR Chaplain Van Elmore submitted the following letter for this edition of *Backdraft*.

A Letter from the Chaplain

Simply put, these are trying times - from terrorist bombings and natural disasters to sexual predators stealing the innocence of our children. When you add to this mix the trauma of personal grief that occurs at some point in everyone's life, it is clear to see how easily one can become overwhelmed. In 2004, I learned just how easily this can happen.

On October 12, 1991 I was married to a beautiful woman named Robin Hunter. Robin was a rebellious diabetic and I constantly fussed at her about taking care of her blood sugar. On August 3, 1995 she gave me a handsome son, Dustin, and life was good. However, in the winter of 1998 she stepped on broken Christmas bulb. The wound became infected and things went swiftly downhill. In 2000, her left leg was amputated below the knee and in 2001, she began dialysis. By 2003, Robin's heart was failing. On January 19, 2004, Robin passed away.

After my wife, died I made a decision as department Chaplain to practice what I preached. The Bible counsels us to, "Grieve at the birth of a child and rejoice and the death of a believer," and this is exactly what I did. I refused to grieve, bottling up all of my emotions - only showing joy when the situation warranted.

But I was wrong. In Ecclesiastes 3:1, the Bible also says, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven ...a time to weep, and a time to laugh". I had ignored this scripture and bottled up all of my grief and sadness. Containing volatile emotions like these only led to problems.

I began to vent my grief and frustration on the wonderful people around me. No one was immune as I became increasingly difficult to work with. Eventually, a number of my colleagues approached the company officers and requested that my attitude be adjusted. The ensuing meeting forced me to do some serious soul searching.

I realized that I had become more than difficult. I had become a complete jerk, especially to the caring people who were there for me when Robin died. I then realized that this all stemmed from my failure to grieve. I have since apologized to the many people I knew I had treated badly, but as often happens in such situations, there are likely coworkers who were offended that I remain unaware of. Thus, I ask for everyone's forgiveness and hope that my situation proves just how important it is to let ourselves grieve.

As our department goes through the trying times presented by illness and the loss of loved ones, allow yourself to grieve and always remember that, although I failed to lean on the many people who were there for me, I am available to you at any time.

God bless each of you,

Van Elmore
Chaplain

Bob Emery Retires!



On a recent Friday evening, Bob Emery retired after 20 years with ACFR. Friends, family and coworkers gathered to wish Bob well and say goodbye. It looks as if Bob will be spending his retirement on his new Harley!