

My Grandfather and dad were both fire chiefs. I started going to fires and other emergencies when I was 5 or 6 years old riding along with one of them. When I was 14, I rode the tailboard of an engine to my first fire. In 1970, at 17, I was lucky enough to get a paying job with the CDF as a seasonal firefighter in the Napa Valley and I've been living the dream ever since.

When I came to the OC in 1974 as a full-time firefighter, I had every intention of working for a year or two and then scooting back to Northern California. What I discovered here however was an inspiring environment that was full of rewarding opportunity – I soon changed my career goal and the rest is history.

I have been provided with opportunities that others only dream of having – some were in the form of a nightmare, nevertheless, we worked hard to make the most of every opportunity. For over 38 years I've had the good fortune to work with the most ethical, caring, competent and courageous people you could ever imagine – from the probationary firefighter to the members of your top management team, there is no group of people more determined and able to make a difference. Their values are simple but their sincerity is complex. Sometimes the truth hurts but it is the truth you will get from the members of OCFA. In October of 1997, I was given a new opportunity by this Board of Directors – to be your fire chief. I remember driving home thinking – OMG – now look what you've done you. At that time, we served just over 1 million people, our budget was upside down, we had 950 full time employees, and our units responded to calls for help in our community 145,000 times. Today, we serve almost 1.4 million people, our budget has been balanced every year since 1997, we have over 1100 full-time members, and our units responded over 220,000 times last year. Indeed a lot has changed under the leadership of this Board of Directors – and let me talk about this board of just a moment.

Without exception, whenever I discuss our board of directors with anyone – they gasp – 24 elected officials as your boss. They wonder how anything gets done. They ask questions about expected conflict over money, service enhancements, and the like. Their shock slowly begins to turn to curiosity and the curiosity then turns to admiration. You see, the OCFA has risen from being a fire department that was “there” to a fire department which leads the way in our profession. In large measure, that success is a result of the leadership and support of this Board of Directors. Since my appointment as Fire Chief in 1997, I’ve worked with over 80 board members, sometimes there are hard questions, some times there isn’t complete agreement on some proposal you’ve been asked to consider – every time however this board of directors has made it crystal clear that safety – for firefighters and for those we serve, was the top priority. As a fire chief and a member of this wonderful organization for close to 4 decades – I could ask for nothing more.

Before I close there are a couple of request I have of you. First, these are difficult economic times and solutions will likely require tough choices. As you consider those choices, and as the economy begins to improve, I respectfully ask that you remember the recommendations that came from the Santiago and Freeway After Action Reports – the basis of which did not changed because the economic environment changed. Secondly, as changes occur and time marches on, it is natural to forget the past. We made a commitment to some special people and I simply ask that you all do your best to never let those people down – I’m specifically talking the families of our fallen brothers and sisters who died under my watch;

Kelly Ahumada	Jerry Chastain	Allan Donelan
Buster DuBrock	Dennis Ford	Leonard Goodwin
Dave Grubb	Jim Hale	Jeannie Latshaw
Kevin Pederson	Chuck Sarazin	Thor Swanson
Tom Wall	Emmett Wells	Doug Whetmore

And, of course, Monsignor John Sammom - May they rest in peace

Thank you for this opportunity – be tough, be tender, be safe!