



**FIRE  
SERVICE  
WOMEN OF  
VISION AND  
LEADERSHIP**



**COURAGEOUS  
WOMEN WHO  
STEPPED  
FORWARD TO  
MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE.**

Each day, throughout the month of March 2021, I have featured on Facebook a total of 31 exceptional women in the fire and emergency services field in recognition of this 2021 Women's History Month. My purpose was to commemorate, encourage, and celebrate the vital roles of these women in both the fire service and American history. I would like to acknowledge and congratulate not only those I profiled, but also the many thousands of women in the fire service that I didn't individually feature.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) estimates there were a combined 1,115,000 career and volunteer firefighters in the United States in 2018. Of this total number of firefighters, 370,000 (33%) were career firefighters and 745,000 (67%) were volunteer firefighters. Also, in 2018, a total of 93,700 of these firefighters were women (15,200 career and 78,500 volunteers). Data identifying the significant number of women who work in the fire service but in positions other than sworn members is not available. It's important to note that fire service women have faced difficult challenges and obstacles along their way, and in some cases, still do. Bottom line, there is a great deal of work left to be done in recruiting, managing, and retaining women in fire departments and throughout the industry as a whole. The fire service is better for having women within our ranks and in various roles, and their leadership and representation is vital to our continued success and improvement.

I really only had two reasons for doing this project. First, I believe that the history and levels of leadership provided by women in all aspects of the fire and emergency service community is substantial and deserves public recognition. Secondly, I hope young girls and women somehow gain access to these profiles, and as a result, become interested in pursuing the fire service as a career. The many responses I've received, and the hundreds of comments the women themselves have received, have been nothing short of amazing!

The most common comment to me from both inside and outside of the fire service is that people had no idea that women played such critical leadership roles at the local, state, and national levels of the fire and emergency service. It leads me to believe that fire service leaders (men and women) need to do a much better job of communicating those facts. However, the feedback I've appreciated most has come from the featured women themselves. They sincerely enjoyed not only their own profile, but those of their colleagues as well. I could not ask for more gratification for my work.

Imagel'm glad this project was well received. It has been an honor for me to showcase these terrific leaders and role models for all to learn about. I wish all women who choose a career in any aspect of the fire service community only the best. And please be SAFE!

**DENNIS COMPTON**

**AUTHOR**



## Joanne R. Rund



Today, I am pleased to recognize another extremely successful woman from the fire service during 2021 Women's' History Month. Fire Chief Joanne R. Rund became the fire chief of the Baltimore County (Maryland) Fire Department (BCoFD) in 2019. When she accepted this position, she became the first permanently appointed woman fire chief in the history of the department. Baltimore County is a large combination fire department with approximately 2,000 sworn, volunteer, and civilian personnel who provide service from 25 career and 29 volunteer fire companies. Chief Rund's story of leadership and exceptional contributions to fire and emergency service began long before joining the BCoFD. Joanne started her career in 1993 as a volunteer EMS provider in Carroll County, Maryland. This was followed a short time later by a move to the Howard County (Maryland) Department of Fire and Rescue Services (HCDFRS) where she served for 32 years. Joanne rose through the ranks of HCDFRS to lead several major areas of the organization including operations, administrative services, and education & training. Chief Rund is a firm believer in creating a culture that is inclusive, healthy, safe, and values mutual respect and teamwork.

She not only has this vision for the other members of her department, but she sets the example herself every day in all she does. Joanne holds numerous certifications in the field of health and safety and is proud to be a Level 4 Certified Command Officer. She is also a certified instructor, which she achieved in 1993. Joanne holds the National Fire Academy's Advanced Safety Officer Program certification and is an associate faculty member at the University of Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI). She is active in the Maryland fire service and at the national level as well. I can tell you firsthand that it has been a godsend to have Joanne generously share her strong leadership, management, and interpersonal skills with the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF). Her involvement with the NFFF goes back years. In 2014, she was named the Region III Everyone Goes Home Advocate Coordinator and she remains committed as a leader and instructor dedicated to reducing firefighter line-of-duty deaths throughout the United States. Chief Rund is an active member of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) having served on many committees and positions – including that of director-at-large with the Safety, Health and Survival Section. In 2018, Joanne was selected to take part in the prestigious IAFC Fire Service Executive Development Institute Program. She is most often described by those closest to her as incredibly smart, an excellent leader, and one of the most kind and patient people you will ever know. I see her the same way but would add humble to that description. Fire Chief Joanne Rund has everything in the world to be proud of, and to top it off, she willingly and openly serves as a mentor to others who are at various points in their careers. The fire service is fortunate to have Chief Rund among us – and I am proud to profile my friend during this Women's History Month for her outstanding leadership and contributions.

## Patricia Mieszala



Patricia Mieszala took a path to the fire service that actually became a second career – and I am going to profile her unique contributions today in celebration of this 2021 Women’s History Month. For ten years (1971-1981), Pat was a Psychiatric Burn Nurse Clinician at the Cook County Hospital’s Sumner L. Koch Burn Center in Chicago, Illinois. It was during that time when Pat and I first met and developed a friendship that has lasted to this day. She served on the American Burn Association (ABA) Board of Directors beginning in the late 1970s and was instrumental in moving the organization’s leadership to include prevention as part of their mission. Pat Mieszala is internationally recognized for her work to reduce burn injuries and juvenile-related fires through public awareness, education, and intervention programs – and she continues to offer her expertise in those areas and others. Throughout her more than forty-year career, she has remained passionate about improving methods to identify and treat youth who set fires. As president and founder of Burn Concerns National Consulting and Educational Services, she provides training to fire and life-safety educators to develop, improve, and evaluate their outreach and community education programs.



Pat is a recognized expert in bringing together coalitions of professionals in all fifty states and Canada who represent the fire service, mental health, law enforcement, burn unit staff, other medical staff, and the field of education to identify, treat, and intervene in the especially challenging area of juvenile fire setting. She has worked in concert with the United States Fire Administration (USFA), the International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA), the National Fire Academy (NFA), the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), and a host of other organizations to further the impact of her expertise and initiatives. Pat served on the NFPA Education Section Board for twenty years and was an NFPA public Education Advisor for thirty-two years – six of which were as a Lead Public Education Advisor. During her career, she has been instrumental in Learn Not to Burn, Risk Watch, Fire Prevention Week and many other NFPA-led endeavors and programs. Her leadership has benefited the fire service and public safety in so many ways, and her intellectual leadership is a treasure. Most recently, Pat has been involved on the steering committee for Vision 20/20's National Strategy for Loss Prevention, as well as serving as a technical advisor for the Community Risk Reduction (CRR) curriculum content and education components. With all of this said, there can be no doubt why Pat Mieszala remains one of the principal leaders in the field of fire and life-safety education and possesses the technical expertise and institutional memory to continue to make the fire service more effective in these life-saving endeavors. Pat has been recognized for her work in many ways, including as the recipient of the 2009 Dr. Anne W. Phillips Award for Leadership in Fire Safety Education at the national level. She is one of those people that brings so much to the table that if you are fortunate enough to have her involved in one of your programs or planning processes, you have secured one of the best possible participants available. Pat is not only smart as a whip, but she can lead or follow as necessary, understands processes, is a great facilitator, and knows how to get things done. I treasure her friendship...and it is truly an honor for me to recognize Pat Mieszala and her leadership and contributions to the fire service during this Women's History Month.

**Comments from Readers of the March 2021  
Women's History Month Features  
that Highlighted Women from  
the Fire and Emergency Services**

"I'm glad the glass ceiling has been shattered! All of the women featured were great and there are many others doing great things for the fire service."

"Looked forward to each day's feature. Hearts are encouraged with so much good happening in the transforming fire service."

I have gained new appreciation for the roles that women play in the fire service.

"We males often fail to recognize the leadership provided by women in the fire service. The features this month shined a spotlight on women that have led and continue to lead this nation's fire service – both paid and volunteer."

## Angela Hughes



Angela “Angie” Hughes began her fire service career with her local volunteer fire department while she was still in high school. During the time that she was completing her EMT class, Angie witnessed and rendered aid at the scene of the Chase Amtrak Accident that occurred in 1987 in eastern Baltimore County, Maryland. The tragedy left sixteen people dead and many others injured. For her heroic actions as a volunteer who just happened to be first on the scene that day, she was later awarded congressional recognition – as well as receiving an invitation to visit the White House. That was one heck of a start to any fire service career, and she didn’t look back. I’ve chosen to highlight her career today as part of this 2021 Women’s History Month. Angie began her paid career as a paramedic with the Baltimore City (Maryland) Fire Department in 1989. After serving three years in that position, she was hired as a paramedic and firefighter in the Baltimore County (Maryland) Fire Department in 1992. Angie promoted to a lieutenant in 2012, and then to captain in 2015. In addition to her many years of service in fire stations, she also gained experience as a fire marshal in fire prevention. But Angie did some other things in her career that have been of

significant benefit to women firefighters throughout Maryland and the country. More accurately, probably of benefit to all firefighters – men and women. It began when she co-founded Baltimore County Women in the Fire Service. Guided by Angie's leadership and efforts, this group became an effective tool for supporting and coaching women as they entered the fire service and progressed through their careers. Angie later became increasingly involved as a leader in the International Association of Women in Fire and Emergency Services (iWomen). Her years of involvement with iWomen, and the strong leadership abilities she brought to whatever role she sought and accepted, made Captain Angela Hughes well suited to become the President of iWomen in 2015. This provided Angie with an international platform to work from in her unyielding efforts to recruit women into the fire and emergency service, and just as importantly, remove obstacles and help them succeed. In this role, she elevated not only the organization but was an advocate for women in all things related to their fire service careers. Captain Hughes was, for years, a featured speaker at conferences, authored a wide range of articles relating to women and the challenges they face, and served on many committees within the fire and emergency service community. One of her greatest opportunities was being invited to deliver the keynote address at the 2017 Fire Department Instructors Conference (FDIC) in Indianapolis, Indiana. Her message was excellent and resonated loud and clear through the thousands of fire service members (mostly men) who were in the audience that day. Angie retired from the Baltimore County Fire Department in 2019, the same year that her term as President of iWomen was completed. It would be difficult to know Angie as a friend and colleague and not want to brag about her selfless leadership and contributions to women in the fire service. So, I am thrilled to do just that today. She is an exceptional person with a deep love for her family. It is an honor to recognize the personal and professional accomplishments of Fire Captain Angela Hughes during this Women's History Month!

## **Comments from Readers of the March 2021 Women's History Month Features that Highlighted Women from the Fire and Emergency Services**

“I hope these features land in a place where young girls will see them as well as the general public.”

“Hopefully, young women who see these features will be inspired to become active members of the fire service family.”

“Each day's feature was a great read. I was fortunate to know a handful of them and all are great women. With a wife and two daughters, it is important that everyone is aware of amazing women everywhere, in all walks of life, including firefighters.”

“I hope there is a website or repository for all of these features. That way, people will have an opportunity to see them as a historical marker going forward.”

## Pam Powell



Let's go back in time to capture the initial, and then ongoing work, of the fire service woman I am profiling today during this 2021 Women's History Month. We're going to October of 1974 when the National Fire Prevention and Control Administration (NFPCA) was established. Pamela "Pam" Powell was an early pioneer of fire prevention public education at the national level – working as a staff member at the NFPCA. Within local level fire departments and the state-level fire marshal offices, it would be an understatement to say that public fire prevention education was largely a well-kept secret and existed essentially in isolation – if at all. Beginning in 1974, to boost and support the local and state public educators that were in existence at the time, Pam was instrumental in delivering national fire safety education conferences in an effort to build a network of fire safety educators from states and local jurisdictions. This was occurring on the heels of the groundbreaking 1973 National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control Report titled America Burning. In the Appendix of America Burning was a minority report written by Dr. Anne W. Phillips that challenged what she thought was the minimal level of attention given to prevention and education in the main body of the report itself. One of the critical accomplishments of Pam Powell while at the NFPCA was bringing Dr. Phillips' minority report to reality. The fire prevention and education conferences Pam led became a model for states

to follow when creating their own conferences. Her work was guided by Dr. Anne Phillips' vision of fire prevention and public education as critical and equal parts of managing community risk. As part of the legacy Pam has left, it is important to mention that more than 45 years later, state fire and life-safety education conferences continue to occur throughout the nation. In 1977, Pam produced the hallmark fire prevention education document titled, "Public Fire Education Planning: A Five-Step Process." As the NFPCA later became the United States Fire Administration (USFA), Pam's collaborative efforts continued to improve the fire and life-safety profile of the nation as a whole. After leaving the USFA, she divided her career between fire and life-safety education, technical writing, and editorial management. Pam was the editor of the first fire and life-safety education section of the "Fire Protection Handbook", and she was the first Executive Director of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) "Learn Not to Burn Foundation." Pam later authored the International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA) book titled, Fire and Life Safety Educator, 2nd Edition – and she is a nationally certified fire and life-safety educator. It's only fitting that Pam Powell was the 2015 recipient of the national Dr. Anne Phillips Award for Leadership in Fire Safety Education presented by the Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI) and IFSTA. If the fire service had a superman-style Clark Kent, who was instead a woman, I think she would be named Pam Powell. Pam is a quiet and mild-mannered leader, educator, writer, and collaborator who flies (albeit on airplanes) to places where she can utilize her superhero powers to protect the lives of others in any way she can. Although mostly retired, Pam continues to lend her leadership, knowledge, and skills to the causes she is closest to. Pam is a good friend whom I have worked with many times over the years. I admire Pam Powell, so it is truly an honor for me to profile this incredible woman of the fire service during Women's History Month.

## Dr. Sara Jahnke / Dr. Denise Smith

Fire service-related research has been a major area of focus and has gained momentum - especially in the past decade or so. Today, I'm going to highlight two incredible women who have made significant contributions to the health, safety, and well-being of firefighters through research. A couple of the reasons I have chosen Dr. Sara Jahnke and Dr. Denise Smith to profile during this 2021 Women's History Month, is that I have worked with both of them in various capacities, with multiple organizations, and on several different issues. Both of these outstanding professionals are also past recipients of the prestigious Dr. John Granito Award for Excellence in Fire Leadership and Management Research presented by the International Fire Service Training Association – Fire Protection Publications – and Oklahoma State University.





They also have been published many times in the International Fire Service Journal of Leadership and Management (IFSJLM). DR. DENISE SMITH is Professor of Exercise Science at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York, and a Research Scientist at the University of Illinois Fire Service Institute. She earned her Ph.D. in Kinesiology with a specialization in Exercise Physiology from the University of Illinois. Much of her fire service-related research has focused on physiological effects of firefighting, particularly the cardiovascular strain associated with the combination of heavy physical work, heat stress, and the psychological stress that firefighters routinely encounter. Her more recent work has paid particular attention to the role of firefighting in altering blood clotting potential because this may be the mechanism by which firefighting triggers sudden cardiac events. DR. SARA JAHNKE comes from a fire service family. Her father, Fire Chief Bill Jahnke, is retired from the Overland Park (Kansas) Fire Department. Sara is the Director of the Center for Fire, Rescue, and EMS Health Research at the National Development and Research Institute – a nonprofit research firm. She earned her Ph.D. in Psychology with a Health Emphasis at the University of Missouri - Kansas City, and the American Heart Association's Fellowship on Epidemiology and Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease. Sara is recognized as an expert in Health Behavior Research, Qualitative Methodology, and Epidemiology. Some of her more recent fire service-related work has focused on the evaluation of several national programs such as "Stress First Aid" intervention, "The First Twenty" wellness program, and the ongoing study of the health of women firefighters. Both Denise and Sara have been connected to the issues of firefighter behavioral health and occupational cancer. Like a lot of research, much of their fire service-related work would not have been possible without grant funding – including the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program under Research and Development. Let me try to capsulize some of the critical importance of their work in a very straightforward way.

Common causes of firefighter on-duty and line-of-duty deaths include heart attacks and occupational cancer. The work of Denise and Sara (and others) focuses on reducing the risk to firefighters by minimizing the impact of these factors on the safety, wellness, and the survival of firefighters. Better personal protective equipment, improved deployment models, better medical monitoring, enhanced training, and more informed decision-making on the part of fire officers and incident commanders are but some of the direct benefits of their research and findings. The research they have already done, and will continue to conduct, is making the fire service smarter, safer, and more capable of leading and managing the challenges we face - sometimes whether we like it or not! I truly value my friendships with these two incredibly talented fire service women, and I've learned so much from them. I'm proud to recognize them both during Women's History Month for their leadership, the effort they put forth, the value of their work, and their commitment to guiding us all.

## **Comments from Readers of the March 2021 Women's History Month Features that Highlighted Women from the Fire and Emergency Services**

“This series of features was a very enlightening portrayal of some of the women who have made such a remarkable accounting of themselves in what was once considered to be only a “man’s world”. Proud to have known and worked with many of them and so many more who have given so much of themselves in the interest of a safer America.”

## Rosemary Cloud



Making history, and being first, seems to be a consistent theme that runs through the profiles of the incredible fire service women I've been highlighting during this 2021 Women's History Month. Retired Fire Chief Rosemary Cloud is no exception. Rosemary began her fire service career in 1980 as a firefighter in the Atlanta (Georgia) Fire Rescue Department (AFRD). Atlanta was her hometown, and she was proud to be in a position to protect the city she loved. Rosemary advanced through the ranks of the AFRD to the positions of driver, lieutenant, battalion chief, and finally, to assistant chief of operations at the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. The Atlanta airport is one of the largest and busiest in the world, and she met the challenge head-on. As she grew and developed in Atlanta, her mentors, and others with influence in the organization, observed her excellent leadership and management capabilities, as well as her exceptional people

skills, and encouraged her to consider becoming a fire chief at some point in her career. The opportunity presented itself, and in 2002, Assistant Chief Rosemary Cloud became the fire chief in the City of East Point, Georgia. Rosemary was East Point's first woman fire chief and is widely heralded as the first Black woman fire chief in the nation. Her contributions to fire and life safety were not limited to the cities where she served. Rosemary was an active member of the community and a leader at the state and national levels as well. In addition to many other achievements, awards, and commendations, Chief Cloud was appointed to the White House National Security Council and was a subject matter expert in developing the National Strategy for Homeland Security. In 2010, she was inducted into the International Women in Homeland Security and Emergency Management Hall of Fame. Rosemary was recognized by the Atlanta Business League with the Millennium Pacesetter Award – and the Atlanta Business League also celebrated her as one of Atlanta's Top 100 Black Women of Influence. These recognitions paint a picture of a leader who was not only recognized for her expertise in the fire and emergency service, but also for her commitment to involving her department in the community as a whole...and in doing so, she personally set the example she expected her members to follow. In 2019, the City of East Point opened a new multipurpose fire station and training facility. It was named and dedicated in honor of former Fire Chief Rosemary Cloud, who had retired in 2015. One of the things that has impressed me the most about Rosemary Cloud has been the number of fire service women who openly credit her for the mentorship, coaching, and support she provided to them as they pursued their own careers. She not only fought and worked her way to a successful fire service career of her own, but she helped countless others who either worked with her or knew her in some other way. Achieving excellence and inspiring others to be the best they can be are critical elements of leadership. I am honored to profile retired Fire Chief Rosemary Cloud during this Woman's History Month as a fire service woman of great accomplishment and influence!

## Mary Beth Michos

March is Women's History Month and today I introduce Mary Beth Michos. This world-class woman has spent her lifetime in service to others. Having started her career as a registered nurse in a hospital, she went on to work on one of the nation's first mobile intensive care units in Montgomery County, Maryland. It wasn't long until Mary Beth joined the Montgomery



County (Maryland) Fire & Rescue Department as their EMS Officer - and later transitioned to a sworn firefighter position. Long story short...Mary Beth promoted through the ranks to become assistant fire chief in Montgomery County - and later became the fire chief in the Prince William County (Virginia) Fire Department. Her leadership skills and management expertise resulted in Mary Beth's involvement at the highest levels in several national fire service organizations. With the burning desire to assist others in their careers, Mary Beth, with the International Association of Fire Chiefs, established a leadership and management development program directed at creating future fire chiefs. Even in her retirement, Mary Beth Michos remains a role model and is one of the most recognized and respected chiefs ever to work in the fire service! I think we're all better professionals, and the nation a safer place to live, work, and play, because of the work of Chief Mary Beth Michos!

## Vickie Pritchett



For nearly a quarter century, Vickie Pritchett has been an advocate and leader in the fire service. Her work serves as another example of all that should be celebrated during this 2021 Women’s History Month. Like so many others, her fire service career began at the local level and has steadily expanded to become national in scope. In 1997, she became involved with the Pleasant View Volunteer Fire Department (PVVFD) in Tennessee – and from 1998 until 2013 Vickie served on their board of directors. She also served as the Community Development Liaison for the Town of Pleasant View and the Executive Director of the Joint Economic and Community Development Board of Cheatham County (Tennessee) at the same time she got involved with the PVVFD. The connection of Vickie and the PVVFD was tailor-made for doing some really good things for the fire and life-safety profile of the community. Her ability to bring fire department officials, builders and developers, as well as elected officials together resulted in a zero square foot fire sprinkler ordinance for the town in 2001 and for the entire county in 2006.

So, from then forward, if you built a structure in Pleasant View or anywhere else in Cheatham County, it was equipped with fire sprinklers. Imagine the long-term impact of that achievement on the safety of the people who live there and the firefighters who protect them. It was the success she had in Tennessee that catapulted her to national fire service prominence as an enthusiastic and talented advocate for fire sprinkler requirements at the local, state, and national levels. Vickie Pritchett is currently the vice president/executive officer of the National Fire Sprinkler Association (NFSA). She is a collaborator of the highest order, and her involvement in other fire service organizations has made each one more effective in their mission. Vickie shares her talents with the Volunteer and Combination Officers Section (VCOS) of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC); is a board member of the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition (HFSC); is the catalyst behind “Common Voices” – a small advocacy group that supports national legislation and policies relating to fire sprinklers in Washington (District of Columbia) and other venues; is a member of both the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and the International Code Council (ICC); and works closely with the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF) and the Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI) on a host of fire safety issues and projects. Vickie is an outstanding presenter and public speaker, and if you’re attending anything where she is the facilitator, plan to be involved and enjoy your time with her. She is a graduate of Middle Tennessee State University and received her MBA from Vanderbilt’s Owen School of Management. To top it all off, in 2013, Vickie was awarded lifetime membership in the PVVFD which she is quite proud of. Sher and I have come to treasure our friendship with Vickie. Her positive approach to life and work, love for her beautiful family, and dedication to the safety of others is contagious and an asset to any organization. I am thrilled to honor this fire service “spark plug” and leader during Women’s History Month. You can’t help but admire and love Vickie Pritchett!

## Brenda Berkman



It would not make sense for me to write about the leadership, courage, and contributions of fire service women during this 2021 Women's History Month without honoring Retired Captain Brenda Berkman from the Fire Department, City of New York (FDNY). Her story begins before she even started her fire service career. Prior to 1977, women were not allowed to apply to become FDNY firefighters. However, in 1977 that changed when



federal law required the FDNY to allow women to apply to take the firefighter entrance exam. At that time, even though Brenda Berkman was in her final year of law school, she decided to take the test. She was among 89 women to take that exam, and they all failed. Brenda filed a class action lawsuit against New York City, and in 1982, federal law required the city to make changes to the physical abilities portion of the exam. That same year, approximately 40 women passed the reconstructed firefighter entrance exam and entered the FDNY Fire Academy. Brenda, as well as those classmates who had successfully finished the academy, became the first women firefighters in FDNY history. That also caused changes to firefighter physical ability testing throughout the country. I first met Brenda between the time her lawsuit was filed and when the court decision was rendered. Of course, we've run into each other and visited many times since. Her commitment and tenacity to being a firefighter was palpable and inspiring from the first time we met. She was also quite informed about firefighter entrance testing, and helpful to anyone who asked for her guidance. I was responsible for firefighter testing and selection in the Phoenix (Arizona) Fire Department during that time, and between 1979 and 1980, we made significant changes to our hiring process including the physical abilities portion. I find Brenda's FDNY career just as interesting as how she got there in the first place. She is very well educated having earned a B.A. degree from St. Olaf College in Minnesota, an M.A. in history from the University of Indiana, her J.D. from New York University Law School, and an M.S. in fire protection management from City University in New York. Brenda served on the FDNY for 25 years and retired in 2006 at the rank of Captain. Throughout her career, and even afterward, Brenda was active in firefighter recruitment and pre-training programs for candidates. She was a founding member and former president of the United Women Firefighters and served as a trustee of the Women in Fire Service for nine years. Brenda has received a number of significant and prestigious awards, but none more so than the

1984 Susan B. Anthony Award and the 2002 Women of Courage Award, both from the National Organization for Women. She was also featured in the PBS program Sex, Power, and the Workplace in 1992; the off-Broadway play Firework in 2002; and the PBS documentary Taking the Heat in 2006. Her success, even before her career began, touched so many other women in significant ways and Captain Brenda Berkman's accomplishments on the job and off set an example for others – both men and women. Her impact in New York and across the country ensure her place in fire service history and elevate her level of recognition during Women's History Month. She was, and still is, amazing!

**Comments from Readers of the March 2021 Women's History Month Features that Highlighted Women from the Fire and Emergency Services**

“These features were magnificent. It is great to see the women being publicly recognized and wonderful to see their accomplishments – what an opportunity to learn.”

## Nancy Northcutt Trench



I first met Nancy Northcutt Trench in 1978 and was taken by the drive and tenacity she displayed even back then – both verbally and non-verbally. We had lunch together in Stillwater, Oklahoma, and she ordered a salad for me that looked like it came straight off a cactus; it was strange. I guess she was just trying to make this “Arizona boy” feel at home or something? That day was the start of what became a long and much cherished friendship between the two of us, and later, our families. It is such an honor for me to recognize Nancy’s leadership and contributions to the fire service as part of this Woman’s History Month. When we met, Nancy was the new (and quite young) Director of Oklahoma Fire Service Training based at Oklahoma State University (OSU). I’m sure it’s not difficult for you to imagine the challenges she faced being in charge of training in the 1970s in the all-male Oklahoma fire service. She became successful and went on to share her talents and leadership abilities as a member of the National Association of State Directors of Fire Training and Education (NASDFTE), where she served terms as vice chair and secretary/treasurer. That organization later became the North American Fire Training Directors (NAFTD) in 1998.

She became and remained a sought-after speaker at the national level and one of the best presenters in the business. As Nancy's role in the fire service continued to expand, her commitment to fire and life safety grew as well. For more than twenty years, Nancy played a critical leadership role in founding and organizing the annual Oklahoma Fire and Life Safety Education Conferences that drew attendees from throughout the United States, Canada, and beyond. By the time the 1990s came around, she had left state training and her role with IFSTA/Fire Protection Publications greatly expanded. Nancy became widely recognized and respected for her truly visionary leadership in institutionalizing injury prevention education as part of the core mission of the fire service. She also was appointed to serve on the board of directors of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). Before her retirement a couple of years ago, there was hardly a major national effort that related to fire and life-safety education that didn't include Nancy Trench as part of the team. In the latter part of her career as assistant director at IFSTA/FPP, she began to focus more of her attention on Community Risk Reduction (CRR), Vision 20/20, and research projects nationally, and in her home state. Her research on smoke alarms and their effectiveness with the hearing impaired and those with other disabilities were of particular importance. Nancy is the recipient of many prestigious awards and has left a fire service legacy to be proud of. It's impossible for me to capture all of her affiliations and achievements during her career, but I'm sure you get a general sense of her unique and diverse talents and contributions. Profiling her as a leader and high-achieving woman in fire service history adds significance to Woman's History Month. Sher and I cherish our many years of friendship with Nancy and Winston.

## Joanne Hayes-White



My Women's History Month fire service honoree today is a native of San Francisco, California, who grew-up to become the chief of the San Francisco Fire Department (SFFD). Fire Chief Joanne Hayes-White began her career with the SFFD in 1990 and is widely regarded not only for her outstanding accomplishments during her own fire service career, but also for her willingness to step forward in support of the careers of other women firefighters. Joanne and I first met at a Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association (Metro Chiefs) conference shortly after she was appointed as fire chief. There was little doubt in my mind that she would have a successful experience in that role. Looking back on Joanne's career provides a snapshot into her drive and determination. She was promoted to lieutenant in 1993 and to captain in 1996. Shortly after becoming a captain, Joanne was made an acting battalion chief responsible for dispatch and communications. She advanced to assistant deputy chief of support services in 1998 and then spent four years as the SFFD training director until becoming fire chief in 2004. As I said...drive and determination! Joanne spent a total of 29 years in the SFFD and 15 of those were as fire chief. That is about three times the average tenure of a metropolitan fire chief in this day and age.

In addition to being a member of several state and national fire service organizations, Joanne was an active member of the San Francisco community. Those who follow politics know that San Francisco is not a timid city, politically. When public conflicts occurred that involved the fire department, as they tend to do from time to time, Joanne stepped-up and used her strong leadership and management abilities to resolve the situation and move the organization forward. She has had many achievements and received a number of awards and recognitions during her career, but there are two human relations accomplishments on her watch that stand out to me: 1) upon her retirement, the SFFD employed more than 250 women in their firefighting/EMS force; and 2) a large number of firefighters - men and women - speak multiple languages in the SFFD. Those are both truly outstanding accomplishments! It is my pleasure to acknowledge the career of my friend retired Fire Chief Joanne Hayes-White - and to highlight her during this 2021 Women's History Month. She leaves behind a lot to be proud of!

### **Comments from Readers of the March 2021 Women's History Month Features that Highlighted Women from the Fire and Emergency Services**

“I can honestly say that I've been inspired a great number of times this month reading these features. I am humbled to serve alongside these exceptional leaders.”

## Candice Marie McDonald



About 10 years or so ago, my good friend, Steve Austin, and I were sitting in the lobby lounge of the Hyatt hotel in downtown Indianapolis. We were talking about some things and got on the subject of up-and-coming people (potential national leaders) in the fire service that we knew. He told me about Candice McDonald from the volunteer fire service in Ohio and suggested that I get to know her. He said that she was a rising star. So, I did, and Steve could not have been more correct. She's no longer an up-and-comer...she's here, and she has excelled in every aspect of her professional life. It's an honor for me to profile Dr. Candice McDonald from the fire service during this 2021 Women's History Month. Candice has served more than a decade as a volunteer firefighter/EMT, EMS officer, inspector and public information officer (PIO). She is the Second Vice President for the Cumberland Valley Volunteer Firemen's

Association, a trustee with Women in Fire, a member of the Fire Department Instructors Conference (FDIC)/Fire Engineering Advisory Board and serves the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) as a Fire Corps State Advocate. Her fire service work extends far beyond the volunteer service and impacts the career service as well. Candice has earned an associate's degree in human services; a bachelor's in organizational management; a master's in organizational leadership; and a Doctor of Business Administration with a specialty in homeland security. It's important to remember that Candice is a volunteer – so she also has day jobs. Candice works at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the Office of Protective Services as a special agent, physical security specialist, and contracting officer representative. She is an adjunct faculty member at Eastern Gateway Community College and is the founder and Chief Executive Officer of Success Up Life, LLC, a consulting firm that brings focus and purpose into life and organizations. Oh...and she's also a mom and wife. Describing Candice as driven would be an understatement, but she is not uptight or overwhelmed by it all in any way, shape, or form. Sher and I have become friends with Candice. She's a lovely person in every way, incredibly capable, and is going to leave a legacy through her fire service career that will have lasting impacts. Whenever the fire service gathers a group to discuss major issues, Dr. Candice McDonald is in the room and adds significantly to the discussion. Steve Austin was right – she was a rising star – but I am certain that her star has now risen and she is making fire service history. What a leader and professional Candice has become, and she has so much more to offer in the years ahead!



## Toni Washington



Toni Washington began her fire service career in the Georgia State Fire Marshal's office, and then, in the 1990s, she was hired as a firefighter with the City of East Point (Georgia) Fire Department. Her fire service story is one of hard work, perseverance, and success that I want to highlight during this Women's History Month. Toni rose through the ranks of the East Point Fire Department and achieved the position of deputy chief. In 2009, she left East Point and became the fire chief and emergency manager in the Decatur (Georgia) Fire Department, where she continues to serve. Toni is the first woman, and the first African American, to serve as Decatur's fire chief. With a bachelor's degree in business administration – marketing and management, and a master's in managerial leadership, Toni prides herself on the expansive mission of her department. In addition to providing emergency services relating to fire, EMS, hazmat, etc., Decatur focuses on prevention and public education throughout the community. In her own words, they are a community-based organization that seeks to prevent injuries and deaths. Toni is active in her community as well as in the national fire service. She serves as chair of the Georgia Firefighters Burn Foundation Board of Directors; Secretary-Treasurer of Women in Fire;

and is a member of the Metro Atlanta Association of Fire Chiefs, the International Association of Black Professional Fire Fighters, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, and the Decatur Career Academy Advisory Council. Toni also dedicates herself to serving as a role model for others and mentoring them to succeed in their lives and careers. Chief Washington has overcome challenges and emerged with the determination of a lioness who believes that the members of her department must be involved, are part of a team that works hard, and that they must make a difference every day in the communities they serve. Her success in the fire service, her innovative approach to management and leadership, and an unyielding desire to prevent harm, are part of the history she is leaving for the fire and life-safety industry. It is my pleasure to honor Fire Chief Toni Washington during this 2021 Woman's History Month.

### **Comments from Readers of the March 2021 Women's History Month Features that Highlighted Women from the Fire and Emergency Services**

“These tributes have been such a fitting honor for so many women leaders I've had the pleasure to know. I looked forward to reading each day's feature. We've come a long way since the 1970's.”

## Gina Sweat



I came to know Fire Chief Gina Sweat as a friend and colleague when she joined the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association (Metro Chiefs) a few years ago. Today (March 18th) is the perfect day for me to recognize her for two reasons: 1) It's Women's History Month – and she's been building an historic career in the fire service; and 2) Today is GINA'S BIRTHDAY! Since 2016, Gina Sweat has served as the Director of Fire Services in the City of Memphis, Tennessee. Gina joined the Memphis Fire Department (MFD) as a firefighter in 1992 and has not looked back. She promoted to Driver three years later, and in 1998, Gina achieved the rank of lieutenant and was assigned to lead Engine Company 5. In 2001, Lieutenant Sweat became Battalion Chief Sweat and assumed command of the Memphis Fire Department's 4th Battalion which consisted of five fire stations. After she had completed 16 consecutive years of line field service in firefighting, EMS, etc. Gina was promoted to division chief and moved to administration. Working in administration, in addition to her many years of experience as a firefighter, EMT, and fire officer, was just what she needed to round her out as a seasoned fire service leader and manager. When selected to be the fire chief, Gina became the first woman to serve in that capacity in the history of the MFD and became yet another woman selected

to lead a large metropolitan fire department in the United States. She humbly credits her parents for her career success because they instilled the value of hard work and determination in her early in her life. Her college education focused on business administration and marketing at Freed-Hardeman University. While earning her degree, Gina also played collegiate basketball for the university. During her years working for the MFD, she went on to earn another bachelor's degree and her master's degree from the University of Memphis. She is active in her community and is a member of several state and national fire service organizations. Fire Chief Gina Sweat is a great person who has committed her professional life to protecting the public from fire and other emergencies – and she's still at it. The example she sets for others, and her willingness to coach and mentor others, are two of the things that has earned her the reputation as an outstanding leader. Sher and I value our friendship with Gina – and it's an honor to highlight her leadership and achievements in the fire service during this Women's History Month. Once again – lets wish Gina a HAPPY BIRTHDAY!!

## **Comments from Readers of the March 2021 Women's History Month Features that Highlighted Women from the Fire and Emergency Services**

“Many of these women were true pioneers from back in the day. And all of the tributes describe the tremendous impacts they've had on the fire service.”

## Meredith - Meri - K - Appy



Throughout her adult life, Meredith “Meri-K” Appy has been involved in education, and in unique ways. She has used her knowledge of education, as well as her outstanding media and communications skills, to keep children and adults safe from fire and other injuries. For more than 40 years, Meri-K has dedicated her time, energy, and talent to protecting lives and property. Therefore, during this 2021 celebration of Women’s History Month, I am going to acknowledge her outstanding contributions as the successful fire service professional that she has become. From 1977-1989, Meri-K worked in curriculum development in Massachusetts which led her to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) located in Quincy, Massachusetts in 1989. By 1995, she had been promoted to vice-president of public education. Over the years, Meri-K became arguably the most high-profile leader, face, and voice for fire prevention and fire and life-safety education in the nation. She managed the Learn Not to Burn program, Fire Prevention Week, and a host of other national public education activities. But 1998 was a transitional year for the NFPA and their public education focus. Meri-K and her team developed and launched the Risk Watch comprehensive school and community-based injury prevention program. This change essentially embraced the role of prevention not just within fire, but the expanded all-hazards mission of the fire service.

In 2003, Meri-K had the opportunity to transition from the NFPA and become the president and CEO of the Washington, DC.-based Home Safety Council (HSC). At HSC, she continued her work with the fire service and other disciplines such as public health to expand her reach and effectiveness. I have worked and been friends with Meri-K for many years and can attest to the breadth and depth of her unique abilities. She is an excellent manager and leader, a talented fundraiser, an author, public speaker, visionary, and a multi-tasking machine. I can't begin to list the organizations she has been part of or led, but they include the likes of Safe USA, Solutions 2000, Beyond Solutions 2000, the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition, Vision 20/20, Community Risk Reduction – and on and on. She has made appearances on the Oprah Winfrey Show, Good Morning America, CNN Headline News, CBS This Morning, Dateline NBC, and all of the major TV, radio, and online outlets promoting fire and life-safety/injury prevention. Sher and I are close friends with Meri-K and she has been a blessing in our lives. It's impossible to estimate the number of people who have been positively impacted by Meri-K Appy, or the number of people who avoided injury or death as a result of her work, but it is a ton for sure. She is truly a woman who has made history in the fire service and beyond.

**“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.” Eleanor Roosevelt**

## Heather Schafer



It is with a heavy heart that I post today's selection of a woman from the fire service to honor during this Women's History Month. Heather Schafer has been the chief executive officer of the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) since 1994. I'm very sad to say that Heather passed away unexpectedly last night (3-15-2021) in her home. Heather's family, the NVFC, and all the rest of us who knew her are still in shock at the news of her passing. For more than a quarter of a century, Heather has guided the NVFC in all of their endeavors to represent the interests of the volunteer fire service in various arenas...and she did so quite effectively. As a woman positioned among the highest levels of leaders in the fire service, she guided the organization through a transitional period of growth and change in volunteer emergency services. In addition to managing the functions of the NVFC on a day-to-day basis, she also led the development and the evolution of the strategic vision for the organization. Her work in the recruitment and retention of volunteers, as well as the safety/wellness of volunteer firefighters, stand out among her many efforts. Heather and I worked together over the years on a number of fire service projects involving multiple issues and organizations. Those included the Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI),

the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF), and many others. Before going to the NVFC, Heather worked for President Bill Clinton's chief of staff and also for FEMA during Hurricane Andrew. She had a passion for nonprofit organizations with a mission of helping others. In fact, Heather earned her master's degree in nonprofit and association management from the University of Maryland. To practice what she preached and set a strong example, Heather was also a member of the Arnold (Maryland) Volunteer Fire Department. I've been writing tributes every day this month highlighting women for their significant contributions to the fire service. I was already planning to honor Heather Schafer later this week, but it just seems right to do it today instead. This post is not intended as a eulogy, so let's not just be sad for her loss, but let's honor her service and outstanding achievements as well. She was smart, kind, beautiful inside and out, and an excellent leader and manager. But mostly, she was a good friend – and along with many others, I will miss her. Rest in Peace, Heather.

## **Comments from Readers of the March 2021 Women's History Month Features that Highlighted Women from the Fire and Emergency Services**

“These tributes are bringing tears to my eyes. Congratulations to all of these incredible women for your many accomplishments and thank you for your service and leadership.”



## Janice Gratton



When Janice “Jan” Gratton passed away, the fire service lost one of its strongest advocates and leaders of all time in the field of fire and life-safety education. Her place as a woman in fire service history is rock solid as we recognize National Women’s History Month. Having begun her career as a volunteer with the Covina (California) Fire Department (CFD), Jan spent more than four decades trying to protect the public from being harmed by fire and other causes. If a more genuine, dedicated, and caring person than Jan Gratton ever existed in the fire and emergency services community, I never met them – and there are tons of other people who would agree with that statement. She just flat-out cared about others and took actions, or led others in actions, to keep them safe. Her career began in the 1960s when she decided to assist the CFD with their public education program. She was fully committed to helping the public understand the need for, and then install, smoke alarms and residential fire sprinkler systems. Jan even designed the first Smoke Detectors for the Elderly and Handicapped project, which became a national model that others followed.

She had her own home retrofitted with fire sprinklers and used it to educate people in her area about the benefits of this fire safety technology. Jan's impact eventually extended far beyond Covina and her state as she became a national figure in our industry. Jan's career path took her to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) where she became involved in their national Learn Not to Burn (LNTB) fire safety education program. She was a skilled educator and a leader in the NFPA Fire and Life Safety Section as well. When the NFPA expanded its public education efforts beyond fire safety and into the prevention of a host of injuries, Jan worked diligently as a regional advocate to make their Risk Watch (RW) program a national success. Risk Watch not only addressed fire safety, but also other injury prevention topics. She later served as the first woman officer on the NFPA Board of Directors, and she represented the NFPA board on the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition (HFSC) Steering Committee. Jan shared her expertise with a host of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) fire prevention and public education teams. She also served on the United States Fire Administration's Solutions 2000 and Beyond Solutions 2000 national initiatives. Jan Gratton received numerous prestigious awards and was widely recognized within much of the fire service industry as the "First Lady" of fire and life-safety education. I deeply loved and admired Jan...she was a treasure as both a friend and colleague.

## Julie Moore



Chief Julie Moore is in the prime of her career as a battalion chief in the Surprise (Arizona) Fire-Medical Department (SFMD), and it is my pleasure to recognize her during this Women's History Month. I first met Julie in Cincinnati, Ohio, in the early 1980s while I was attending the Fire Department Instructors Conference (FDIC). Although she was still living in Ohio, her husband was a recently hired firefighter in the Phoenix (Arizona) Fire Department (PFD). She asked that I take something (a surprise) back to Phoenix with me and give it to her husband. Of course, I said yes. I don't think Julie, nor I, could have imagined the stress we were about to cause young PFD Firefighter Brian Moore when one day he was asked to report to Chief Compton's office at Fire Administration without an explanation as to why. I learned afterward that he just about had the big one when he was told. Julie relocated to Phoenix later to join Brian, who still continues his successful career with the PFD and together they've raised a beautiful family. In 2001, Julie was hired as a firefighter by

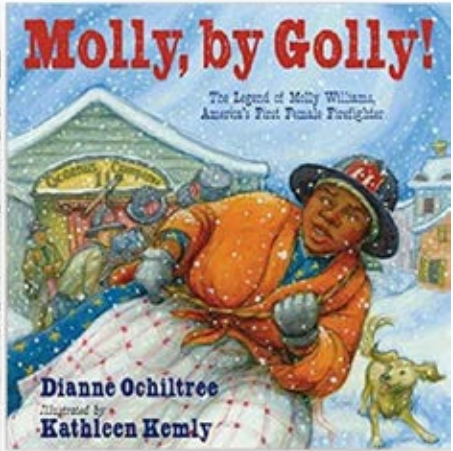
the SMFD, which is located west of Phoenix. As with other fire service women, her career has been a series of firsts: first woman SFMD recruit to attend and graduate from the Phoenix Regional Fire Training Academy, and the first woman in the SMFD to achieve the rank of battalion chief. But there was another first that I find critically important in her career development. You see, after many years serving as part of the leadership team in her union, Julie was elected president of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) Local 4361, a position she held for three years. The years I spent in the leadership of the Phoenix Firefighters Union helped me tremendously as I moved into management positions in the PFD and later, and Julie has shared similar thoughts with me about her career. It can be invaluable leadership experience in most cases. She has now completed her master's program in Public Administration and she currently manages personnel and media relations as a PIO in the SFMD. I don't know what Chief Moore's future will be in the fire service because she's still writing her history, but I know for certain that she is capable of doing anything she sets her mind to. The solid character and high values of some leaders set them apart from others in positive ways...and Chief Julie Moore is one of those exceptional leaders. I am so blessed to call her my friend and colleague.

## Molly Williams



### Molly Will

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While we continue to honor fire service women during Women's History Month, today let's take a trip back to the 1800s in New York City. It's widely accepted that the very first woman to serve as a firefighter was named Molly Williams...even though it was not by her choice. You see, Molly was black and a slave. Her master/owner, a wealthy man named Benjamin Aymar, was a member of the city's volunteer fire force and would take Molly (who was his slave) with him to the firehouse. This was Oceanus Engine Company 11 in Lower Manhattan. Molly was expected to clean the firehouse, cook meals, and keep the heavy water pump maintained as well. She became interested in the equipment and made it a point to learn how it functioned and how to operate it. The water pump was quite heavy and it took several strong men to pull it through the streets of New York to the location of a fire when it was needed. As the story goes, Molly was responsible for taking care of Aymar's eight children at his residence as well as her duties caring for the men at the firehouse. It was in 1818 when Molly Williams was at the firehouse with Aymar tending to several of the firefighters who were ill with the deadly flu. The alarm sounded, but the men were all too sick to respond to the fire.

She took it upon herself to respond alone with the heavy water pumper. Mind you, that was a hand-pulled heavy water pumper; by herself, wearing her apron and dress, and she got the pumper to the scene of the fire and operated it. When they heard what she had done, the members of Oceanus Engine Company 11 were so impressed and grateful that they appointed Molly Williams as an unofficial member of the company. She was called Volunteer 11 and was said to be as strong and capable as any of the male members. It wasn't long before they started using horses to pull the pumper. There is a children's book about Molly titled, Molly by Golly - the Legend of America's First Female Firefighter. Molly's story is inspiring, but in another way, it is awful. Her work with Oceanus Engine Company 11 was done under the absolute worst of conditions - that of being a slave. This is my tribute to this woman's contribution to fire service history - the incredible Molly Williams!

## **Comments from Readers of the March 2021 Women's History Month Features that Highlighted Women from the Fire and Emergency Services**

“It is heart-warming to see these giants in the industry recognized in this way. Perhaps the expanded realization that women have made spectacular contributions to the fire service when given an opportunity will encourage even more success for others in the future.”

## Julie Downey

I am pleased to present my friend Fire Chief Julie Downey to you during this Women's History Month because she is another fire service history-maker. Julie began her fire service career in 1981 in the City of Sunrise (Florida) Fire Rescue Department. That started a chain of firsts for her in Sunrise. She was their first



woman firefighter/paramedic, first woman driver/operator, and first woman to become a lieutenant. Julie retired from Sunrise Fire Rescue in 2004 to become the battalion chief of EMS and Training with the Town of Davie (Florida) Fire Rescue Department. In 2005, Julie was promoted to assistant chief of EMS, training, special operations, and emergency management for Davie Fire Rescue. In 2016, Julie was promoted to the position of fire chief in Davie. This was another first for her because she was not only the first woman fire chief in Broward County, but also the entire state of Florida south of Orlando. With Julie, it's not only the ranks she achieved, it's also what her leadership, expertise, and teamwork led to in the way of outcomes. Following are just a few: 1) Created a mass casualty response plan in Sunrise that was later adopted throughout Florida; 2) Elevated Davie Fire Rescue from an ISO 4 rating to an ISO 1 rating; 3) Spearheaded legislation requiring Stop the Bleed kits in all town facilities. This program was later recognized as a Pioneer Innovation by the White House National Security Council.

Julie is a Technical Committee member on the NFPA 3000 Standard for Active Shooter/Hostile Events Response Program Committee, and she serves as president of the Fire Chiefs Association of Broward County. In addition, Julie is the vice-chair of the Broward County Healthcare Coalition and serves on the Executive Board of the Florida Fire Chiefs Association as their secretary/treasurer. Having served 40 years in the fire service, Chief Downey's achievements are many and the example she continues to set for others is outstanding. Her friendship and leadership are a blessing to our service!

“The question isn't who is going to let me; it's who is going to stop me.” Ayn Rand



## Janet Wilmoth

Women's History Month is something the fire service should celebrate with enthusiasm. The contributions of women to the United States fire service are many and varied. Janet Wilmoth was raised in a family made-up of firefighters - some of whom I know. So it didn't surprise me in the least when she entered the fire service. Janet worked with Fire Chief Magazine for 27 years, rising through the levels of the organization to eventually become the Editorial Director. With Fire Chief Magazine, she created an exceptional publication and brought stories to life through her journalistic talents and keen sense of issues. She expanded the Volunteer and Career Fire Chief of the Year Awards program and led several other initiatives



to increase awareness and recognize excellence. When Fire Chief Magazine shut down in 2013, she turned her attention (in 2014) to a new position as special project director for Firehouse/Endeavor. There, she manages the Firehouse Design conferences and Station Design Awards. Janet also heads the

Emergency Technician of the Year Awards and even the Law Enforcement Design Awards for Officer Magazine. In addition to her primary work, she has served on several national fire service organization boards. These include the Fire Department Safety Officers Association (FDSOA); Fire & Emergency Manufactures & Services Association (FEMSA); and the Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI) National Advisory Council. Janet also served on the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF) Life Safety Initiatives Committee. She has received several prestigious awards for her exceptional contributions to the fire service. One of the more impressive things about Janet is perhaps less known to her peers; that is her generous willingness to meet with, and counsel, other women (one-on-one or in groups) to help them improve their performance. We have been friends for many years and are still to this day. It is an honor to post this tribute to my friend and a true professional...Janet Wilmoth.

“Once you figure out what success tastes like, it tastes better than attention.” Unknown

“Never believe anyone who tells you that you don’t deserve what you want” Taylor Swift

## Mary McCormack

Women's History Month is going to take us back a little farther in fire service history. I first met Mary McCormack in 1978 at the Fire Department Instructors Conference (FDIC) in Memphis, Tennessee. Mary and her husband Ed were quite active in the national fire service and seemed like royalty at FDIC. What struck me about Mary



at the time was her kindness and welcoming personality, no matter who she was dealing with. But as I've said a thousand times (at least) over the years, "don't ever mistake kindness for weakness," and Mary was a good example of why. She was tough, a strong leader, smart, knew everybody, and was well aware of how important relationships were to her leadership success. We became great friends and seeing Mary at FDIC and other places was always one of my favorite parts of the trip. Mary played a critical role with FDIC and the International Society of Fire Service Instructors (ISFSI) for many years. She later went on to chair the Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI) National Advisory Council (NAC) in Washington, D.C., which placed her in the middle of the leadership circle addressing major national fire service issues at the federal level. She understood politics, was good at it, and knew how important effective interaction with elected officials and federal agencies were to the fire service. People had a great deal of respect for Mary, and she excelled at getting things done. Mary later went on to form the Fire Department Safety Officers Association (FDSOA),

where she served as executive director for many years. She had a passion for all things related to firefighter safety and committed herself to making career and volunteer firefighters safer and more effective in the performance of their duties. Like I said before, she knew how to get things done and was able to connect other fire service leaders to her priorities. The photo I've provided with this post is of Mary McCormack standing alongside another fire service icon and friend, the late Lou Amabilli. Mary's legacy and contributions remain present within the FDIC, ISFSI, CFSI, FDSOA - and others. Her leadership and talents touched them all and we are a better fire service for it.

“If you don't get out of the box you been raised in, you won't understand how much bigger the world is.”

“There is no greater pillar of stability than a strong, free and educated woman, and there is no more inspiring role model than a man who respects and cherishes women and champions their leadership.” Angelina Jolie

## Rhoda Mae Kerr



Rhoda Mae Kerr is a seasoned fire chief who has a rich history as a leader in the fire service at the local and national levels. Rhoda Mae has a wealth of experience and is currently the fire chief in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Women's History Month is a perfect way and time to celebrate her contributions. A fourth-generation firefighter, Rhoda Mae began her fire service career in 1983 in Fort Lauderdale. She rose through the ranks to deputy fire chief, and then an opportunity came knocking. Rhoda Mae became the fire chief in Little Rock, Arkansas, for five years and then moved on to Austin, Texas, where she was the fire chief for 10 years. The opportunity to return to Fort Lauderdale then came her way and she took advantage of it. She has been their fire chief since 2018 and is the first woman fire chief in the history of their city. But that's only part of her story and believe me, I can't begin to tell it all here. Just to give some of the highlights: Rhoda Mae was the first woman to serve as president of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC). She was president of the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association (Metro Chiefs) and served as president of the National Society of Executive Fire Officers (NSEFO). Before entering the fire service, Rhoda Mae was a coach and physical education teacher at a high school for 12 years.

One of the greatest gifts she gives is her commitment to assisting others in developing their knowledge and skills in preparation for future opportunities they might have. Chief Rhoda Mae Kerr and I have been friends for a long time, and I consider her a blessing in my life. She has an incredible personality and sense of humor. All of us in the fire service are fortunate that she chose to spend her professional life with us!

### **Comments from Readers of the March 2021 Women's History Month Features that Highlighted Women from the Fire and Emergency Services**

“Thank you for recognizing these inspirational women along with their strong work and contributions to the fire service and the communities they serve. Each day of this March I have looked forward to reading about another amazing woman. These and thousands of other women are writing history every day as they continue to lead and clear the path for young girls with big dreams. I am sad to see March end.”

## Kara Kalkbrenner

Phoenix (Arizona) Fire Chief Kara Kalkbrenner is a strong leader and a high achiever. It's as if Women's History Month and International Woman's Day, as they relate to fire service leaders, were created with her in mind. Kara has been a Phoenix firefighter since 1985 and has served as fire chief of the nation's fifth largest city since 2014. Kara is one of only a handful of women fire chiefs of large metropolitan fire departments in the country. Interestingly, Chief Mary Cameli is another. It's heartening to see two such exceptional women fire chiefs in the same metropolitan area who are not only colleagues, but friends as well. Kara has more than 36 years with the Phoenix



Fire Department - starting as a young firefighter, then promoting through the ranks to fire engineer, captain, division chief, deputy chief, assistant chief and executive assistant chief. When Kara was a sophomore at Maryvale High School in Phoenix (also mine and Sher's alma mater), she decided to pursue a career in the fire service. She made that decision after a chance conversation with the parents of a Phoenix firefighter. And as they say...the rest is history. I have known and worked with Kara since she came on the job and have witnessed her growth as a professional. She excelled in every position she has held, including that of fire chief.

Kara has been active not only in the Arizona fire service, but nationally as well. Her accomplishments with the Phoenix Fire Department have been many, but one in particular stands out. She has been a strong national advocate of firefighter safety, including issues surrounding firefighter occupational cancer. Kara, a recent occupational cancer survivor herself, has dedicated her time and energy to this effort for years, long before she was diagnosed. She leads a fire department that has been, and remains, a national leader in the fire service. Phoenix is fortunate to have Fire Chief Kara Kalkbrenner; and the fire service is fortunate to reap the benefits of her leadership. Sher and I are fortunate to have her as a friend. We love her dearly.

“Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take but by the moments that take our breath away.” Maya Angelou

"Feminism isn't about making women stronger. Women are already strong, it's about changing the way the world perceives that strength." G.D. Anderson



## Mary Camelli

March is Women's History Month and today is International Women's Day. Because this is a special-upon-special day, I'm going to recognize two exceptional women today (in two separate posts).

Fire Chief Mary Camelli of the Mesa (Arizona) Fire and Medical Department is one of the nicest people I know. I've known Mary since 1997 and been friends with her since that time as well. Mary and I have a great deal of experience working together, and I've had the opportunity to watch her develop into an exceptional leader, manager and fire chief. She joined Mesa Fire and Medical in 1983 and served in every rank, including paramedic. Mary was promoted to fire chief in 2016. One of the things that sets her apart are her commitments to quality service delivery and to enhancing the stature of the organization within the community. Her incredibly active community service and community leadership has endeared her to the citizens of Mesa and has a positive impact on the City of Mesa and the department.



One example I'll share is that Mary was selected as the 2020 Mesa Woman of the Year. Keep in mind that Mesa is a city of half a million people. It was not a city or government sponsored award, it was a citywide award for Citizen of the Year, and only one man and one woman are selected. Under her leadership, the Mesa Fire and Medical Department has become a "gold standard" example of success in integrated community health care. She has transitioned Mesa into its own separate 9-1-1 communications and dispatch center serving not only Mesa, but their automatic aid partners as well. Mary also played an important role with other partners who worked successfully to secure a dedicated public safety sales tax. In her spare time, she has been the president of the Arizona Fire Chiefs Association (AFCA); vice chair of the International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA) Executive Board; and is a board member of the Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE). I find myself inspired by Fire Chief Mary Cameli, and as you can probably tell, Sher and I love her dearly. She is truly a fire service treasure!

"I love to see a young girl go out and grab the world by the lapels. Life's a bitch. You've got to go out and kick ass." Maya Angelou

"Feminism isn't about making women stronger. Women are already strong, it's about changing the way the world perceives that strength." Gloria Steinem

## Donna Black



Donna Black is the fire chief in the Town of Duck, North Carolina. Duck is a combination fire department, which means it is made-up of both volunteers and paid firefighters. Starting as a volunteer, Donna worked her way through the ranks (as both a career and volunteer firefighter) culminating in 2006 when she became the fire chief. She now has more than 22 years of fire and emergency experience, including expertise in the area of emergency management. When Donna began her career in Duck, it was an all-volunteer department. Through her leadership, the organization transitioned to a combination department to better meet the service delivery needs of the community. Managing an organization with volunteer members comes with unique challenges that require keen leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills to be effective. Integrating career members into the mix makes the process even a little more challenging. Donna does an excellent job as a fire chief and as a role model so highlighting some of her fire service contributions during Women's History Month is an honor for me.

Donna is very active within the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) as their first vice president and has been a leader in many of their efforts including career development programs and activities focused on women in the fire service. As co-chair of the IAFC Women Chiefs Council, as well as her service on the IAFC Volunteer and Combination Officers Section (VCOS) Board of Directors, Donna has emerged as a key and innovative leader. She has been a member of the IAFC Program Planning Committee for the annual Fire-Rescue International (FRI) conference. Chief Black's commitment and dedication have been a gift to both volunteer and career fire departments throughout the country. We are truly fortunate to have her among our ranks.

"Women belong in all places where decisions are being made. . . It shouldn't be that women are the exception." Ruth Bader Ginsburg

"When there are no ceilings, the sky's the limit. So let's keep going—let's keep going until every one of the 161 million women and girls across America has the opportunity she deserves to have." Hillary Clinton

## Lori Moore-Merrell

On this day during Women's History Month, I can't get much deeper into March without honoring Dr. Lori Moore-Merrell. Her fire service career has already been history making, and I believe that she has nothing but great things in her future. Lori began her career as a firefighter/paramedic in the Memphis (Tennessee) Fire Department. After several years in Memphis, a unique opportunity of a lifetime came her way. In



In 1993, she moved to Washington, D.C. and went to work with the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF). After a great deal of effort and learning, Lori became Assistant to the IAFF General President. In that role, she made tremendous contributions in fire and EMS operations, as well as labor issues and collective bargaining. While at the IAFF, Lori also completed her master's and doctoral degrees at the George Washington University School of Public Health. Her leadership and work in fire service research has driven change and improved firefighter staffing standards and firefighter safety in significant ways. Firefighter/Paramedic Lori Moore is now Dr. Lori Moore-Merrell. She retired from the IAFF and is the President of the International Public Safety Data Institute (IPSDI), a respected leader, a renowned lecturer, an author, and a premier researcher. Lori is also the hardest working person I know...hands down! The friendship Sheri Fair Compton and I share with Lori and Richard Merrell is a treasure to us, and Lori is truly a treasure to the American fire service! We are better every day that Lori is in the game!

"You could make a case that, along with the technological revolution, the most provocative upending destabilizing thrilling change in the course of human history is that we're finally in it. ... We're here now, women are in the world, and we will not be bullied."  
Meryl Streep

## Tiffany Green



Tiffany Green certainly made her mark in history when she became the fire chief of the Prince George's County (PG County) Fire/EMS Department in Maryland about a year ago. PG County is a large metropolitan department and Tiffany is one of only a handful of Black women to achieve such a position anywhere in the country...and the very first in PG County Fire/EMS. Tiffany has been a member of the department for more than 21 years; beginning as a firefighter and promoting through the ranks to become fire chief. She was raised in a family that was strongly committed to serving others, and her interest in firefighting and EMS grew out of her desire to serve her community as a whole. One of Tiffany's goals is to reduce emergency calls for service by increasing the quality of fire and life-safety public education throughout the county. People I know who work with Tiffany describe her as an excellent leader who takes an innovative approach to improving her department and the fire service. We are fortunate to have trailblazers like Fire Chief Tiffany Green in the fire service. She has incredible opportunities ahead of her. Women's History Month is a great time to salute Chief Green!

## Tonya Hoover

Another amazing woman who deserves recognition during Women's History Month is the Deputy United States Fire Administrator, and current Acting United States Fire Administrator, Tonya Hoover. Her contributions to the safety of our nation are many. She has served as the Superintendent of the National Fire Academy; the California State Fire Marshal; and was promoted through



the ranks to battalion chief in her local fire department early in her career. I won't mention the other positions Tonya has held or this will look like a resume. It's easy to admire Tonya for her leadership and all she has accomplished, as well as the example she sets for so many. Moving through the hierarchy of the fire service is challenging for any man, and you can multiply that 10-fold for a woman. Yet here she is, acting as the highest-ranking fire official in the United States of America! She has already made fire service history with many years left to go! I am blessed by my opportunities to work with Chief Hoover, and I treasure our friendship!



## **Conclusion**

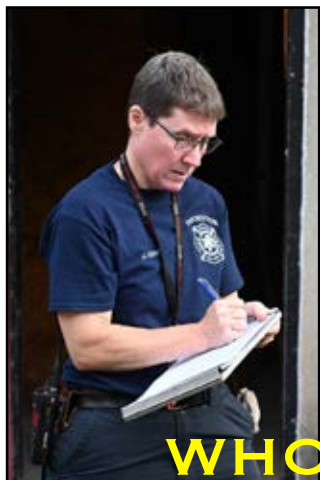
It has been a great honor to document and celebrate the outstanding achievements women make throughout the fire and emergency service. The fact that there has been a significant call for my work to be published and more widely distributed is a tribute to the importance of the effort.

There is a playful quote from years ago comparing the talents of two famous dancers that said, “Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did, but she did it backwards and in high heels.” I can’t help but be reminded of these words when I think of the challenges and accomplishments of women in the fire service. If they chose the career path of firefighter, they not only had to learn to do their jobs and perform well, but they had to repeat their performances over and over (sometimes daily) to continuously prove to some of their male counterparts and supervisors that they were capable of doing the job. And to top it off, they were often being evaluated by those who did not want the women there in the first place. When I was in the military, and again in firefighter recruit training, I was reminded of the mindset of “improve, adapt, and overcome.” Every woman I featured during the 2021 Women’s History Month was tough and determined enough to do that, as are the thousands of other women who have fire service careers. I salute you, and I’m proud to tell your stories!

I would like to thank my friend, John M. Buckman III, for his significant assistance in making this book of honor possible. Many of you know John as a former fire chief and the 2001-2002 IAFC President. He has a kind and generous heart and is always an advocate for excellence, training, leadership, safety, and fairness. It is also important that I say thank you to the IAFC, VCOS, and Pierce for generously contributing to this project.

**Dennis Compton**

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**WHO WILL BE OUR**



**LEADER IN THE FUTURE?**



THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING SUPPORTERS

*Volunteer & Combination*



*Officers Section*



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