

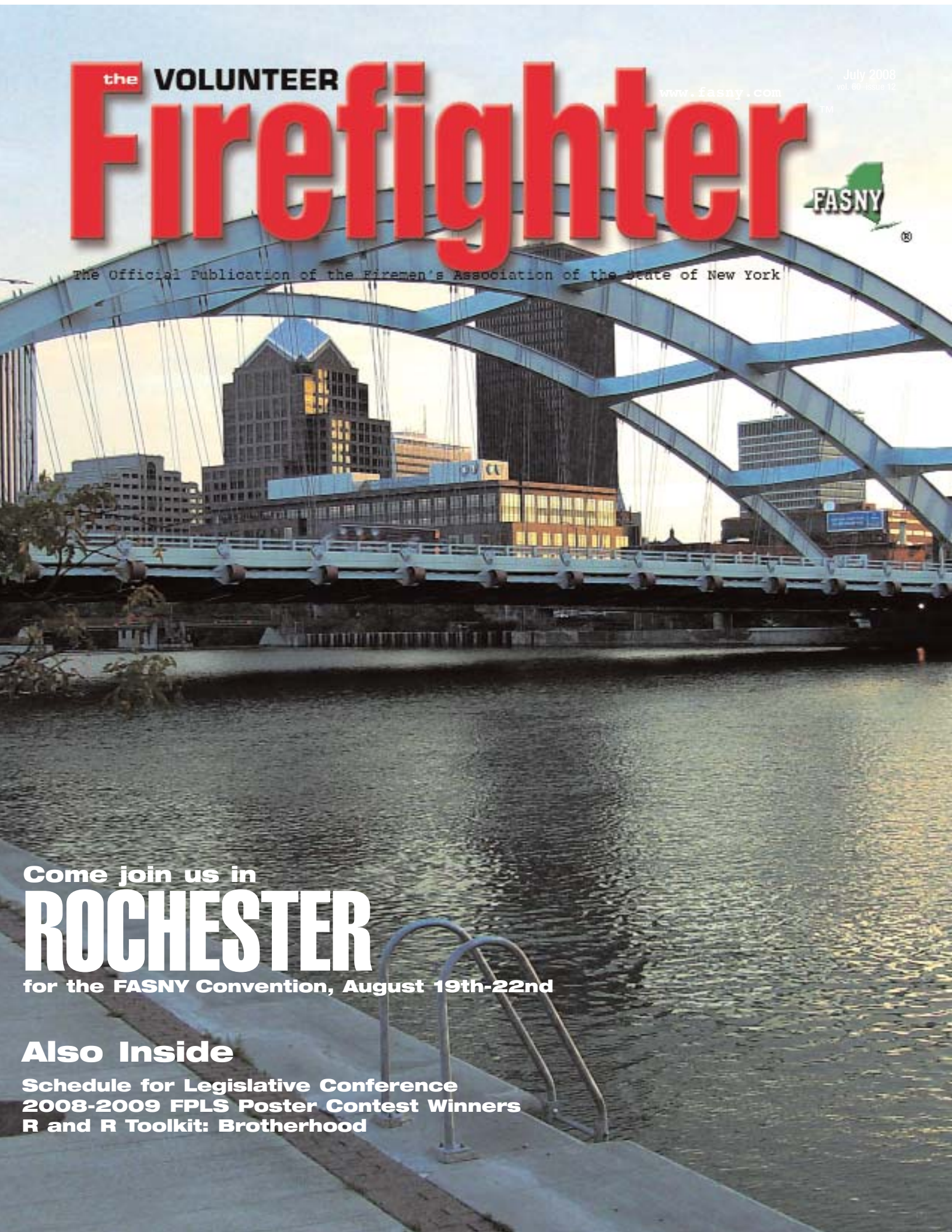
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ROCHESTER

for the FASNY Convention, August 19th-22nd

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Evans Center Chief Dennis Allen demonstrates real brotherhood. He recently received a double-lung transplant and now he needs our help.

Recruitment and Retention Toolkit: Brotherhood

By Tiger Schmittendorf

This article is one in a series of toolkits focusing on recruitment, retention, fire service marketing and leadership.

Last month I said we'd take the summer off from talking about clearinghouses and trench work to focus on some other aspects of the fire service as they relate to recruitment and retention.

So, I decided we'd talk about an often mentioned but rarely explored principle of the fire service: Brotherhood. For the purposes of this article, the term "brotherhood" is gender-generic, so I hope the feminist revolution doesn't show up at my doorstep any time soon.

Already you might be asking yourself what brotherhood has to do with recruitment and retention. But think about it. What is one of the greatest if not somewhat intangible assets we have to offer someone thinking about joining our ranks? That's right; it's the real brotherhood of the fire service.

Brotherhood is defined as the quality of being brotherly; fellowship; or refers to all those engaged in a particular trade or profession or sharing a common interest or quality.

Could that describe the fire service? Sure it could. Does that adequately describe "brotherhood" as it pertains to the fire service? I don't think so. I don't think it begins to do it justice.

Chief Rick Lasky discusses brotherhood at length in his book titled: "Pride and Ownership: A Firefighter's Love of the Job." If you don't have the book or the DVD of his same titled presentation, you need to get them.

In discussing honor, pride and integrity; Chief Lasky says that "Honor is the brotherhood. To me the brotherhood means more than just a sticker on the windshield of your car. It means that when your kids are sick we help out. That when you're having a tough time on your bills, we chip in. That when you need to move into your new house, we move you, and when that new house needs a new roof, we tear off the old one

and re-roof it. It also means that I would lie next to you and burn the ears off my head before I would ever leave you in a burning building."

Now that's brotherhood. Have you ever experienced brotherhood like that in the fire service? I have – on more occasions than I can recall.

My most recent experience of being on the receiving end occurred in May at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. I was there as part of a small group of firefighters from across the country selected to teach a new Safety Through Leadership course created by the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation and the "Everyone Goes Home" program.

To make a long story as short as possible, I went to dinner one evening in nearby Gettysburg with eight of my classmates – essentially a group of strangers from California to Philly who had just met the day before. We had a blast.

Unfortunately, I'd been experiencing difficulty taking a deep breath all day due to a sharp pain in my ribs. After dinner, we went to tour the battlefields and returned to Emmitsburg about 10pm. By then the pain was so bad that I couldn't take it any more. I just couldn't catch my breath.

Standing on the front pad of the Emmitsburg Volunteer Fire Department, my newly acquainted friends dialed 911 and summoned an ambulance for me. Qualified and caring members of the Emmitsburg Volunteer Ambulance Corps and a paramedic from Frederick County Fire-Rescue arrived quickly and rendered excellent care. They took me to the nearest hospital back in Gettysburg where they started an extensive work-up to determine the cause of my pain. By now I was in real distress.

About a half-hour went by when I realized that I was in a possible jam. I thought to myself, "This is great. I'm in

Gettysburg. All the other guys are in Emmitsburg and they have my rental car. I don't have any of their cell phone numbers and I'd be hard pressed at this point to remember any of their last names. How am I going to get back to the fire academy?" I wondered. This could get interesting.

Not too long after that a nurse walked into my room to tell me that there were eight firefighters waiting for me in the waiting room. I smiled, but inside I wasn't really surprised. After all, this was the fire service. The phrases "You go, we go." and "No man gets left behind." went through my head.

She told me that she could only send in two at a time and asked me which two I wanted to see. I replied with, "Whichever two aren't going to make me laugh." Needless to say, she sent in the wrong two (not that there were a "right" two in that bunch.) They easily doubled my pain.

According to reliable sources, the rest of the group kept everyone in the waiting room entertained, just as you'd expect any group of good-natured firefighters might do. So an X-ray, CT scan and a few pain killers later; the doctor sent me on my way with the diagnosis that I might have pneumonia, despite not having a single other associated symptom.

Not surprisingly, those eight firefighters, strangers yesterday and brothers today; stayed with me until I was discharged around 3am and drove me back to the NFA.

That's real brotherhood. That's the instant connection that comes with the title firefighter. That's the bond that's tough to explain and that you couldn't possibly put a price on. It's the envy of every other business. I can't say enough about the true brotherhood that was demonstrated to me by the entire class and instructors, especially by Greg Collier, Henry Costo, Ron Dennis, Don Dominick, Billy Hayes, Andy Smith, Mike Teague, and Corey Yankovich for

showing up at the emergency room and to Diane Matsumoto for driving me to the airport the following day, despite my drug-induced attempt at giving directions. I sent a special thank you to my brothers (and sisters) in the Emmitsburg Volunteer Ambulance Corps and Frederick County Fire-Rescue for taking such good care of me.

The fact is, a lot of firefighters preach brotherhood, but how many really practice it?

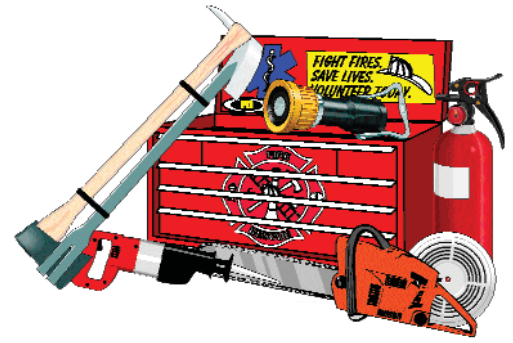
"I define brotherhood as the fact that no matter what patch we wear on our left sleeve – what's important is that we all wear the same red, white and blue patch on our right sleeve – the one with the stars and stripes on it.

Unfortunately, I see a lot of today's firefighters who throw around the word "brotherhood" like it were candy that anyone can enjoy. Their brotherhood is not real brotherhood.

Their brotherhood is fashionable, trendy. Their brotherhood stops at the engine room doors. It's a hollow hand shake or a one-armed hug or a pat on the back – and if you're not careful, their so-called "brotherhood" could end up stuck in your back, or somewhere else.

The extent of their brotherhood is just a bold-lettered phrase on a T-shirt, a word that rolls off their tongue as easily as a profanity, or something they wait until it's too late to demonstrate – when their flag draped brother makes his final ride on the engine.

Early on in my "adult childhood" (which is the technical term for the phase of life I've been practicing for the last 25 years,) I was blessed to be surrounded by a great group of firefighters who practiced real brotherhood. Of course, back then, we didn't talk about brotherhood (*that wasn't cool*) – we just



practiced it.

Our friendships – our brotherhood, extended well beyond the firehouse and into our personal lives. I'm proud to say that those same friendships stand steadfast today.

One long lasting friendship I cherish is with our Past Chief Dennis Allen. I've known Denny since I joined the fire department almost 28 years ago.

There are certain people in your life who are always in need of something – while others are always there when you need them. My friend Denny Allen is always there when you need him.

Dennis is never one to shy away from tough situations or hard decisions. He's always in the thick of it on an EMS call and has a long-standing reputation for being a sure-shot at starting IVs – a practice that earned him the nickname "Needles" many years ago. He's always calm, cool and collected under pressure. Nothing shakes him in an emergency. He's a real leader. There's no telling how many lives he has saved.

Dennis responded twice to Ground Zero following the attacks of September 11, 2001, providing EMS support to the first responders working the pile and covering calls for the FDNY while they tended to their lost brothers and each other.

Dennis demonstrates the unique ability to effectively balance family, work, play and fire department activities. I envy him for that.

Continues On Next Page

Three of the reasons he is so successful are his dedicated wife and best friend Marlene, a long standing and active member of our fire company's ladies auxiliary; and his grown sons Scott and Marcus. Both of them are Eagle Scouts just like their dad.

Always putting his family first, Dennis instilled his core values of community service in each of them, involving them in everything he did and being involved in everything they participated in.

He knows the true meaning of brotherhood. He is the kind of guy who is always there to lend a helping hand. He's a loyal friend who has your back when you need him to.

Now it's payback time for Denny Allen. Dennis was diagnosed in 2005 with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a fatal disease that attacks the lungs and diminishes breathing capacity. I'm pretty sure "idiopathic" is Latin for "the doctor's don't have a clue as to what causes it."

Nonetheless, I can't tell you how happy I am to report that Dennis just received a just-in-the-nick-of-time double lung transplant at the Cleveland Clinic on July 2, 2008. We anticipate that tens of thousands of dollars will be needed to cover non-reimbursed medical and living expenses and the loss of income as he and Marlene must re-locate to the Cleveland area for at least three months following the surgery.

A celebration benefit honoring Denny Allen is planned for September 6, 2008 at the Evans Center Volunteer Fire Company. One of the feature activities of the day will be a live auction of firefighter artwork and memorabilia. It's going to be a lot of fun!

I hope you help us put brotherhood in action. I hope you can join us in honoring this father, friend and firefighter who has unselfishly dedicated himself to serving his fire company and his fellow man. Keep him and his family in your thoughts and prayers and hope that he fully recovers from the transplant to continue his life of service.

I'm personally asking each and every one of you that if you do nothing else,

please visit www.DennisAllenProject.com or www.firefighternation.com/profile/DennyAllen and leave words of encouragement for Dennis as he recovers from this

"I encourage you to exercise every opportunity to celebrate your friendships and work diligently to maintain the life-long bonds that make real brotherhood the fabric of the fire service, for the fire service is the fabric of what's right about America."

life-saving surgery. If you find it in your heart to help make his life more comfortable, then I thank you in advance.

Many people are consumers and some are contributors. Denny Allen is a contributor. I hope you'll consider contributing to saving the life of our brother firefighter Dennis Allen.

Real brothers take care of each other in the good times and the bad. We succeed together and sometimes we fail together. The key word is: together.

We're brothers through thick and thin – not just when it's popular or convenient.

Inasmuch as I'm sitting here writing this on the Fourth of July, I think it's only appropriate that I share my personal definition of brotherhood:

It's the fact that no matter what patch we wear on our left sleeve – what's important is that we all wear the same red, white and blue patch on our right sleeve – the one with the stars and stripes on it.

That's the beauty of the fire service. That's the real brotherhood and sisterhood that brings us together – and keeps us together.

I encourage you to exercise every opportunity to celebrate your friendships and work diligently to maintain the life-long bonds that make real brotherhood the fabric of the fire service, for the fire

service is the fabric of what's right about America.

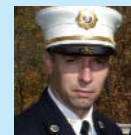
Brotherhood takes commitment. Brotherhood takes practice.

With real brotherhood, we can accomplish much and overcome anything.

Imagine the possibilities.

If you've ever been on the giving or receiving end of real brotherhood in the fire service, visit my blog at www.firefighternation.com/profile/tiger5 or drop me an e-mail at tiger5@firehousezone.com. I'd love to hear your experiences.

Until next time... "Stay safe. Train often."



Tiger Schmittendorf is a proud FASNY member and serves the County of Erie Department of Emergency Services (Buffalo NY) as

Deputy Fire Coordinator. He created a recruitment effort that doubled his own fire department's membership and helped net 525+ new volunteers countywide. He is a Nationally Certified Fire Instructor and has been a firefighter since 1980.

Schmittendorf can be reached by e-mail at tiger5@firehousezone.com or visit his blog at: www.firefighternation.com/profile/tiger5.

Tiger Schmittendorf will present: "Leadership in the Firehouse: Recruitment & Retention – Rescue & Recovery Operations" at the FASNY Legislative Conference in Albany, NY on October 25, 2008.