

# FIRE FAX

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ISSUE 1

## FROM THE DESK OF



*John Ticer*

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT

As most of you should already know, in February President Kim Shepherd received the distinguished honor of receiving a District Associate judgeship in Clinton County. Because of the new position she needed to resign her position as the president of our association. A board meeting was called shortly thereafter and pursuant to the bi-laws, the board of directors voted to appoint me as president of the association. Dan Roberts was subsequently appointed as 1<sup>st</sup> V.P. and David Miller as 2<sup>nd</sup> V.P.

I had the distinct privilege of working on the association board

with Kim for many years. Kim will be missed, not only for her leadership on the board, but also for all of the things she did to help promote the association and our mission of training. Kim has taught at the two week arson school since 2011, has encouraged other prosecutors to become involved in our association, and has co-taught fire investigation at the annual prosecutor's conference. Any experienced investigator can tell you that it does not matter how good your case is, if you do not have an enthusiastic knowledgeable attorney on your side, your chances of winning a fire case are greatly reduced. While the association will miss Kim, I am very happy for her and cannot think of a better person to be on the bench. I also wanted to take a few minutes to discuss membership. For the past few years membership has gradually declined. I first took notice of this when the insurance industry broke off a segment of those who were members to establish a SIU Association. While fire/arson investigation was important to that group, its membership needed a well-rounded training platform that covers the many

different topics that those individuals work with. That event, combined with retirements within our group, shrinking public sector investigation units, and finally this past year, the COVID cancellation of the two week fire school and association annual conference, have all led to a decrease in membership numbers. The two week school is a "go" this year and we are pushing full steam ahead on the annual conference to be held at the Cedar Rapids Marriott on September 7-9. My hope is that this will get us moving forward and back to growing our numbers. The board has had a long discussion about membership and annual dues. Currently only about half of our members have paid dues for last year (2020). I suspect human nature being what it is, that many simply forgot or do not remember, so they assume they paid. For many who were used to paying dues when they came to conference, the cancellation of last year's conference caused dues to be missed. This is an important issue if you list membership with the Iowa Chapter on your Curriculum Vitae (CV). It has been determined by the board that membership is based upon the chapter's

fiscal year, which runs October 1st through September 30<sup>th</sup>. So, for example, dues paid anytime between October 1, 2020, and September 30, 2021, are for that fiscal year (which encompasses the majority of the 2021 calendar year) unless you state otherwise. For those who have requested invoices and never received one, we discovered during the transition to a new website platform, that our Secretary/Treasurer was not getting emails. That issue has been fixed and we are currently working through a backlog of emails reference membership. If you have questions concerning your membership status you can send an email to Secretary/Treasurer Mark Dooley or make sure to talk to Mark at this year's conference registration table.

Lastly, I feel the need to mention the horrible event involving the death of Iowa State Trooper Sgt. Jim Smith, who was shot and killed during an incident involving a barricaded subject in Grundy County. Jim's wife, Kathy, his son, Zander, and his daughter, Jazlyn, his friends and his community need our prayers. This incident again shines the light on how dangerous our profession can be. This is not simply limited to our law enforcement. Some days, we all deal with bad people. It may be at school, the shopping center or the grocery store. The next fire you investigate may involve desperate or unstable individual(s). Be careful out there and may God watch over you and keep you safe.

## FROM THE DESK OF



*Dave Miller*

2<sup>ND</sup> VICE PRESIDENT/  
DIRECTOR OF INSURANCE

Hello, I hope everyone is having a good spring. If the past year has taught me one thing, it is to try and plan for the unexpected.

We are discovering the need for proper succession planning within the Iowa Chapter. We are fortunate to have a rich, well of tenured, chapter experience in our current leaders and directors, as they have been involved with chapter business for several years. This experience adds value to our organization, and most recently, enabled a seamless transition to John Ticer as our President.

This concept of building and leveraging experience should be used in our professional life as well. A critical driver to building this experience is actively bringing new people into our profession and our organizations. Doing so drives education, introduces new individuals into our specific processes, allows for new and shared experiences, and helps us all hone our skills. In short – it ensures our industry will continue to advance and grow.

Succession planning is also a way to recognize the need for new investigators in the industry and target key growth that may be needed. In my professional life, as a manager/director, we discuss annually the professional development and readiness of our investigators; what they want out of their careers and what we can do to help them grow. You might ask, “Why do I need to worry about this?” Consider the impact of not having qualified investigative teams. What would happen if we did not have qualified investigators to conduct investigations?

What would happen if your agency/company could not conduct investigations? Planning for the future is critical in our line of business. Investigators are not trained overnight. It takes time, commitment, and a willingness to share our knowledge. Whether you are a leader/supervisor or an unofficial leader, we all have an obligation to identify individuals that want to investigate fire and are willing to learn. We should welcome and support them in learning our profession.

I have been in the insurance investigation field for almost 31 years and a supervisor/leader for approximately 25 years. My own experience has spanned a wide scope of managerial techniques and processes. Early in my career, I was very bullish and domineering with my management style. As an owner and manager, I didn't think to educate and encourage the people who worked with me. I was scared and did not have the confidence to understand the process. Through trial and error (many of them), I learned that instead of simply having a staff that

would take orders or do the job, I would rather have an entire staff that could potentially run the business/department, if needed. This attitude runs deep in our department today. I feel we have an excellent training process with a key focus on development, deliberate staff planning and we certainly have very low turnover. We continue to push our team to educate themselves, to stay actively engaged in their careers, and to share their knowledge with others.

How does this translate to the Iowa Chapter of the IAAI? Hopefully, through leading by example. Our department has investigators scattered throughout the Midwest, with several of them serving in chapter leadership and one serving in our international leadership. By supporting active involvement in our organization, we encourage investigators to take ownership for their own development and we continue to develop and share our expertise with others. If your department(s) have individuals interested in fire investigations, encourage them to join our organization, encourage them to learn the proper techniques, encourage them to take the online and in-person education that is offered, and encourage those who are already active to bring others along. As a group, we need to strive to become better leaders and attract new members.

#### FROM THE DESK OF



*Chris Van Vleet*

IAAI-2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President  
Iowa Chapter-Past President/Life Member

Just a short note to update everyone about what is going on at the International. As everyone probably knows, this year's International Training Conference in Atlantic City was canceled. The International was moving full speed ahead, but due to continuing COVID issues in New Jersey, we were forced to cancel. The venue was not able to host our conference due to New Jersey restrictions regarding the number of people that could gather in one room. We were still able to hold our Annual General Meeting on Tuesday, April 20, 2021, which was live streamed for those that signed up. Our next Annual Training Conference will be held in Jacksonville, FL. April 10 -15, 2022. It will be great to have an in-person conference again and I hope to see some of you in Jacksonville!

I am also on the CFITrainer Committee and we continue to work on bringing you new modules on current and relevant topics. CFITrainer is funded through the

FEMA Assistance to Fire Fighters Grant. Unfortunately, we did not receive the grant this year. We have already submitted our application for the next cycle, and we hope to hear soon if we will be awarded a grant this year. The grants allow us to provide CFITrainer module training free of charge. If we go without receiving a grant for two years in a row, the Board may need to look at other options to fund the platform. This is work in progress and hopefully we will not have to worry about it. More to follow depending on the outcome of our grant application.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone for their support and vote in my campaign for IAAI 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President. It is an honor to represent the Iowa Chapter as a member of the Executive Team and I encourage anyone with ideas or concerns to reach out to me.

Hopefully Iowa remains open, and we can meet in Cedar Rapids for the Iowa Training Conference this September. I look forward to seeing everyone then! Stay safe and healthy!





**Iowa IAAI  
Fire Investigation  
SEMINAR &  
Annual Meeting  
September 7-9, 2021  
CEDAR RAPIDS MARRIOTT**

## IN MEMORIAM



**1934 - 2021**

Donald "Ben" Cypher, 86, of Saxonburg, has answered his last Alarm and Roll Call on May 6,

2021. Ben was born October 31, 1934, in Marwood, PA. He was the son of McCurdy Cypher and Pearl V. Knoch.

Ben proudly served his country in the US Marine Corps in Korea from 1953-1956.

Ben was President and Chief Investigator, Donald B. Cypher and Associates, Inc, Fire Cause and Origin Investigations, which he started in 1976.

He was a member of St. Francis of Assisi Parish (St. Joseph Church) in Cabot. He was a life member of the Marine Corps League Bantam Detachment #743 and served as Commandant from 2015-2017. He was a 65 year member of the Saxonburg Volunteer Fire Department, having served many positions including Ladder Captain and Chief. He was active as a firefighter for 62 years until his health issues required his retirement from active firefighting.

He was Past President and Life Member of the International Association of Arson Investigators. He was a speaker at the Iowa Chapter IAAI, as well as many chapters throughout the world.

In 1968, Ben became the first State Master Fire Instructor in Butler County and taught all phases of firefighting and fire investigation. He became the first Chief of the Butler County Community College Fire Training Facility in 2002. In 2015, he was honored by being named as the Butler County Veteran of the year. He volunteered at the Butler VA for many years.

Surviving are his wife, Mary Lou (Carbin) Cypher, whom he married June 27, 1981, his children, Donald (Gayle) Cypher of Owls Head, NY, Douglas (Margaret) Cypher of Carlsbad, CA, Danielle (David) Vaughan of Butler, Dayne (Kelli) Cypher of Sarver, and Benjamin (Melissa) Cypher of Alta Loma, CA, 9 grandchildren, Heather (Jeff) Schultz, Jeremy (Jessica) Cypher, Garrett Cypher, Leah (Sean) McQuillan, Marc Vaughan, Tori Vaughan, Rylee, Regan and Remington Cypher, 5 great-grandchildren, Hayden, Jillian, Jackson, Cameron and Grayson, and a great-granddaughter on the way.

He is preceded in death by his parents, two brothers, Raymond and Charles Cypher, and his first wife, Jacqueline Lefevre Cypher.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on Tuesday, May 11, 2021, 10:00 am at the St. Francis of Assisi Parish (St. Joseph Church), with Fr. Ward Stakem officiating.

Interment will be at the National Cemetery of the Alleghenies.

Memorial donations may be made to the Marine Corps League PO Box 511 Lyndora, Pa 16045 or the Saxonburg Volunteer Fire Co. 210 Horne Ave. Saxonburg, PA 16056.

### RECALLS

Product recalls  
(<https://www.cpsc.gov/Recalls>)  
and Underwriter Laboratories  
(<https://www.ul.com/>). Please refer to these site for up to date recall notices.

*The opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the IAAI or the Iowa Chapter IAAI.*

**Contact information:**

**David Miller**

**Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance Company**

**4215 HWY 146**

**Grinnell, IA 50112**

**800-362-2041 ext. 8265**

**[David.Miller@GrinnellMutual.com](mailto:David.Miller@GrinnellMutual.com)**

**This edition of Firefox was presented by  
David Miller, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President**

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