

## Monthly Message from the Chief

After first coming to work in June 1971, I was asked if I wanted to join CDFEA. In those days, it was an option not addressed during initial signup. I recall asking one of the tenured firefighters what it was. He said, "Just say yes," so I joined the California Division of Forestry Employees Association.

I didn't participate much early in my career, other than to attend chapter meetings occasionally. When I promoted to captain and moved to what was then the Sonoma Ranger Unit, my coworkers held a higher level of interest and involvement in labor issues. It may have also had to do with the pending affiliation with the International Association of Fire Firefighters (IAFF) and the California Professional Firefighters (CPF), which was ratified by the membership in July of 1982. I am a charter member of Local 2881 and have maintained my membership because I believe in the cause.



It was also about then that I was elected as the chapter rank and file representative. Later, I would become the chapter and district supervisory representative and a member of the supervisors' negotiating team. The experiences I had representing members coupled with supervising and/or partnering with three men who would go on to become State Rank and File Directors laid the framework for my philosophies regarding labor relations. I learned much to which I would not have otherwise been exposed.

Although, at times, my involvement was called into question by some in management, I found I gained a fair amount of credibility and respect by being prepared, objective and respectful. I adhered to the belief that it's all business...don't make it personal; don't take it personal. I still do.

I encourage people to get involved. If you don't make an attempt to control your own destiny, you have no one to blame but yourself. I cannot overemphasize what a great learning opportunity it is.

Bottom line: labor and management want the same thing...to provide a safe workplace free of discriminatory, arbitrary or capricious treatment in which employees can perform the work necessary to meet the Department's mission.

Last month CAL FIRE and CDF Firefighters were recognized as labor management partners of the year by California Fire Fighters Joint Apprenticeship Committee (CFF JAC). The "Partnership for Success" plaques Bob Wolf and I accepted on behalf of those who earned us this honor read, *"In recognition for establishing and maintaining an exceptional apprenticeship training program and*

*for creating excellence in the fire service through a strong management and labor partnership.”*

I was pleased to be able to accept the award. The exemplary effort made by so many to make the apprenticeship program work is an excellent example of what can happen when labor and management work together.

At the beginning of December, I attended the annual CDF Firefighters convention. There, I addressed the general session and shared the state of the Department with the delegates. I also visited with many of the district caucuses and the Honor Guard. I was impressed by the candor of the delegates and the level of interest in matters affecting the Department.

I always look forward to days when I can visit with the people of CAL FIRE. That includes everyone. The examples I have used focused on fire protection employees, but every one of us has a role in our success. What I express here applies to all employees.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that although I have a great deal of appreciation for the safeguards that organized labor provides, it is my inherent responsibility to protect and exercise management rights.

Many years ago my Unit Chief asked me who my ultimate boss was. I guessed wrong. He claimed that the California taxpayers were collectively my ultimate boss. I have never forgotten that. They have a reasonable expectation that I manage the Department in their best interest, and I intend to.

The keys to effective and successful cooperation between labor and management are open communication, honesty and respect!

I look forward to enhancing management's relationship with labor in the coming year by building on partnerships and resolving differences. Much more can be accomplished in a cooperative atmosphere.

I wish you all a safe and enjoyable holiday season and a happy and prosperous New Year.



Del Walters, Chief  
Director