



THE FIREMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

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Levittown's Thomas Cuff Elected President of Statewide Firefighters Group

Longtime Levittown resident and volunteer firefighter Thomas J. Cuff, Jr. was recently elected President of the Firemen's Association of the State of New York (FASNY). Mr. Cuff's election by a unanimous vote came on the final day of the Association's 136th annual convention, held in Rochester, NY.

Cuff's election to this important post marks the pinnacle of a journey he began over half a century ago, when he joined the Garden City Fire Department in 1953. And every step along the way has prepared him for the great responsibility of leading 100,000 of his fellow volunteer firefighters over the next two years.

Tom and his wife Jane settled down on Shelter Lane in Levittown, where they raised four daughters that have given them 10 beautiful grandchildren. Tom joined the Levittown Fire Department in 1961 and served as Captain of Ladder Co. No. 1, as well as Secretary and Treasurer in the administrative ranks. He also served as a Commissioner of the Levittown Fire District for 20 years.

Tom's record of fire service leadership includes terms as President of the Nassau County Volunteer Firemen's Association, the South Shore Volunteer Fire Departments, the County's Association of Fire Districts and the Southern New York Volunteer Firemen's Association.

With a degree in Business Administration from Adelphi University and experience in engineering and other disciplines at LILCO, Tom brought a slightly different perspective to the volunteer fire service. As a result, he often studied things others didn't pay much mind, like new laws providing firefighter benefits, and was very concerned about building construction methods and the codes governing them.

When Congress enacted the Public Safety Officers' Benefit Act (PSOB) in 1976, most in the fire service paid little attention as Washington was still recovering from Watergate. Thankfully, Tom was already researching this new benefit for firefighters, as his own fire department would suffer a terrible line-of-duty death just a few months later.

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Firefighter Kevin McKinney was responding to an alarm when tragically, his vehicle collided with a piece of Levittown apparatus responding to the same call, killing him instantly. Armed with his knowledge of this new law, Tom volunteered to help McKinney's family file the paperwork necessary to qualify Kevin for the PSOB monetary award. Thanks to Tom's efforts, the family received the money in less than two months.

For over three decades, Tom has helped families of deceased firefighters across New York state successfully navigate the federal Department of Justice's sometimes Byzantine paperwork and procedures. He even keeps a pre-formed set of documents he designed himself on his home computer, helping him quickly and efficiently start this process after each fatality. (The National Volunteer Fire Council published and nationally distributed a guide authored by Tom on how to file a PSOB claim that included these documents.) Just last year, Tom helped the family of Paul Brady of Malverne, who was tragically crushed to death atop a rescue truck during a training exercise, qualify for the federal death benefit.

One of Tom's greatest desires in his new post is helping prevent firefighter and civilian deaths and injuries, so maybe he won't need those PSOB packages as much. As a result, he is leading the charge for the passage of residential sprinkler requirements both here in New York and hopefully, on the national and international levels, as well.

This month, Tom will lead a delegation of volunteer firefighters to Minneapolis for meetings of the International Codes Council. There, firefighters and fire safety advocates from across the nation will battle the powerful construction lobby and their allies in an attempt to overturn previous rejections of residential sprinkler requirements. Tom believes he and his fire service colleagues may finally be able to accomplish this important and lifesaving change.

Tom first became involved with national codes and standards early in his tenure as a Fire Commissioner. He worked with a group of fire service leaders to require hotels to also display room numbers and fire exit signs one foot off the floor, helping both guests and firefighters orient themselves in dark, smoky hallways.

Tom also became very involved in the promulgation of the National Fire Protection Association's 1500 standard for firefighter health and safety. He felt certain special interest groups were manipulating the development of this new standard in an attempt to unjustly force overbearing and inflexible mandates on smaller volunteer departments, thus putting them out of business. Tom worked with a group that developed reasonable and equally safe alternatives to the original standard's requirements, allowing small communities to keep their volunteer firefighting forces without having to compromise safety.

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Looking forward, Tom's tenure as FASNY President comes during challenging times for the volunteer fire service both here on Long Island and statewide, including attacks on the special taxing districts that support the volunteers' operations in many parts of the state. Tom believes passionately in the importance of maintaining local, community-based control over the delivery of fire suppression services. A recent study by the NYS Association of Towns bears out his argument, pointing out that small, local fire departments, which are usually staffed by volunteers, are much more efficient at delivering services economically than town, county or city based fire departments, staffed by paid firefighters.

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Photo Caption: "New State Firemen's Association President Thomas Cuff with fellow members of the Levittown F.D.'s Ladder Co. No 1 and Commissioners of the Levittown Fire District at his installation dinner in Rochester last month."