Minute of the Iowa Firefighters Association
Board of Directors’ Meeting
January 16, 2011
Belmond, IA

Those present were President Ellen Hagen, Vice Presidents Jack Runge, Roger Bissen, Al Esch, Brad Yeager and Mark McNees, Past President Cliff Renslow and Executive Director Wendy Lensing. Also present were: Brian Platz, Solon; Mark Johnson, Forest City; Thomas Nolton, Forest City; David Lensing, Humboldt; Steven Lillquist, Forest City; Bob Platz, Dyersville; Brian Seymour, Indianola; David Anderson, Lake Mills; Steve Pederson, Lake Mills; Scott Hagenson, Lake Mills; Richard Harman, Cedar Rapids; Bob Hagen, Jewell; Jim Thiele, Garner; Terry Jass, Garner; Chris Hinds, Perry; Marion Valero-Lehman, Redfield; Randy Novak, FSTB; Dave Zimple, Humboldt/Badger; Rusty Hockman, Jewell.

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by President Ellen Hagen.

President Hagen presented a metal sign to the Belmond Fire Department in appreciation of their hosting the meeting.

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Cliff Renslow. It was seconded by Mark McNees. Motion carried.

Motion to approve the minutes of the last Board of Directors’ meeting, held Oct. 31, 2010 in Jewell, was made by Al Esch. It was seconded by Cliff Renslow. Motion carried.

Executive Director’s report – Wendy Lensing:
I’d like to thank the Belmond Fire Department for hosting the meeting today. It’s been quite a busy time with end of the year things and getting ready for the meetings yesterday and today while the dues are coming in. Dues have been coming in well. If you haven’t gotten them paid yet please do so as soon as possible.

The departments that have paid so far have been pretty good about returning the survey that was sent out with the billing. As these are returned I will continue to compile the replies to the questions about training and recruitment and retention. These can be very helpful in our talks with legislators.

The IFA credit card now has a photo card available. This is a neat new option where you can either upload a photo of your own or pick one from their gallery of available images. I know that one of the available images is flames. The first card is free. If you choose to change photos again later the charge would only be $5. If you have more than one cardholder on your account each person can choose a different image and it would still be free the first time as long as you all order at the same time. We are up to 256 accounts. Hopefully this will continue to increase. Last year we had over $2700 in income from the credit cards. If more of our members would apply for and use the IFA card this would really be a great benefit for the association and the card itself is a good benefit for our members. Hand in hand with the credit card is a benefit that gets forgotten I think but all of our membership is eligible to belong to the Power Co-op Credit Union as well. They have great rates on both savings and loans.
The legislative session began last week. Unfortunately with the weather and the meetings this weekend I was unable to make it to Des Moines. I will be going down each Wednesday again during this session. I look forward to meeting with the new legislators and getting to know them as well as the returning ones. This won’t be an easy year but we will continue to work towards our legislative priorities. Senator Hancock has drafted a bill for a tax credit again that we hope to be able to get passed. Firefighter Day on the Hill and our legislative night are scheduled for March 9th. If you are able to make it to Des Moines that day to meet with your legislator that would be great. Please make an effort to talk to your legislators about issues facing the fire service whenever you have the chance. It’s important for them to know that it really does matter to you and it can make a big difference if they are hearing from all of the members and not just the 8 of us.

Please be sure to get the word out about the tax checkoff also. We were able to get the checkoff back on for 2 more years. The money that we receive from this goes to the Volunteer Training Fund. I will be getting the information put back up on the website and you can print off the flyer that is there. Please take that to your local tax offices and see if they will post it and mention it to their clients. Make sure your family and friends know about it too. Send the information to your e-mail or Facebook friends. This is a great way to get additional funds into the training fund.

Along with some of the other benefits we have been checking into, I’ve been talking to US Cellular about the possibility of a discount for our members. They can do that, but the way that they need to do that would be to set us up as an employer account with at least 21 lines to be the “parent company” so to speak. These lines would be together under the IFA. They can be separate accounts that are mailed to the individuals and the IFA is not responsible for them, but they would all be listed under IFA’s id#. These 21 lines would not be discounted, but they would have business benefits (instant rebates, business line pricing on devices, etc.). After that, any of the members would be able to go into US Cellular with membership card and photo ID and be signed up for a 15% discount. Before we can proceed with anything though we would have to find the 21 lines to go under the IFA. I will try the board and Past Presidents to see if we can come up with the base. If we can do that I will put the information out to the membership.

Financial report: As of December 31, 2010 the total current assets of the Iowa Firefighters Association are $460,113.51. They have done more work this year at the memorial and so our funds are down considerably from what they have been. As of December 31, 2010 the total current assets for the Iowa Firemen’s Foundation are $21,220.31.

Motion to approve the financial report was made by Cliff Renslow. It was seconded by Jack Runge. Motion passed.

Proposed 2011 budget: Total estimated income for 2011 is projected to be $177,750.00. We do have regular increases in the cost of operating as costs continue to go up. Our total estimated expenses are $190,131.00. That leaves us with a net income of a negative $12,381.00.

President Hagen noted that in the amount figured for the US Caucus which is the trip to Washington, DC the board had decided to give the Congressional Fire Service Institute a donation of $200 to support their efforts rather than spend the $275 per plate to attend the fundraiser dinner. It was decided that spending the time on the hill and actually being able to talk to the legislators in person was a better use of the money.

As the board sees it, with a $12,381.00 shortage, we feel that we need to ask for a dues increase. We have talked that we would like to see a $1 per person increase. We are going to propose a $1 increase
each year for the next 3 years to cover expenses. Everything continues to go up and up. We have not had a dues increase since 2002. At that time the dues went from $7 per person per year to $10 per person per year. We think we’ve held the line pretty well. That is something that we will be proposing at Mid Year.

Past President Renslow asked that if there is any discussion or comments on this that the membership please call and talk to the board members about it. Ten years is a long time without a dues increase. Everything goes up. We need to keep the newsletter available to our members. We went through the budget yesterday and we cut back as much as we can but we can’t keep cutting back and still be able to move forward. We can’t deplete savings for daily operations. As Jack mentioned yesterday it took 135 years to have that amount in savings. We don’t want to deplete it. Jack also mentioned yesterday that at $1 per year over 3 years it might not be such an impact on departments. We really feel we are being fair with this.

President Hagen mentioned that on the income side, we have had lots of interest income in the past. That is no longer the case as interest rates go down. We can’t depend on interest on our accounts as operating income.

Dave Zimple asked how our estimated income for 2011 compared with 2010. Wendy replied that last year we budgeted for income was $182,200 and we are budgeting for 2011 proposed income of $177,750. This is down about $5000.

Cliff Renslow said membership is down also. It used to be about 15,500 and it’s now down to about 15,100. It’s down about 400. Jack said we have had a few new departments join. Mark mentioned that we have 2 CDs now when we had more in past. That was around $3000 in income from interest that we don’t have. Ellen mentioned that we have not yet received payment from Perry for 2010 convention registrations yet either.

Dave Zimple asked when the first dollar increase was proposed to go into effect? Wendy said it would go out the first of November for the 2012 billing cycle. The way the year runs, the bills are sent out for the coming year the last week of October. We then get a lot of the dues coming in in November and December. So even though a dues increase would be for 2012 we would see the benefits of that in the 2011 budget year. It splits about half and half with about half of the dues for the upcoming year coming in the current year and half in the next year.

Dave Zimple asked if this required a resolution. Cliff said that yes, it would be a resolution that was brought to the membership at the Mid Year meeting to be voted on. Dave didn’t think it should be a shock to anyone. It’s been talked about for several years.

Jack said if you break that dollar down – 33 cents goes toward the newsletter, and we get a good deal on the newsletter. We don’t pay as much per member as other states do since we were kind of the “mother ship”. He’s working on bringing us up to that level, but we aren’t there yet and we are going through some years of increase before it really flattens out. So 33 cents goes right off the top to the newsletter, another 17 cents goes towards our contract with our lobbyist. That contract is up the end of June. We have not approved that yet, but we do have the proposal and it would take another 17 cents of that dollar. What do you need for a cushion? Obviously you don’t want to continue to have a dues increase every year so you do need to build a cushion in there so 20 cents goes for that. We did give Wendy an increase in salary, basically just a cost of living raise, 6 cents would go for that. That accounts for about 76 cents of that $1 right there. The rest would be for other increased expenses and to start building more financial wherewithal. Philosophically we had a good discussion. The first thing someone
is going to look at when you pull the financial page off is that there is a savings account with $157,000 in it. Why are you going to raise my dues when you are sitting on savings like that? I guess it’s my philosophy that we should cash flow the business. What has been done prior is a blessing to us and quite honestly I think it’s the future of the organization. You need to have something like that for the unforeseen. It’s no different for some of you that run your own businesses. But when you look at net for net, I think we need to bring a budget to you that cash flows. Last year rubbed really hard on that and even the year before that we talked that we were running it really thin. If we are going to cash flow the business and as Cliff said, move this organization forward, you are going to have to have some dues increases. The other thing that we talked about was the way we might handle that. It looks like if we project out a few years it looks like we will need about $2.50 - $3.00 before things level off for us. We could go for a $3 increase this year, and again there is a philosophical discussion, we don’t need $3 this year. So why should we take your dollars and put them in savings. The resolution may look something like a $1 increase for each of the next 3 years. Are there things that could change that? Obviously we don’t put in some of the income like donations and some of the other income that we do get in but it’s not something that you can put in black and white and know that it’s going to be there. That’s why we’ve tended to end up better at the end of the year than maybe what was budgeted. You want to overestimate or be very realistic on expenses and be very conservative in estimating your income so that at the end of the year you don’t get the wrong kind of a surprise.

Another increase that we will have is again with the US Caucus, in the past the President and the 1st VP have made the trip. When Mike was President and 1st VP he was also the alternate delegate for NVFC so he was already included in the budget to go under the NVFC expenses. We had Wendy take his place then for the money that was budgeted. We don’t have that situation now but we still feel that it is very important for Wendy to go each year because she is our constant. She doesn’t change. She knows the people and they call her. This year with it being in April and Jack being a farmer he’s not going to go so Wendy and I will go. So we are still good this year with the two and next year possibly he won’t go but there will come a time when we really need to add that third person and that will need to be added to the budget expenses. We think she is very important and needs to be there.

Roger Bissen said that also when we go to our States Networking meeting and we kind of compare our state with other states we are not out of line, in fact we are a lot lower with our dues than other states are. The same way when Ellen and I have gone to the National Benefit Summit, this year we went to Akron, OH. We are a lot lower with our dues than a lot of other states are. It’s good to be able to compare where we stand.

Mark McNees said that Jack mentioned on the newsletter the deal that we are getting, that even with the increase over the next 3 years in the contract with them that we have accepted, and it’s important that we keep the newsletter out there for our members, we are still a $1 per person less than the other states are paying. We’re still getting a good deal. It’s tight on him too with expenses. It’s an increase, but we are still paying for it at a lower level than the other states are while getting a good product.

Al Esch mentioned that the newsletter has seen a loss of income due to a loss of advertisers. There are some major accounts that Jeff had that decided to pull their dollars and either put them elsewhere or just not advertise. A lot of that has to do with the business climate obviously. Some of that falls back on us as members too. We need to make sure that we support the advertisers and let them know that by having that ad in there we see it and it brings in some business for them.

Roger asked if everyone was happy with the newsletter or was there anything that needed to be changed. There were no comments.
Bob Platz said that what Jack said about increasing the dues $1 per year for 3 years was good. At first he thought why make everyone mad 3 years in a row, but that makes sense to let them keep their money until it’s needed.

Jack said the resolution would be that it would allow us to increase it for 3 years. We may not need to go for three years, but I think we need to craft a resolution that would allow that. The pain is going to be one year, but I also don’t think that we need to take two of your dollars if we don’t need them until that second or third year.

Cliff said that the people in this room will hear a lot of comments about the increase, the past presidents will hear a lot of comments, that is why we explained it. You can all help us out by explaining it. Brian Seymour said that the sooner you can get something out to the past presidents about it the better. Jack again mentioned that he knows the comment will be made about the savings, but the business has to cash flow. Cliff said that all you have to do is look at the budget and the expected shortfall and if income doesn’t increase the money will come from savings and it won’t take long for the savings to be gone and then what?

Mark McNees said that too many people have worked for too long to get that savings to where it is. They did an awesome job. I have sat on boards and organizations and we have used, without raising dues to keep everyone happy, we have used the savings and there is one in particular that I won’t mention that is now gone because no one stepped forward to say that we need to raise the dues. We cut everything that we could and still ran on the savings and then you are not in a good spot. That is not where we need to go. There isn’t enough in there to run this for one year if things really went to heck.

Cliff asked if anyone that was present had an argument against raising the dues. Jack agreed that we wanted to hear the tough questions. Ray Reynolds asked why we were taking such a hit on membership? There are a lot of things I would cut before I would cut membership if I was looking at savings. Cliff said part of it was the economy. Wendy replied that it’s not necessarily that departments have dropped, it’s just membership in general. I may get a department’s dues back and maybe they had 25 members, but they may have lost 5 members that they haven’t been able to replace because of the recruitment and retention issues. We have 600+ departments and if they were all down a few members that would have a huge impact right there. Mark said all departments have budget issues and it’s not just the small ones that take it out of their budgets if the city doesn’t pay for their dues. We’ve had large departments that are gone too. Roger said when departments put budgets together they look at where they can cut and for some the IFA is a priority and for others it’s not. Jack said that he didn’t think it was a trend that people are dropping out. One of the things he’s noticed is that there are departments that are on the delinquent list and then they aren’t getting the newsletter and they find out that the right guy didn’t get the information to get the dues sent in. This year we’ve had about 3 new departments? Wendy said we had 2 departments that were delinquent last year and were dropped that have now paid and rejoined. We had another department that had dropped off and came back. We just also got another department that had belonged many years ago that just rejoined. We are getting people coming in, it’s just that I think the decrease is just that of the departments that belong some of them have been having their numbers trickling down.

Brad Yeager said that he thought also that being short members the board had not kept up with recruiting non-member departments. The membership committee will again be sending out information to the non-member departments.
Paul Schellhase said that if the board talked about the increase at the Mid Year meeting just like they had today that it would be fine. There would be some people that would be against it because they are against everything but if you explain it like you have today it will fly.

Cliff made a motion to approve the proposed budget. It was seconded by Jack. Motion carried.

**Officer Reports:**

**1st VP – Jack Runge:** I thought being first I’d have something left but they’ve already hit all the high points of my report. I would like to thank Belmond for having us. They have a wonderful station. It’s always nice to come in and see the memorabilia and the pride that is always shown in these buildings. Hats off to you folks for what you have here. Also in the thank yous – Dave and Wendy opened up their house to us yesterday. Each year we go in and do our budget work and we invade their house for a day and Wendy feeds us dinner and so thanks Wendy and thanks Dave. We appreciate being able to come up and do that.

Scott Bahr talked to us yesterday and gave us more information on an insurance policy that we can offer to our members. There will be more information on that later. We have looked at some other products from some other companies and flexibility became an issue in dealing with them. We don’t feel that we can sell you a product and include it with your membership because obviously that is dues driven. If we have an insurance benefit then there is a cost to us and we have to pass the cost on to you. We think it should be a cafeteria type of thing where the members can decide whether or not you want to buy into it or not. We were working with one company that was looking good but when it got down to working with departments they kind of fell out of the picture. They wanted one check from Wendy and all of our members in one transaction. When you look at these products and the cost is extremely low there isn’t a lot of room in there for administrative work. Scott has put together a plan with the Hartford Company and if he isn’t here today I will talk more about it later.

The tax checkoff was already mentioned. Talk to your friends and neighbors about that. Again, that’s one of those outside sources of income that can come into the fire service for training.

New legislators have already been talked about. I had a chance to be in Des Moines Tuesday night at another legislative reception and it’s amazing all the new faces that are down there. Make it a point to get to know your legislator and talk to them. If they have a question relating to the fire service we want to be the one that they ask about it. We want them to get our story first.

We’ve already spent enough time talking about the budget. I’d like to get each and every one of yours support in helping us sell that.

**2nd VP – Roger Bissen:** Again, thank you to the Belmond Fire Department for opening up your station to us. You have a beautiful facility and we’re glad to be here. Yesterday working on the budget everything went very well and thanks again to Dave and Wendy for opening up your home for us and the hospitality. Tis the season for certificates and firefighter recognition so we all do a little bit of traveling in the winter. I will be going to Battle Creek in a few days and heading down to Atlantic and I’ve also been invited to the Cherokee County Association to give a little presentation on line of duty deaths and benefits for that.

We are also gearing up for legislative season as Jack mentioned. We need to stay on top of our residential sprinklers. At our last board meeting I talked about a spec house that we were building in Harlan that is going to be sprinklered. That house is complete. It’s going on the market and the realtors
are starting to show it. I visited with Ray Reynolds this morning and we are putting together a photo op for the Fire Marshal’s office and we are going to invite some other people there. Hopefully we will get some senators there, maybe a rep from NFPA. We are scheduled for that on January 25th at 1:00. I think we need to do everything that we can as an association to promote residential sprinklers. This home is a working class size home. It’s probably 1300 square feet so it’s a fairly small home. We aren’t talking about something that is 8000 sq.ft. that needs sprinklered, we are talking a small home and we’ve taken the initiative to make it sprinkler safe.

3rd VP – Al Esch: Thanks Belmond, beautiful facility. Thank you very much for hosting our meeting. Thank you Wendy for having us at your house to work on the budget and some of the other things that we needed to attend to. Every year it’s interesting to see how the budget works and how we can best utilize the money that is in those accounts. As everyone has said it’s one of those challenges that we have meet and meet head on. We just can’t take the money that is sitting in those accounts and use it and not replenish it. It’s got to be there for the future of this association.

I attended the Instructor’s conference in Ames in November. They had a very good conference in my opinion. It seems the Society is going in the right direction as far as what they want to pursue in the next few years. There was some talk about on-line training opportunities. I’m not sure about where they stand on that at the moment but it sounds like something that may happen this spring, at least a pilot project.

I also attended the joint legislative meeting with the law enforcement officials, the Iowa State Patrol, Sheriff’s association, and Professional Firefighters along with Roger and Ellen. I found that very interesting. Even though we don’t have a say on the board or a vote on the board, we put our agenda out there for them and it was pretty much shot down right out of the gate. They are really focused on funding their retirement and pension packages this year. The Professional Firefighters had made the mention of trying to get some tax dollars out of non-taxable organizations; properties owned by 501(c)3s and have that go into their fire protection districts. It sounds like something that they are going to try to pursue. Whether or not it’s something that we want to pursue is something that we haven’t talked about here on the board. We’ll see how that goes. We did talk about interoperability at the meeting a little bit and also funding for our public safety access points or dispatch centers. Apparently that kind of fell on deaf ears also. At least to me, they don’t quite understand the concept, where we get that money from or how we need to involve them with that. We really need to get some done in that aspect. That’s going to take a lot in the next few years.

In December I attended Dyersville and Asbury’s annual banquets. I gave out a 32 year certificate in Asbury to one of their past board members and retired captains.

I just recently attended the opening session of the 84th General Assembly and sat up in the gallery on the Senate side. They did see that there was a red coat in the Senate chamber. After lunch I stood in the lobby between the two houses and greeted quite a few of our legislators. After they reconvened I went over to the House side and sat over there for a while. After I left I had a call from Senator Hancock that it had been noticed that I was there.

There is some legislation pending that we really do need to watch. SF4 is the firefighter tax credit. Senator Hancock filed that on Tuesday. It has been referred to the Ways and Means committee. I haven’t seen any other meetings scheduled for that yet. There is another one on the Senate side SF9 and this may be opening a can of worms again but this refers to the business trade vehicle registrations and use. What they want to do is to allow specialty plates on those vehicles. So just so you aware of it, it
will be talked about again. I did see on the House side there may be an effort to disband the electricians licensing in the state.

Check our website and check it often. Also, there is a new website for the General Assembly. Take a look at that. It’s real easy to navigate. It will give you up to date information on where these bills and files are at. You can even listen to live audio while they are in session.

4th VP – Brad Yeager: Thanks Belmond. You have a beautiful station. I got to go through the audit with Al and Mark yesterday. Looking through Wendy’s books everything is perfectly in order as we knew it would be. I did get to go up to Lake Mills and do an awards presentation back in November. I really do enjoy doing those and honoring the people that have come before us. It’s a neat deal and especially local guys like that it’s a little bit extra special and they didn’t give me too much trouble up there.

I do appreciate the work that Jack has done on the insurance benefit. I hope it takes off. It looks like it’s going to be a good deal for us. We’ll just have to see what the numbers look like.

The past couple of weeks in my efforts to help out and to help Wendy with the website I transferred us over to a different server and as I like to do probably made her life harder instead. We’re still in the process of moving some of that stuff over and I know she sent a mass e-mail out Friday that maybe not everyone received. I’ll continue to work with her on making that process a little easier and hopefully have them sign up on the website to put your name on or take your name off the list.

Mark and I and Al need to work on some membership things. We will be sending out a letter to departments that aren’t currently members. If you know of departments in your area that aren’t currently members let us know and if you have a contact name of someone we can talk to send one of us an e-mail. It is apparent to me now being on the board that the benefits are a big effort for us and we’re trying. Getting information on the benefits and things to the non-member departments would be good.

I’ll be heading down to fire school in a couple of weeks.

5th VP – Mark McNees: I would also like to thank the Belmond Fire department and Chief Wayne Bruggeman for hosting our meeting. I would also like to thank Wendy and Dave for hosting our meeting yesterday. I will be brief as the others have covered much of what I wanted to discuss, but I will hit again some points I believe are important at this time.

The IFA budget is under stress for the coming year due to increases in several areas. I believe we must run this organization with fiscal restraint, as has been done in the past, and needs to really be accomplished now. That means we have to make this cash flow as a business or as your own home budget. Our income is mostly fixed by our dues structure. That has not changed in nearly 10 years. We have very little choice but to adjust our dues to keep the IFA solvent and on a path of sustainability. It’s needed to provide our members with their monthly newspaper, and for representation of our members on the local, state, and national level. I do not believe the increase proposed is out of line, but will help the board plan better in the near future while providing the services and benefits we want to offer. It will also help the departments plan their budgets as well.

The newest offering for volunteer firefighter accident coverage for our members has been drawn up specifically for our members at a cost I believe is very reasonable. It will allow departments to provide some added security to each of its members if they and their city choose to participate. If can help with recruitment and retention of members as well. I strongly urge departments to check into this program.
through Scott Bahr and Hartford. They have put a lot of work into this, but if we don’t take advantage of this it will end. Information will be available on the website along with contact information.

The tax season is upon us and it’s critical we get the word out to our families, friends and the public to encourage them to contribute to the firefighter check-off on their Iowa tax forms. We need to tell them just how these funds help all firefighters with training including ourselves. I ask you to send emails along with talking with people you know to spread the word. I also think it’s easy to take a copy of the check-off advertisement to all your local tax preparers and ask them to make sure and ask if their clients wish to contribute to the firefighter or any of the other check-offs.

The new legislative session is underway and we will be visible at the statehouse as we pursue our agenda. Sen. Hancock has introduced a firefighter tax credit bill. We will continue to push our priorities while being aware the state is facing very tough budget times. We look forward to meeting and working with the new legislators and DPS commissioner Larry Noble.

Al will be addressing the convention committee later on, but I will address the Perry convention briefly. They are still working on their finances to come up with a solution to get the IFA paid for registrations and their other creditors. It will be a process and I’m sure we will hear more from Chief Hinds later in the meeting. I anticipate we will see our funds from Perry, but it may be over a period of time. My personal opinion is that I think it is important they get the private organizations and businesses paid first for better public relations. We can better handle the wait on payment since we are the parent organization and will also suffer negative perceptions if creditors aren’t paid in a timely fashion. We will discuss more later.

Brad mentioned membership and took my comments so again if you know of area departments that are not members please let us know so we can try and make contact and approach them.

On something totally different, we have recently had several arson cases and they have really driven home how important the services of the fire marshals investigators are to departments. I jokingly blame our agent for commenting several months ago that he was surprised Cass County hadn’t had more arson fires. We have had 3 since then. I believe there probably are more going unnoticed and urge all departments to call and utilize the investigators if you have any suspicion at all regarding any fire. It’s nice to have them take a little of the pressure off of you in gathering information and prosecuting those who commit arson.

**Past President – Cliff Renslow:** As with the rest of the Board, I would like to thank the Belmond Fire Department for letting us host our meeting here today. I would again like to thank Dave and Wendy for letting us invade their home for the budget work session.

To also extend on the Insurance information that has already been talked about. There is also information in there that has money for family members in this coverage, if the firefighter is burned and they have to travel more than 50 miles, to help with the travel expenses.

Ellen and I went to the retirement reception for Commissioner Gene Meyer this last week. Gene will be missed a lot as he did a lot for the department of public safety, and I feel that he really did a lot for the Fire Service. He will be missed and I don’t think that he will be retired for very long as I think that he will be involved in something.
I was glad to see that we had five applicants for the IFA Scholarship this year, we picked a winner that will be announced at the Midyear meeting. We didn’t have any nominations for the other IFA awards. I encourage you to nominate someone for these awards this next year during the application period, even if they have been nominated before and didn’t receive it. These are awards that we want to give our members, but we need your help with it.

**President Ellen Hagen:** I have also done some certificates and it really is fun to do them. I was in Garrison Monday night. Let us know when you have things going on in your departments and you’d like to have us come.

No one was able to make it to Des Moines on Tuesday for the Governor’s address due to the weather. I did get to the Capitol on Thursday. I went to Gene Meyer’s reception and then went over to the Capitol and talked to Senator Hancock and my representative. After that I had a meeting with the Red Cross. They wanted to meet and offer their assistance. Have any of you ever called the Red Cross after a fire for people? We haven’t, and it was good for me to hear all of the things that they can help with – rental assistance and immediate food and clothing vouchers. How many of you know who you get if you dial 2-1-1? You get Red Cross. We didn’t know that. Dial 2-1-1 and they can direct you to someone in your area and answer all of your questions. The other thing that they wanted us to know is that they are going to go after being on the checkoff. They don’t want to try to take our place, but they wanted us to know that they are going to try to get on there. Donations are down for them just like they are for everyone else. They want to work with us and I think that’s a good thing.

Do any of you listen to the webcasts on Firehouse.com? They had forcible entry last week and I was at the Capitol so I missed the live but since I registered I could listen to the archive yesterday. It is some good training that you can listen to whenever you want to. They have a PowerPoint so slides go with the speaker. I have high-speed so it’s smooth. It’s just like listening to somebody talk. The forcible entry had some good information and one thing that sticks in my mind is don’t just go to the first door that you find. Go to the door that the family is going to use. Especially in big towns, they could be barred. Go to the door that they go in and out of because that is locked with a key and you can break down a door that is locked with a key. That is usually the easiest. So go to Firehouse.com and you can find some good training there.

I will be going to the Capitol again on Tuesday for a House Public Safety Committee meeting. They are going to be talking about interoperability and Larry Noble will be there.

Thank you again to Belmond. We appreciate you hosting us and thank you to everyone for coming. This was a very good turnout.

**Committee Reports –**

**NVFC – Bob Platz:** As you all know we just went into a new legislative year. I talked to John Lyman who is our legislative chair. We have a lot of things going on and we don’t know how it’s all going to go yet. One bill is the D Block. We had 81 co-sponsors on board in the House and after the change we still have 70 but we did lose a lot there. On the Senate side we had 8 and we still have 7. Congressman Peter King is going to run that bill again this year.
The AFG and SAFER could be very problematic. There are a lot of things going on and one of the things is the SAFER grant is way up there and the Federal government doesn’t know if it should be paying for firefighters salaries around the country and that is what the SAFER does. So that might take a hit, I don’t know. Hopefully we can still keep our AFG grant going but the President lowered that quite a bit too from $420 million to $300 million. The LOSAP bill will be reintroduced in the House this year. That may go somewhere as it doesn’t involve a lot of dollars. The Fire Sprinkler bill, this is for businesses, not residential, that bill has in there for depreciating out the sprinkler in 15 years instead of 39. The Good Samaritan Fire Assistance Act we got passed in the House back in 2004 but we can’t get it through the Senate. Fire – Police Eligibility; there are a lot of places in the country where the police and fire are the same person. They want to make sure that they are PSOB eligible so we are looking at the language on that to see if that is going to work out.

Brian Seymour and I will be going out to DC the first part of April and so we should have pretty up to date information at the Mid Year meeting.

If the NVFC hears of a LODD they are also going to send a letter out to that department to let them know of the resources available through NVFC.

The Heart Healthy Program will be at fire school in Ames. They will be doing cholesterol screenings and blood pressure and hopefully they have a good turn-out to make it worth their time. The booth will be right next to the IFA booth.

Roger asked Bob if he had heard any conversations on NFPA changing from 10 years to 15 years on the turnout gear. Bob said yes, it was still in committee right now. Brian said it would be a discussion item the next round. Roger asked if they thought it would happen. Brian said he didn’t know. Roger asked about shields vs. goggles. Brian said it was on that same list. He thought shields would probably go. Jack asked about new helmets with roll down goggles. Brian said they would probably still be considered a shield and not goggles. He said again it was all just in discussion stages. Brian said as part of NVFC he sits on committee for this area for NFPA. They meet twice a year to go over the codes that will be reviewed that year. They will be meeting in February in Indianapolis. The state of Iowa does have a voice in that through Brian. Roger said if everyone has turnout gear that is 10 years old or less that is great but he doesn’t think everyone can afford that. Bob said if they pull the money from the AFG grants that all of that will go by the wayside and it will be like it was 20 years ago and the departments won’t be able to afford it. Mark said they got an AFG grant and replaced all their gear. It’s all the same age. There is no way they could replace it all at once again. Brian said he didn’t think an expiration date would go away, but hopefully it would be longer. You’ll still have to plan for it. Bob mentioned a letter from Senator Grassley that announced the latest round of AFG grant recipients. In that he did say that the fire service needs these grants. He is pretty powerful on the money side of the game.

Convention Committee – Al Esch

Monticello is making progress on plans for this year’s convention. They have some questions about the shower trailers and some of the other equipment that they purchased from Perry. We’ll have to get into that a little bit deeper when the weather gets better to open things back up and actually get inside the trailers and start pulling stuff out.
Board has received some phone calls and questions regarding last year’s convention. We were getting calls from creditors on the status of some invoices that were outstanding. Al asked Chris Hinds if he would like to comment on the convention.

Chris said it was no secret, “they lost their butt on the convention”. They thought they were in the hole about $115,000 but last week they got another bill from Alliant for $2700. They have been paying off creditors as fast as they can generate money. The mayor has appointed a committee made up of a couple members of the city council and they are working with them on finding a way to come up with enough funding to pay everybody off and give them some breathing room in order to get the money paid back. The stumbling block they are having with that is that the mayor is a different mayor than the one they had when they signed on to host the convention. He’s saying you got into the mess get out of it on your own. Big creditors that they still have out there: NW Iowa Comm. College – they came down and installed the poles and stuff - $19,000; a company out of Newton that provided the portable toilets - $20,000, they are the only company that has started legal action against them; printing on the convention book – just under $10,000; equipment rental used to work on campground - $14,000. All local, mom & pop type places are taken care of. All campers that had electrical issues at campground have been taken care of and repairs have been paid for. They are raising money any way they can. They are still selling merchandise. They’ve been selling merchandise out of a store front that owners have let them use. Have still had some trucks selling. He said he keeps assuring everyone that they will be paid and they will, it’s just a matter of when. Brian Eiteman, their convention chair, told him that he e-mailed a convention report to Wendy.

Al: It has been a unique situation this year with the host town not making money and actually losing money. It’s also a unique position to be in on the board to deal with the phone calls and the comments and response from our members as well and their concerns. As committee chair, I don’t want to get into micro-managing the conventions and being involved with profit and loss statements. I really don’t think it’s the association’s business how much money you make and I don’t feel it’s our business how much you lose, until we start getting the calls. Once we start getting calls from creditors then we have to answer them, and answer them honestly, because then our reputation is on the line. We are hoping that all of that comes together for you and that we can bring this to a close as quickly as possible.

Chris: We are working on it and we had some unique situations. First, the campground was not our first choice. It’s where we were steered by the city and encouraged to use if we wanted their support. They had grant money for that area which was used for environmental cleanup but the grant money didn’t go in the direction that we thought it needed to. We had a lot of out of pocket expenses to prepare the campground. The fire department probably has $40,000 that they have put out there just for that. We had $14,000 just in equipment rental. Another of our things was when we went to Alliant Energy and told them what we were doing and what we needed and it trickled back up to people who didn’t know about their involvement in the past and they said that they couldn’t be doing that. We had to pay rental on transformers, we had to purchase other items from them to set up the campground. They did donate a lot of stuff to us that they wrote off – approximately $50,000. The new bill that we got from them for $2700 was an additional rental fee for transformers because we had to expand the campground from what was originally planned. That was another problem. If the campground had been the same as last year or other years past, there was enough equipment. We were just enough bigger that we had to buy additional wire to go in the ground, additional electrical boxes, and some of those costs just take off and run wild on you. It was $200 - $300 for each electrical box, that adds up fast. Spools of underground wire are not cheap. Those were some of the things that really pushed us over the edge.
Jack asked if the town was now the owner of that ground. Chris said yes they were. Jack asked if they are not placing any value on the all of the work that the fire department did out there to get it leveled and cleaned. Chris said basically, no. Jack asked if the horse show that was scheduled for the next week after convention had taken place. Chris said no. As anyone that camped knew, they were working on this old railroad yard and with all the metal that kept working it’s way to the surface they did not feel that it was safe for the horses.

Paul Schellhase asked how many were camping? Roger said report said 1470 campsites were sold. Mark said that brings up that they didn’t keep track of how many campers there were in Atlantic, but they sold 1100 campsites. We all know there weren’t 1100 campers there. A lot of departments buy extras and circle the wagons. I think this is something as a committee we will be discussing with the host towns that it’s great if you can sell extra campsites but with the work and cost involved you need to come up with a reasonable number of campsites and you really don’t need any more than this. People are going to have to buy them, and if you’re full, you’re full. If it comes up for example that Harlan bought 20 of them and the campgrounds are full the host town can come back to Harlan and say are you really going to use all of those or can we sell some to Garrison. We are expanding the campground at a huge cost and it may only have one plug in in one of those boxes and you have 12 of them in there. It’s not cost-effective and it will run others into the same problem. I don’t think we need 1500 campsites because there aren’t 1500 campers there but you have to set it up for an electrical outlet in case it is.

Paul asked how many were registered. The report said 2059. Dave Lensing said that like Mark was saying people used to come in tents and now they come in a 37’ 5th wheel and all you really need to do is increase the size of the campsites. Mark said every host town knows that they are going to have to buy more wire. You keep yanking up the wire each year and every year it gets shorter because you keep cutting it and every campground is different. That is one of the reasons that the committee was started to try and help out a little bit and give some of the money back to help with those types of expenses. Those expenses are going to be there and it’s a cost that host towns have to figure in. But there has to be a point where we say, we don’t need 1600 campsites next year. It’s not going that direction. Ellen said that if you keep increasing the size of the campgrounds it also eliminates towns that can host if they don’t have that much land available. Mark said that they bought additional wire also. Chris said they bought 4 spools of wire. Mark said that was why that $4000 is set aside out of the money that we get from registrations to help offset some of those expenses but every town is going to have costs. Atlantic spent way more than that also and so have the other towns. It offsets some of it but every town has to figure in those additional costs. Roger thought it would be beneficial for the committee to have a guide that for x number of registered campers you will need x number of campsites. Because with 2059 registered, 1470 campsites is not in line with what has been done in the past.

Roger told Chris he felt bad for them. He asked if this has had an effect on their membership. He said it hadn’t had an effect on the membership as far as losing anyone, but it has definitely had an effect on the morale and attitude. Roger asked if the city manager, city council, city hall realizes that. Recruiting and retention is a huge problem, not only in Iowa but across the country. Long term this could have a negative effect on the Perry FD for recruiting. Chris said they have had comments made to them that they were afraid everyone would give up and walk off and there wouldn’t be a fire department and there are people on the other side that say if that’s the case I guess we’ll start over. The city administrator is even looking at selling some of the equipment. Chris said they have first responders and also a dive team with a boat. He would like to have us sell off all the equipment for both of those.

Roger said he really wished that their city council and city manager would say we need to do this to help out our volunteer fire department that puts their lives on the line for our community.
Mark said that the convention committee had a conference call with Brian and Chris and discussed many issues and problems and he wanted to let people know that Perry members receive so much per call and that they had even said that they were willing to give that back but it would still take 3 – 4 years of them returning what they are given per call to pay off the debt. To me that’s like you just spent 2 – 3 years working your butt off and you lost money and now on top of it I’m going to give back all I get. I think the firefighters have put their best foot forward and gone above and beyond in trying to do something, but, and we discussed this too, I think your city has quite a bit of responsibility for some of that costs out at that campground that you incurred and they just put it on your back. That is not the entire issue, but it takes a big chunk of what your debt is, is the fact that you did that for them.

Al: To wrap this up, the committee will be looking at some benchmarks and putting them into place for future host communities. We’ll assign, potentially one of the board members, to that host community to make sure that these benchmarks are being followed and if there are adverse developments that they are addressed at that time. That is my recommendation to the board.

**Guests:**

**Fire Marshal Ray Reynolds:** I want you to encourage your firefighters to go to fire school because we will be giving away 13,000 9-volt batteries for your departments to use in replacing batteries in smoke detectors when you go on calls for service. I have boxes and boxes of batteries and the only thing it requires of your department is that in Indianola, they’ve been the first pilot for a project that we call “Operation Safe Senior”, and when we go to a CO call, a lift assist, or anything where we go for service the fire department will offer to do a quick check of smoke detectors and make sure that they have working batteries. We’ve replaced a number of them just on the calls we’ve been on. It has certainly created a positive environment with our seniors.

Fire reporting – We are happy to report that we have approved ImageTrend as our web-based fire reporting software. We are in the process of writing a contract. Commissioner Meyer as he was leaving, gave us $234,000 for a 3 year program for the web-based system. The challenge is going to be after that 3 year window, it’s going to cost roughly $15,000 a year to maintain that system which is really reasonable for what we will get out of it. I will tell you as I’ve said before, Minnesota went from 38% to 97% reporting overnight. What they are seeing now is the larger cities are saying why should I pay for a software upgrade when I can do this for free? The city of Rochester just switched to ImageTrend. Be patient. We’re working on a training plan. It’s going to be a great thing for our state.

Smoke Alarms: I’ve taken a few heat rounds from some local fire chiefs in the Metro area who have asked me to back off on the smoke alarm media stuff because it’s deflecting attention from residential sprinklers. The answer is no. Sprinklers and smoke alarms are BOTH life saving devices that we are champions for but what we see is an increased benefit in the smoke alarms because as you know we had 146 lives saved by smoke alarms including the great pictures from Des Moines of a house completely engulfed and the people inside sleeping were awakened by the smoke detectors. I know the board gets updates when I see significant saves or significant events.

Thank you for allowing us to use your Foundation account as 501(c)3. Many businesses appreciate that when they contribute to our smoke alarm campaign. We have roughly $80,000 in an account. By the time we are done with our smoke detector project we will have installed 10,000 smoke alarms in Iowa. We are about half way on funding. Randy is working on the AFG grant for our state to purchase with the key priority of the Federal government and the AFG being fire department installed smoke alarms. We are right on task with what we have in place. We are getting some great visibility. Insurance companies
are really starting to notice and we have a presentation to the Independent Insurance Agents Association and there will be about 300 – 500. The $80,000 that we have so far as pretty much just been word of mouth by about 5 of us. I’m very hopeful that this project will keep moving forward. We are going to be purchasing about $70,000 worth of smoke alarms here in the next couple of weeks and through Casey’s we are going to work on distributing them throughout the state to those cities that have been involved with this. There are 5 major cities that have completed smoke alarm surveys including: Cedar Rapids, Ankeny, Waterloo, Council Bluffs and that to me is impressive that those big cities have gotten involved in this project. We also have a small company in Iowa, United Services, that has offered $15,000 just towards hearing-impaired smoke detectors. We are working with and have a couple of electricians lined up that have offered to donate their work in installing these smoke alarms in these homes. We have a need for about 11 families so far but the office of Deaf Services tells me that they turn away 60 families a year because they don’t have money for these. Our goal is everybody ought to have a smoke alarm. We have to do something to combat the 86% of our fire deaths that don’t.

Legislation – as you know there has been a flurry of activity. They are looking to repeal almost every licensing program in the state. My electrical inspection program is first on the pre-bills. They want to do away with the whole electrical licensing and inspection program. I’m convinced that farms will take a hit and that is their first primary target. They don’t want electrical inspections on farms.

Retired Windsor Heights Chief Al Hunter passed away. He was a tremendous pioneer to the Metro area and a great incident commander. A number of departments around the metro will be attending the visitation this afternoon and the funeral tomorrow.

Our priorities continue to be:

- Funding for vehicles – 80% of our fleet has over 100,000 miles and depreciation was cut last year in an effort to avoid layoffs. We have about zero in our account and about 50 vehicles that are over 100,000 miles. That’s a huge problem.
- Overtime funds – so that our agents can continue to investigate fires throughout the state
- Better facilities for the Fire Service Training Bureau – our training facility ought to be state of the art. It’s 2011, there’s no reason we shouldn’t have the best equipment to train our firefighters.
- Implementing and maintaining ImageTrend for our fire reporting software is a key priority for us.

**FSTB – Randy Novak:** I’d like to remind everyone that last legislative session after we had taken midstream the 10% budget reduction, the training fund dropped to about $610,000. $150,000 last legislative session was added that became effective July 1st of this current fiscal year, but it’s my understanding that that was a one-time fund, which means if something isn’t done, we will go back to $610,000. We were up to about $680,000+ before the budget reduction. $150,000 is a lot of training dollars going out the door.

We started October 1st our new $28,000 grant from the National Fire Academy, the state support grant. We typically use it to run additional 2-day NFA courses where we are using our instructors so we can run those courses at a reasonably cheap cost. We’ve run several Juvenile Fire Setter courses recently. We use it for Instructor training. Instructor training has gone wild for us. We added a second section to the fire school.

We are applying for an AFG-FP&S grant for a Mobile Fire Investigation trainer that we think is critical not only for supporting our own training needs but to support training needs for the regional fire schools.
and also for support when the Fire Marshal’s agents are doing one day and two day training out there on their own that we have this training unit available.

We are also putting in for $500,000 for the smoke detector project. That is one that we would like to do through the IFA. I will bring that up under new business.

New Courses: We have a new HazMat Ops course. We are using the new IFSTA materials.

Volunteer Fire Officers Training Program through Public Entity Risk Institute (a non-profit organization outside of the Washington, DC metro area) They have developed a 12-module that was originally developed for on-line training. We are going to make it available in both on-line and direct delivery. The pricing was originally $250 per firefighter. We have it now at $150 for all of your officers at once. We hope to have it available in the spring.

Re-accreditation site visit with IFSAC will occur later in February. That is done on a 5 year cycle. We are currently accredited by both IFSAC and the ProBoard for 12 levels. We are looking at adding probably 2 – 3 and maybe 4 certification levels based on demands that they are getting.

Posters have been sent out to all Iowa fire departments for the Regional and State Fire Schools.

Annual State Fire School is January 28 – 30 in Ames.

We have selected the Federal FY 2011 direct and regional deliveries from the National Fire Academy. We will be selecting the Federal FY 2012 direct and regional deliveries later this month. This year’s regional delivery is the Life Safety Plan Review.

Minimum training standard took effect July 1, 2010. The Bureau will continue to answer questions and present the minimum training standard at county association meetings. Roger asked how requests were coming in for FFI training. Randy said they were still getting a lot or requests.

Fire Marshal’s website and FSTB website’s have been updated. New design colors and content. The fastest way to find out about new training opportunities and other information is to sign up for an automatic e-mail notification at www.dps.state.ia.us/fm/fstb. We are still working on new content. If you are having problems viewing the website contact them. It is a problem with your browser and it’s a simple fix.

We will be giving one of the Governor’s Awards at fire school. The Stratton Award ordinarily would be given at fire school but it was given to Commissioner Meyer earlier as he was not going to be able to attend. These awards programs are back up and running and you can find information on website.

Unfinished Business:

Insurance: Jack Runge went over the details of a plan that Scott Bahr has put together with the Hartford Company. This is a Volunteer Firefighter Accident Policy that departments can sign up to have coverage for their members above what workmen’s comp might cover. It has income protection again loss of earnings if disabled due to an accident; indemnity for a covered loss of life, limb, sight, speech or hearing; payment of medical care expenses for covered injuries and additional covered conditions. There are various deductible options available with coverage starting as low as $12.56 per member. A department must sign up as a group with all members covered. Paperwork is one simple form with about 3 blanks to fill out plus the name, contact and address information of the department. The more
people that sign up the more flexible they can be with adding more coverage options. Those that can be covered under the department policy:

- Volunteer members of the fire company, including those receiving a nominal retainer fee
- Deputized bystanders
- Junior firefighters
- Firefighters auxiliary
- Volunteer EMS/EMT responders and other first aid/rescue squad members
- Paid employees and drivers (requires underwriting approval)

Insured persons will be covered when they are:

- Accidentally injured or lose their lives while actually on duty at a fire, traveling to or returning from a fire, at a fire drill, at a parade or at a test or trial of any firefighting or emergency apparatus
- On an emergency call, or traveling to or returning from an emergency call
- Participating in or attending as a volunteer member of the organization (but not as a paid driver or employee) any other regularly approved, supervised activity of the organization
- Riding in or on organization apparatus (including private passenger automobile furnished by the organization for the transportation of the fire chief or other official of the organization) while traveling to or returning from a fire drill, a parade or a test or trial of any firefighting apparatus

This coverage pays BEFORE Workmen’s Comp.

We have about 12 – 18 months to get this going and get some participation. If at the end of that time we don’t have the participation this offer can go away. We think this is a benefit that we can offer to departments and their members at a pretty decent cost. If you have questions contact a board member. Information will also be going up on the IFA website. They will be coming to fire school and to the Mid Year meeting and are willing to come to county meetings to present this as well. They will be advertising in the Iowa Firefighter.

Some of the board members are definitely taking this back to their cities to look at.

Dave Zimple said it looked like a good product but it would come down to marketing. We offered the credit card to members and there is just a small percentage that have taken advantage of that. He said that it’s like people read the information that we put out in the paper but don’t understand what it’s telling them.

**New Business:**

**Randy Novak: AFG – FP&S grant** – State Fire Marshal’s office would like to apply for the FP&S grant for roughly $500,000 for smoke detectors. We aren’t seeing the corporate sponsorships that we thought we would see. What we would like to do if possible is that we would like to run it through the IFA to do the application and not run it through as a state agency. The overall purchasing issues really get complicated when you are in state government. If we are able to do that through you we would still have to go through the bidding process but we wouldn’t have to have state purchasing go through the bidding process. We would like to do it through the IFA’s AFG account as long as you had nothing else going through that for this particular period. Randy would be doing all the paperwork for this. Jack made a motion to let Randy apply for a FP & S grant for the State Fire Marshal’s office smoke detector project through the IFA. It was seconded by Roger. Motion carried.
Bob Platz – NVFC – The NVFC was looking for 10 people to read the FP&S grants and I applied and it looks like a good possibility that I may get to do that.

Good of the Association:

President Hagen: For those that don’t know, Marion Valero-Lehman from Redfield is our new representative to the Emergency Response Council. She took Scott Hagenson’s place on that board.

Dave Zimple: I just have a comment and I know it may irritate a few people but we have a 2011 proposed budget here that shows $22,034 for a government relations consultant and if they don’t think enough about the association to even come at the beginning of the legislative session to a board meeting and talk about it I guess I have some serious issues about whether or not we should extend the contract with them.

Cliff Renslow: I’d like to thank everyone for the great turnout today.

President Hagen: Yes, I’m very pleased with the turnout today. Thank you for showing interest in your association and being here. Mid year – get your rooms. They are going fast. We are at the Sheraton in West Des Moines. I have changed the name of the banquet. It is the Mid Year Banquet honoring our Past Officers. I want everyone to know that the banquet is not just for Past Presidents. It is for everyone.

Motion to adjourn was made by Cliff Renslow. It was seconded by Al Esch. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Wendy Lensing
Executive Director