



## Benefits Summary

### WHY WOULD I WANT TO JOIN THE GEORGIA STATE FIREFIGHTERS' ASSOCIATION?

As a firefighter or a chief officer, you may be asking yourself the question, "Why should I join this Association?" Read on for an in-depth excursion into the many and varied reasons for becoming a member of GSFA.

The Georgia State Firefighters' Association (GSFA) was formed in 1952 by a group of fire chiefs because they realized that more could be accomplished for the fire service through a group working collectively instead of individually. Those fire chiefs also knew that an organization comprised of ALL MEMBERS OF THE FIRE SERVICE could have more of an impact.

GSFA is now the largest, and the oldest, non-profit fire service Association serving the fire service community in Georgia. Any member of the fire service, from rookie to chief officer, career or volunteer, can be a member of GSFA. GSFA is not a union. It is a benevolent, membership organization working for firefighters. State agencies (Georgia Fire Academy, Georgia Firefighters Standards & Training, Georgia Firefighters Pension Fund, Georgia Forestry Commission, etc.) and affiliated organizations can also be a member of GSFA.

Membership dues are only \$25 annually per member per year. For that \$25 you will receive a multitude of benefits not found or offered by any other fire service organization, even those larger ones on the national level. And this Association works for your behalf within Georgia!

What has the Georgia State Firefighters' Association done for the individual firefighter (and remember, chief officers are in the profession of firefighting) that would prompt him/her to join this organization? To answer the oft-asked question, "What's in it for me?" Let's explore the many and varied benefits of membership.

Firefighters joining and working through the mechanism of GSFA throughout the years have accomplished decisive victories for the fire service on several levels. Let's discuss a few of those and their impact on the individual firefighter today.

#### 1. Georgia Firefighters Pension Fund

In 1952, GSFA started a retirement system for firefighters through a legislative act. This system is now known as the Georgia Firefighters Pension Fund. Firefighters in Georgia can belong to this pension plan regardless of whether they are a member of GSFA even though we created it. GSFA created the pension fund as a benefit for the Georgia fire service. Sadly, our forefathers did not have the foresight to tie membership in the GSFA as part of the criteria of being a member of the pension plan. Had this been done, Association membership would be greater. Non-members benefited then, and continue to benefit, from the efforts of the Firefighters' Association on behalf of the entire fire service. How can it be so easy for a firefighter today to ignore the role the GSFA played in this one important benefit enjoyed by firefighters? How can they be a member of the pension plan and say? The Georgia State Firefighters' Association has done nothing for them as an individual? They have a retirement plan that is the envy of the nation. Why? They have this benefit because of the collective efforts of a group of firefighters working through the GSFA. Until 1984, Pension Board of Trustee members were elected by the GSFA membership at the annual conference. A new law was enacted in 1984 that changed the composition of all Boards of Title 47 pension systems from being elected (GFPF through GSFA), to appointment by the Governor. When the law was changed, the GSFA by law retained the authority to recommend names for Board appointment to the Governor. The GSFA office was housed in the same building with the Pension Fund until the GSFA moved to its own quarters in June 1985.

## **2. Georgia Fire Academy**

In January 1958 the Georgia State Firefighters' Association created the Georgia Fire Institute at Georgia Tech through a legislative act. In 1969 a training center was built on the campus of Southern Tech in Marietta. This training center, now known as the Georgia Fire Academy, was created as a separate entity by the Georgia Fire Academy Act of 197, another effort of GSFA. Harold Thompson was the first Director of the Academy.

The Georgia Fire Academy is now a resident agency at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center. Because of GSFA efforts, firefighters now have their own training agency. The GSFA Executive Director served on the Governor's Study Committee for the creation of a public safety training center. A shovel from the groundbreaking ceremonies for the new training center (GPSTC) is hanging in the GSFA Office. The GSFA President also serves as a member of the Fire Academy Advisory Council. GSFA also sponsored numerous fundraising events to raise monies for the Public Safety Memorial that was erected the GPSTC in Forsyth, Georgia. The GSFA President serves as a member of the Memorial Selection Committee for the engraving of names on the Memorial.

## **3. Georgia Firefighters Standards & Training**

In the eighties GSFA turned its efforts toward the establishment of minimum standards for the employment and training of firefighters in the State of Georgia. These efforts were realized through legislation which created the Georgia Firefighters Standards and Training Council. Another benefit for the Georgia firefighter, benefiting both GSFA members and non-members. The 2003 amendment to this Law will have a far-reaching impact on the Georgia Fire Service. George Hope (Gainesville) was the first Executive Director of the GFFS&T.

## **4. Georgia State Indemnification Commission**

GSFA was instrumental in introducing legislation to create this agency that provides funds to public safety officers killed or injured in the line of duty. This Act has been amended several times over the years to include other recipients/benefits, with the last one being the addition of a worker's compensation benefit. The GSFA President by laws serves as a voting member on this Commission, and fights for the rights of the individual firefighter to receive this benefit when entitled. Several times he has been able to sway others to his way of thinking when a fire service claim was in danger of being declined. There again, both members and members of GSFA are recipients of and benefit from the efforts on behalf of the entire fire service community.

Both career and volunteer firefighters are eligible for the indemnification, and this was another collective effort of GSFA that continues to have an impact on the individual firefighter today.

## **5. Board of Public Safety**

GSFA was successful in having legislation introduced that placed a member of the fire service as a voting member of the Board of Public Safety, the agency that oversees public safety agencies in Georgia. Members of this Board are appointed by the Governor, and GSFA has the authority by law to recommend three names to the Governor for appointment, although he does not have to select the appointee from our recommendations. Our recommended appointee, Chief J. D. Rice, was replaced in March 2008. Chief Jack McElfish now serves as the fire service representative on this Board.

## **6. Firefighter Prestige Tag**

GSFA introduced legislation providing for a special prestige tag (firefighter tag) for firefighters in Georgia, another benefit enjoyed by the entire fire service, members or not. GSFA provides names to the DMV for the first 50 tag numbers issued, and is contacted whenever a new tag design is planned. The first tag designed hangs in the GSFA office.

## **7. Joint Fire Service Legislative Committee**

GSFA combined its legislative efforts in the late eighties with the Georgia Fire Chiefs Association (formed in 1973) through the creation of a Joint Fire Service Legislative Committee comprised of members from both Associations. The members of this Committee compile a legislative agenda from input at the Joint Conference that will be pursued for the next Session. This Committee works both to

introduce legislation as well as to monitor or even opposing legislation introduced by others that would negatively impact the fire service.

#### **8. Annual Firefighter Cruise**

An excellent vehicle for communication and fellowship for the individual firefighter is the annual firefighter cruises sponsored by GSFA. The first cruise was in 2003. These cruises have been tremendously successful and enjoyed by everyone who has cruised with us.

#### **9. Regional Fellowship Day**

GSFA was planning to implement a statewide membership campaign and the Board decided to regionalize the activity first and then expand statewide. So, the first Regional Firefighter Fellowship Day was held in Thomasville, Georgia, in June 2005. This is the forerunner to many more that will be held in other regions throughout the State. The GAFC was invited to participate in this event. On Saturday, a District meeting was held in conjunction with a district fire school for the Georgia Fire Academy. Prior to the meeting, a membership 'blitz' was planned for the District and GSFA and GAFC officers targeted fire departments in the District and three teams visited all the fire departments in the District on Friday. During this blitz, quite a few departments were visited that we did not have on our department roster.

#### **10. Public Relations/Community Service**

After the September 11, 2001 tragedy, GSFA set up a bank account and coordinated a statewide effort for the collection of funds donated/collected for the fallen firefighters in New York City. Over \$1 million dollars was collected through this and distributed to the families of the fallen firefighters. Funds were received both from fire departments who collected funds in their communities, and from individual citizens throughout the State.

The GSFA Board personally hand-delivered individual checks to the New York City Fire Department for the families of the 343 fallen firefighters.

#### **Future Goals/Objectives & Partnerships**

GSFA is always looking for ways and means to help the fire service in Georgia. The only limit to our largesse is our budget, and this of course could be remedied if we had more members.

Partnering with allied organizations within the fire service is one avenue GSFA has chosen to help the fire service. The GSFA Chief Executive Officers acts as liaison for the Association with other agencies and organizations in the State, and attends as many functions and meetings as schedule will permit. A joint Conference is held annually with the Georgia Association of Fire Chiefs, and GSFA joined an effort with the GAFC in 2003 to implement the 5-Year Fire Service Improvement Plan.

GSFA, GAFC and the Georgia Firefighters Burn Foundation co-sponsor a Brunswick stew/cornbread meal for the Legislature at the State Capitol on the 33<sup>rd</sup> day of the Session. GSFA co-sponsors the State Firefighter Weekend with the Georgia Fire Academy. The Statewide Memorial Service is a joint effort of GSFA, GAFC and the Forestry Commission. The Georgia Fire Academy coordinates this event at the GPSTC.

GSFA sets up a booth at the Fire Safety Symposium, and also furnishes prizes for the event. GSFA participates in the Insurance Commissioner's annual dinner during Fire Prevention Week, and furnishes goodie bag items and goodie bags for the poster contest winners. In 2003, GSFA and the Georgia Forestry Commission collaborated on the collection of fire data through a survey of departments in the State. GSFA partners with the Georgia Firefighters Burn Foundation to host a luncheon on Firefighters' Recognition Day at the State Capitol on the 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday in February. GSFA representatives attend the annual Fire & Emergency Services dinner in Washington, D.C.

In 1995, sufficient funds were in the budget for the GSFA to begin awarding educational scholarships to its members and their families. Eight \$500 scholarships were awarded in 1995, and has continued each year thereafter.

In 1996, sufficient funds were in the budget to begin mailing a personal copy of the quarterly publication, Georgia Firefighter News, to each and every member of GSFA.

In 2005, sufficient funds were in the budget to implement a fire department Grant Program of four (4) \$500 Grants. Four \$500 grants were awarded through a drawing at the annual Conference in August 2005.

### **CLOUT/STRENGTH IN NUMBERS**

Through the clout of this Association's membership and the volunteer efforts of firefighters working together, GSFA has made tremendous strides on behalf of all firefighters in Georgia. This clout has enabled us to introduce and pass legislation aimed at improving working conditions and safety standards for firefighters. GSFA is constantly working to help firefighters in Georgia. We strive for involvement at every level. Members serve on committees and projects both on the State and National level. GSFA is involved in the development of fire codes and works hand in hand with those who develop the standards by which you are regulated. A member of GSFA serves on the NFPA 1001 Technical Committee. GSFA has representation on the National Volunteer Fire Council, an advocacy group that works diligently on the national level for our nation's volunteer fire service.

On the legislative level, GSFA will continue to introduce and fight for legislation to improve the fire service, or to oppose legislation that would have a negative impact. We

'Go to bat' to assist State agencies (GFA, GFFS&T) to secure funds for their budget requirements. We assist the Georgia Firefighters Pension Fund to facilitate the passage of legislation to increase retirement benefits.

Emphasis on membership remains a very important priority. A combined effort of the current membership, plus the potential numbers in the State (30,000 firefighters), could accomplish much that is needed for the fire service. Even though non-members benefit indirectly from GSFA's legislative efforts, it is important to remember that numbers do count when dealing with the Legislature.

We believe that once you have read about and are familiar with what the Association has accomplished for firefighters over the years you will want to join the thousands of other members who have decided to stand up and be counted. Non-members already benefit from the overall activities of the Association as well, but your addition to the membership rolls would add to the numbers the organization needs to achieve its objectives on behalf of the entire fire service. As our membership grows, additional benefits can also be implemented.

As you can see, most of the advantages enjoyed by the individual firefighter today can be traced to the collective efforts of a group of firefighters working through the mechanism of GSFA.

Wouldn't you like to be a part of an organization to make a difference in your profession? Your membership is very important to us, because sometimes ONE PERSON can make the difference.

[Joint today and help us to help you.](#) Only \$25 per year per member.

### **MEMBER SERVICES**

#### **EDUCATION**

Sponsored Workshops & Seminars  
Annual Conference for networking  
District Meetings  
Resource Library/clearinghouse for information

Distributor for Delmar Thomson Training Manuals  
Distributor for Jones & Bartlett (NFA) Training Manuals

#### RECOGNITIONS

Annual Recognition Awards (Valor, Firefighter and Rookie of the Year, Educator of the Year)  
Firefighter's Recognition Day at State Capitol  
Statewide Memorial Service for firefighters at GPSTC

#### PUBLICATIONS/COMMUNICATION

Georgia Firefighter Magazine, a quarterly publication  
Georgia Firefighter News, a quarterly publication  
Fire Department & Statistical Directory  
Funeral Protocol Booklet  
Website: <http://www.gsffa.org/>  
Email: [gsmith3809@aol.com](mailto:gsmith3809@aol.com)

#### PUBLIC/GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

Legislative Initiatives - State and Federal  
Representation on Statewide Committees/projects  
Representation on NFPA 1001 Technical Committee  
Representation on Georgia State Indemnification Commission  
Representation on National Volunteer Fire Council  
Authority to submit names to Governor for appointment to several fire service Boards

#### PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT/DEVELOPMENT

Eight (8) \$500 scholarships given annually  
Four (4) \$500 Fire Department given annually  
Sponsored workshops/seminars on a variety of topics  
Firefighter's Competition at annual conference  
Certain training classes credited by GFFS&T

#### PERSONAL BENEFITS

Automobile window decal and membership card  
\$250/\$500 life insurance with membership  
\$1,000 Line of Duty Death Benefit  
Sponsored Credit Card Program  
Full time Staff

GSFA--- Dedicated to ensuring our members a strong and united voice for the fire service, through unity in leadership, political action, education and member services.