



ILLINOIS FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION

Dedicated to Excellence in the Fire Service

P.O. Box 7, Skokie IL 60076

phone 847-966-0732, fax 847-966-0782

Website: www.illinoisfirechiefs.org



To the Leaders of the Illinois Fire Service:

This year will be our 55th annual symposium and it will once again be held at the Par A Dice Hotel in East Peoria. The event will kick off on Tuesday, May 5th with our Evening Reception and the Forum with our Attorneys Ottosen and DiNolfo. Wednesday the 6th and Thursday the 7th will bring a day and a half of speakers presenting everything from fire service leadership to artificial intelligence.

Wednesday's keynote speaker will be our very own 2nd Vice President Chief Joe Schrage covering the topic of Mission Focused Leadership and then late morning with Brian Kazmierzak and Michael Clark presenting Artificial Intelligence-Using AI to Manage your Fire Department. The feedback from last year's Convention and the topic of AI was very positive and we are building on your requests and needs.

On Wednesday evening, we will be turning back the clock and returning to the Peoria Chiefs baseball game and picnic. The Peoria Chiefs Baseball Organization provides great entertainment and hospitality and we are glad to be able to attend once again.

The entire Symposium will provide seven presentations, two breakfasts, one lunch, a hospitality event, the baseball dinner and social, and a raffle. In addition, Thursday morning, we will present the status of the transition to WAM and what we see happening in the future.

Please mark your calendars and make your reservations early since we typically sell out the Par A Dice Hotel. More information is available at our website www.illinoisfirechiefs.org. You will be able to see the full three-day itinerary, speakers, events, and registration.

As always, if you have any questions or comments, please free to contact me at 847-417-7270 or at lambelb@wilmette.com. I look forward to seeing you at this year's symposium.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brian Lambel".

Brian Lambel
IFCA President

Illinois Fire Chiefs Association 55th Annual Symposium Program

Tuesday, May 5, 2026

4:00-6:00pm **Registration Par-a-Dice Lobby**

5:00-6:00pm **Evening Reception with Attorneys**

6:00-9:00pm **Open Forum**

Karl Ottosen & Stephen DiNolfo, Ottosen DiNolfo Hasenbalg & Castaldo, Ltd. • Karl & Steve will moderate our open forum with an open microphone format. Bring your hot topics for discussion. Attendees will be invited to submit questions anonymously before the symposium for discussion and answers. Hospitality bar & heavy hors d'oeuvres will be served.

Wednesday, May 6, 2026

6:30-8:00am **Breakfast** (included in registration)

7:00-8:00am **Registration**

8:00-8:15am **Welcome**

8:15-9:30am **Keynote - "Mission Focused Leadership" • Chief Joe Schrage**

The fire service, once primarily focused on military leadership styles and experience, now draws from many other leadership influences such as corporate America styles in an effort to remain relevant and inspiring. Fire Chief Joe Schrage draws upon his former leadership in the Church sharing leadership principles standing strong for over 2,000 years. In his recent Firehouse Magazine article, titled "From Chaplain to Chief," he discussed commonality among great religious leaders and great fire service leaders. Chief Schrage will build upon that article citing clear parallels between religion and the fire service including mission, focus, sacrifice and courage. He will discuss mission, why mission is the foundation to great leadership and the discipline that is required to lead great organizations.

9:30-9:45am **Break**

9:45-10:00am **Illinois Office of the State Fire Marshal Update**

10:00-11:30am **"Artificial Intelligence & Your Fire Department - The Good, the Bad & the Ugly." • Brian Kazmierzak and Michael Clark**

Artificial Intelligence "AI" isn't a replacement for chiefs—it's a force multiplier that can help understaffed departments do more with the same (or fewer) people. This class will examine both the benefits of AI and its pitfalls, and how they apply to your fire department. Here's where it directly applies in the fire service today:

- Reduce Administrative Burden
- Data-Driven Decision Making
- Predictive Fire/EMS Modeling
- Training & Competency Tracking
- Personnel Management
- Community Engagement
- Policy & Accreditation
- Budget & Grants
- Firefighter Health & Safety

**Watch for an email from Survey Monkey.
Submit your questions for the Attorney's Forum.**

Wednesday, May 6, 2026 (continued)

11:30am-1:00pm **Lunch (included in Registration)**

1:15-2:45pm **The Fire Service at a Crossroads. • Chief Salvatore Scarpa**

Today's fire service is navigating unprecedented challenges—from climate-driven disasters and escalating EMS demand to workforce shortages, supply chain instability, aging infrastructure, and shifting societal expectations. This session challenges executive leaders to confront the risks of maintaining the status quo and instead strategically position their organizations for long-term relevance and resilience. Through discussion and practical application, participants will examine emerging threats and opportunities, evaluate recruitment and retention realities, and gain actionable tools to engage members and stakeholders in building a modern, adaptive fire service prepared for the demands of the twenty-first century.

2:45-3:00pm **Illinois Fire Service Institute Update**

3:15-4:45pm **Why Good People Make Bad Decisions: Ethical Decision Making in the Fire Service. • Kristopher T. Blume**

In the fire service, tough calls are part of the job. But what happens when the right decision isn't clear, or when pressure, fatigue or organizational dynamics cloud our judgment? In this session we will explore how psychological factors impact ethical decision-making in the complex and demanding environment of the fire service. This session, adapted from a course traditionally offered through the National Fire Academy, uses real-world examples to explore why good people sometimes make poor choices.

5:00-10:00pm **Peoria Chiefs Baseball Game & Dinner**



Mark Your Calendar

IFC E/R Foundation Golf Outing
July 15, 2026—Bloomington GC

**Illinois Fire Chiefs Association
75th Anniversary Dinner**
August 15, 2026—Westin Hotel, Lombard

**IFC E/R Foundation
Fishing Classic**
September 18, 2026—Winthrop Harbor Marina

**Illinois Fire Chiefs Association
Annual Conference**
October 12-15, 2026—Peoria IL

Watch for More Information
IFCA website: illinoisfirechiefs.org
Monthly HotSheet

Thursday, May 7, 2026

- 6:30-8:00am **Breakfast** (included with registration)
- 8:00-8:15am **IFC Educational & Research Foundation Update**
- 8:15-9:00am **"IFCA Changes and the Future • John Buckley, Brian Lambel and Wisconsin Association Management (WAM)**
- 9:00-10:15am **"Command Discipline Under Fire" • Joseph Mitchell**

The Firemen's Disciplinary Act 50 ILCS 745 Practical Overview
Command staff face more scrutiny than ever. One misstep in a disciplinary investigation can erode trust, invite grievances, or expose your department to significant organizational liability. The Firemen's Disciplinary Act is not simply a compliance requirement. It is a leadership instrument that, when understood and applied correctly, strengthens command authority and organizational integrity.

This session covers the Act's requirements, protected rights, and practical guidance for command officers to apply its provisions fairly and consistently. Participants will gain clarity on statutory obligations, procedural safeguards, and common pitfalls that weaken disciplinary decisions.

When used properly, the Act strengthens culture, reinforces accountability, and reduces the risk of costly legal challenges.

10:15-10:30am **Break**

10:30-11:45am **"Investigations Under Fire: Conducting a Legally Defensible Investigation." • Joseph Mitchell**

Understanding the Firemen's Disciplinary Act is only the first step. The true test of leadership begins when an allegation becomes real and command must act. In today's environment, investigations are scrutinized not only by arbitrators and courts, but by governing bodies, unions, employees, and the public.

This session focuses on the disciplined execution of a legally defensible investigation. Participants will examine investigative structure, interview protocols, documentation standards, representation rights, and the procedural errors that most often undermine cases. Emphasis will be placed on maintaining due process, safeguarding employee rights, and ensuring investigative decisions are fair, consistent, and well supported.

When conducted professionally and deliberately, investigations do more than resolve allegations. They protect the organization, reinforce accountability, and strengthen command credibility.

11:45am **Raffle/Closing**



Invited Speakers . . .



Karl R. Ottosen is a shareholder and managing partner with the law firm of Ottosen DiNolfo Hasenbalg & Castaldo, Ltd. at the firm's Naperville office. Mr. Ottosen has over thirty-five years of experience representing government entities. He is a frequent speaker at seminars and workshops on topics such as labor, employment, and local government law issues. [You may contact Mr. Ottosen at kottosen@ottosenlaw.com.](mailto:kottosen@ottosenlaw.com)



Stephen H. DiNolfo is a shareholder with the law firm of Ottosen DiNolfo Hasenbalg & Castaldo, Ltd. Mr. DiNolfo's practice is concentrated in the full range of litigation services. From the Naperville office, Mr. DiNolfo manages the firm's litigation practice and handles a variety of liability, employment, discipline, and labor matters for the fire service. His email address is sdinolfo@ottosenlaw.com.



Joe Schrage is a 29-year veteran of the fire service who currently serves as the fire chief for the Highland Park, Fire Department. He began as a chaplain and a paid -on-call firefighter prior to his current 22-year tenure at the HPPD. Schrage serves as a member of the executive boards of the Illinois Fire Chiefs Association and Northern Illinois Public Safety Training Academy and as vice president of Division 3 of the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System. He served as a trustee for the Warrenville, IL, Fire Protection District and as a peer assessor for Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE). Schrage received an associate degree in fire science from Southwestern Illinois College, a bachelor's degree from Loyola University Chicago and a Master of Divinity from University of Saint Mary of the Lake. He completed the Chief Fire Officer program, attained multiple National Fire Academy certifications, and was awarded the Chief Fire Officer designation from the CPSE.



Brian P. Kazmierzak, EFO, is the Deputy Director of Public Safety / Fire Chief for the Benton Harbor (MI) Department of Public Safety, where he has served since 2020. Brian has a bachelor's degree in fire service administration from Southern Illinois University and serves as the Director of Operations for www.FireFighterCloseCalls.com. Brian received the 2006 F.O.O.L.S. International Dana Hannon Instructor of the Year Award, the 2008 Indiana Fire Chiefs Training Officer of the Year Award, and the 2011 ISFSI/FDIC George D. Post Fire Instructor. In addition, Brian completed the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program in 2006 and is a certified Michigan Professional Emergency Manager. Brian participated in the UL FSRI PPV Research Study and the Basement Fire Tactics Study Panels. Brian has been a student of the fire service since 1991 and has taught and consulted with both small departments and large metropolitan fire departments.

**Programs partly funded by grant from
IFC Educational & Research Foundation**

Invited Speakers . . .



Michael R. Clark has served in public safety since 1996, beginning his career in corrections before transitioning to patrol, where he held multiple roles, including detective. In 2005, he expanded his expertise into fire services as a paid-on-call firefighter.

In 2011, following the State of Michigan's consolidation of police and fire services in Benton Harbor, Michael became a certified Public Safety Officer, holding dual certifications as a Michigan police officer and firefighter. Over the years, he advanced to the position of Deputy Director, second in command of the department.

Michael is a certified instructor in both law enforcement and fire service disciplines, including NFPA 1700 and 1403, firearms, and active shooter/mass casualty response. In addition to his operational responsibilities, he oversees the City of Benton Harbor's IT department.

He holds a Bachelor of Applied Science in Public Safety Management from Siena Heights University.



Chief Salvatore Scarpa is a 35-year veteran of the fire service, currently serves as the Fire-EMS Chief for Columbus – Georgia's second largest city. He has written numerous articles for the fire service and presented at many regional, national and international conferences on contemporary issues in the fire service. Sal has an associate's degree in fire science, a bachelor's degree in public administration, and a master's degree in leadership studies. He is a graduate of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer (EFO) program, a credentialed Chief Fire Officer (CFO) with the Center for Public Safety Excellence, and a graduate of the International Association of Fire Chief's Fire Service Executive Development Institute (FSEDI). Sal serves as a Commissioner for the Center for Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) representing metro fire agencies; and is a member of the Board of Directors for the CPSE Center for Innovation. He serves as a committee lead for the World Fire Congress Community of Practice on Climate Change representing Metro fire agencies.

He is a graduate of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer (EFO) program, a credentialed Chief Fire Officer (CFO) with the Center for Public Safety Excellence, and a graduate of the International Association of Fire Chief's Fire Service Executive Development Institute (FSEDI). Sal serves as a Commissioner for the Center for Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) representing metro fire agencies; and is a member of the Board of Directors for the CPSE Center for Innovation. He serves as a committee lead for the World Fire Congress Community of Practice on Climate Change representing Metro fire agencies.



Kristopher T. Blume. The fire chief of the Meridian, ID, Fire Department and has more than twenty-seven years of fire service experience. A frequent contributing author, Blume is also the Fire Engineering author of the book, Carry The Fire. Blume is a graduate of the Executive Fire Officer (EFO) program and is an instructor at the National Fire Academy. As a student of the fire service, he is focused on values-driven, mission-focused leadership for the profession.



Joseph P. Mitchell brings more than 31 years of executive-level local government and public safety leadership experience. He most recently served as Assistant Village Manager for the Village of Oak Brook and previously retired as Chief of Police for the Orland Park Police Department.

Since 2012, Chief Mitchell has instructed more than 1,000 public safety command personnel across Illinois and throughout the nation on internal affairs processes, professional standards, and legally defensible discipline — including senior members of the fire service. His instruction emphasizes leadership accountability, due process, and organizational risk reduction.

He has authored multiple published articles on public safety discipline and command leadership in the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) magazine (December 2025) and the International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (IADLEST) magazine (June and September 2025).

Chief Mitchell is a graduate of the FBI National Academy (Session 274), Northwestern University's School of Police Staff and Command (Session 221), and holds a Master of Public Service degree from DePaul University.



Register On-Line
Visit www.illinoisfirechiefs.org

Online Registration



<https://ilfca.memberclicks.net/symp05005>

Full Registration - May 5-7, 2026

\$200.00

Includes all presentations. One ticket to: Tuesday evening reception with the attorneys. Buffet Breakfast on Wednesday and Thursday, Lunch on Wednesday and ticket to baseball game and dinner on Wednesday evening.

Spouse/Significant Other Full Registration

\$100.00

Includes all presentations. One ticket to: Tuesday evening reception with the attorneys. Buffet Breakfast on Wednesday and Thursday, Lunch on Wednesday and ticket to baseball game and dinner on Wednesday evening.

Daily Registration - Wednesday, May 6, 2026

\$110.00

Wednesday Presentations. One ticket for Wednesday Breakfast and Lunch

Daily Registration - Thurs, May 7, 2026 8am-noon

\$ 60.00

Thursday Presentations, Buffet Breakfast on Thursday morning.



Please contact the Hotel Directly

A block of rooms has been secured for the Symposium. Hotel rate is \$110.00/night plus tax and fees. To secure the special pricing, reservations must be made **BEFORE April 13, 2026**. Please use the reference code **FIRE26C**.

To make your reservation call 1-800-547-0711 or 309-699-7711 or

Go to this exact web address <https://paradise.boydgaming.com/groups-and-weddings/group-reservation> scroll down and enter code **FIRE26C**. Guest will then select IL Fire Chiefs then will need to select BOTH check in AND check out dates. Reservation will default to checking in Monday out Tuesday.



Evening with the Chiefs

May 6, 2026

Peoria Chiefs vs Wisconsin Timber Rattlers

Dinner, Ticket and Transportation Provided

Limited Number of Tickets

Game Time: 6:35pm

The Peoria Chiefs are the High-A affiliate of the St. Louis Cardinals and the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers are the High-A affiliate of the Milwaukee Brewers. Both teams play in the Midwest League



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Dedicated to excellence in the Fire Service

Post Office Box 7 Skokie, Illinois 60076-0007
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Website: www.illinoisfirechiefs.org

What does the IFCA do for you?

The Illinois Fire Chiefs Association was formed in 1951 with nine initial members. Since that time, the IFCA has grown to represent five hundred fire departments and districts and over 1500 Chief fire officers in Illinois. The IFCA is well known as the premier representative of fire service management in Illinois. The IFCA focusses on supporting our members – the fire service leaders in Illinois – as they work to protect their communities. As a member of the Illinois Fire Chiefs Association (IFCA), you have access to cutting-edge information about your profession, knowledge and training to succeed as a leader, networking with fire service experts, advocacy for fire service legislation, and the ability to discuss issues with other chiefs.

Education – The IFCA offers Senior Officer Development courses throughout the State, tailored to the needs of the area departments. The annual Symposium allows Chief Officers to learn and connect with other Chiefs from across Illinois. Recently, the IFCA joined the IAFFPD sponsoring a joint Fire Service Conference, the premier fire service event in Illinois. Additionally, the IFCA publishes a monthly online newsletter and the printed “Gong” magazine three times a year.

Legislation – The IFCA is very involved in Springfield, advocating for our membership. With our long-standing presence and the diversity of our membership, we work to represent the views of Chief Fire Officers throughout Illinois. The IFCA is known for working on providing innovative solutions to difficult fire service issues.

Volunteer and Combination Officers Committee – The IFCA VCOC is a very active committee that is focused on providing support to Volunteer, Paid-on-Call and part-time fire departments and districts. This is accomplished through our annual VCOC Conference and our training sessions throughout the State. The VCOC also has an equipment exchange program, matching departments in need with those who might have a need for equipment.

Funeral Support – The funeral committee is there to help in the time of need. While certainly available for line of duty death events, we are also available to advise and help with services for active and retired members. This group is trained to provide expert help behind the scenes, allowing the stricken fire department to take the lead.

EMS Committee – The EMS Committee is a leading resource in Illinois for 9-1-1 EMS response. Members of this committee work on current issues in EMS and keeping the IFCA members informed.

IFCA ACS – The IFCA Assessment and Consulting Services are the best of the best when it comes to conducting promotional assessments. The IFCA also offers Chief hiring and other consulting services.

Recognition – The IFCA is very proud to recognize those who work to protect their communities. The Chief Jerry Burke Award is our premier award given for a lifetime of achievement; the Chief Emeritus is given to those Chiefs who have retired after very distinguished careers. The IFCA also provides a Fire Chief of the Year and the Administrative Professional of the Year awards annually.

IFCA Educational and Research Foundation – The Foundation is committed to advancing the fire service in Illinois. Through the fire officer courses – particularly the Chief Fire Officer Program, a landmark program throughout the Country – the Foundation works to educate fire officers to keep them, their firefighters, and their communities safe. The Foundation also provides grants to support the advancement of the fire service. However, the Foundation is best known for the scholarship program that has provided **more than \$2,000,000 in scholarships!**

To join the IFCA or for more information contact us at info@illinoisfirechiefs.org or 847-966-0732.

FOR NEW DEPARTMENT MEMBERSHIP



ILLINOIS FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION Membership Application

Organizational membership shall be calculated by the size of each Fire Department or Fire District, based on Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) employees or contracted employees. A FTE will be considered as 50 hours of work on average for one week and include chief officers, shift officers, firefighters and EMS personnel. Each Organizational membership shall include the Active membership for three designees from the Organization as long as such members meet the requirements of Article Four, Section One of the Bylaws.

Name (Last, First)		Department/District/Business Name				
Mailing Address		City	State	Zip	County	
Rank	Email (required)		Office Phone			
For Future Renewals (Please check one)						
<input type="checkbox"/> Bill Department/Business <input type="checkbox"/> Bill Individual						
Type of Department						
DEPARTMENT / DISTRICT					FEE	✓
-1.1 For a Department that is not regularly staffed having less than one FTE and has 25 or less Paid on Call or Volunteer Firefighters					\$125.00	
-1.2 For a Department that is not regularly staffed having less than one FTE and has 26 or more Paid on Call or Volunteer Firefighters					\$200.00	
1.25 For a Department that is staffed with one to four FTE employees					\$250.00	
1.3 For a Department that is staffed with at least five but not more than twenty FTE employees					\$325.00	
1.4 For a Department that is staffed with at least twenty-one but not more than one hundred FTE employees					\$450.00	
1.5 For a Department that is staffed with at least one hundred and one but not more than five-hundred FTE employees					\$600.00	
1.6 For a Department that is staffed with more than five hundred and one FTE Employees					\$1000.00	
FIRE DEPT / DIST ONLY – Indicate 2 Designees besides Fire Chief for 1.1-1.6						
Designee 1 (Last, First Rank)			Email (required)			
Mailing Address		City	State	Zip	Office Phone	
Designee 2 (Last, First Rank)			Email (required)			
Mailing Address		City	State	Zip	Office Phone	
INDIVIDUAL					FEE	✓
- Individual Membership (requires that member's department/district must have paid annual dues)					\$50.00	
- Government/District Personnel (requires that member's department/district must have paid annual dues)					\$50.00	
- Retired Emergency Service Personnel					\$40.00	
- Associate Membership (business/other)					\$150.00	

Note: Individual membership requires that the member's department has paid their annual department/district dues. Membership 1.1 – 1.6 includes a chief officer and 2 designees. Each additional member from the same department shall be at the rate of \$50 per year. Questions: 847.966.0732 ♦ Website: www.illinoisfirechiefs.org **Email application to:** info@illinoisfirechiefs.org

Chief Fire Officer

Open Forum w/Attorney's



Illinois Fire Chiefs Association
PO Box 7, Skokie IL 60076-0007

Postage
Insignia

**The Illinois Fire Chiefs Association
Invites You to Attend the
IFCA Annual Symposium
May 5-7, 2026, East Peoria IL
Program & Registration
Information Enclosed**