



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

HAROLD A. SCHAITBERGER
General President

VINCENT J. BOLLON
General Secretary-Treasurer

December 15, 2009

To My Brother and Sister Fire Fighters and IAFF Members:

In 1988, I retired from the love of my working life, the Fire Department of New York. For 32 years I gave my all — my guts, my heart and yes, my knees — and I gave it at 110 percent. I spent 20 years on 31 Truck in the South Bronx, housed with Engine 82 in what we called “La Casa Grande.” As the South Bronx burned, we put out fire after fire, tour after tour. And as a fire fighter I gave 110 percent.

I left the Bronx in 1977 when I was promoted to Lieutenant and was assigned to Ladder 26 in Harlem, quartered with Engine 58 as “The Fire Factory.” Similar to the fire activities in the Bronx, we were doing over 6,000 runs annually. And as a fire officer I gave 110 percent.

From my first day on the job, I was a proud member of this IAFF. I served as a Company Delegate, then on the Executive Board as the Financial Recording Secretary of Local 94, the Uniformed Firefighters Association of Greater New York. After being promoted, I became a Battalion Delegate and then was elected to the Executive Board of Local 854, the New York Uniformed Fire Officers Association, as a Lieutenant’s Representative, and within one year I was elected President. And as a local union official, I gave 110 percent.

During this time, I was the First Vice-Chairman of the largest fire fighter pension fund in the United States and Canada, then over \$2 billion. I chaired the annuity trust fund for my local and worked to increase it from \$6 million in 1978 to \$36 million when I left 10 years later. And for the sound and prudent financial management of my union members’ money, I gave 110 percent.

We worked for our members tirelessly, during labor strife, layoffs and even a short-lived strike, increasing their pay, benefits and retirement. We worked to improve our members’ life and medical insurance, as well as the continued and improved benefits for our retirees and widows. And I gave 110 percent.

We drafted and worked to implement legislation that directly affected our members’ lives, including changes in the New York State Toxic Tort Law which gave injured fire fighters the right to sue for their injuries and exposures. We aggressively and passionately lobbied for the passage of fire fighter occupational health and safety legislation, including the New York State Right-to-Know Law, the New York State Public Employee Occupational Safety and Health Act, and the New York State Fire Gas Toxicity Legislation. We also drafted and fought hard for the New York State First Line Supervisors Program, which provided training, at the expense of the State of New York, for newly promoted first line supervisors for ALL paid fire departments in the state. Each of these legislative successes remains in effect for fire fighters today, and it was our union that won these legislative battles. And I gave 110 percent.

During my presidency of Local 854, we were the first in the state to be awarded funds to develop a safety and health office within our local, which allowed us to hire professional health and safety personnel, conduct seminars and send bi-monthly health and safety newsletters to each of our union members. When the IAFF asked, I proudly represented them on numerous NFPA committees, addressing fire fighter health and safety, incident command, infectious diseases and safety officers. I was a charter member on the NFPA 1500 committee and assisted in drafting the first edition of that standard – 26 years ago! I am on the Board of Directors of the NFPA to ensure that issues affecting the IAFF are addressed in their standards. And I gave 110 percent.

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Of course, my proudest union moment came in 1988 when I was elected as this great union's General Secretary-Treasurer. I accepted the challenge to serve as the IAFF's financial officer, leaving my beloved city and retiring from the only job I ever wanted to have, a union fire fighter.

During my 21 years as your General Secretary-Treasurer, I partnered with our General President and the IAFF Executive Board to take our union's finances and administration to a place we never dreamed of just a few years before. We implemented new programs, updated processes and provided tools to the affiliates to assist with membership and accounting issues. We have worked diligently to grow our membership, not just in finances and numbers, but also in influence, especially within the North American labor movement. We have spent your union dues money wisely and our membership is getting the most for their per capita dollar, particularly in this tough economic time. And despite some difficult financial years, we continued to significantly increase our level of services to our members. And I gave 110 percent.

The lowest moment in my life was of course September 11, 2001. I walked Ground Zero with General President Harold Schaitberger, talking to our members who were digging to find our comrades. As I read list after list of the names of the fallen Brothers – many my dearest and closest friends -- as I sat and worked with the executive boards of Local 94 and 854, I knew we as a union needed to rise where we never had been before – and we did. It became the proudest time in my career. We came to the plate and provided for our New York locals, our members and the families of the living and the lost. We gave our all and I gave 110 percent.

It has now come the time in my cherished union career, as one of your principal officers, to retire. After 32 years of climbing ladders, humping tools and crawling through smoke-filled hallways and over the thousands of parapets, combined with over 50 years of union work as a fire fighter representing fire fighters, this body of mine just can't give anymore.

I won't allow myself to hold onto such a critically important office just to maintain the position when I know I can no longer give that 110 percent, and so I am now regrettably ready to turn over these reigns and leave a job that I love for the second time.

But I am not going far away. I have assured Harold and our Executive Board that I will work with them and our next General Secretary-Treasurer to assure a smooth transition. I will continue to serve and counsel our great union, whenever and wherever the call arises.

And I will spend my time – time that I have often missed over the past 50 years – with my wife, Linda, as well as my children, Janice, Suzanne, Chrissy, Kathy, and my six grandchildren.

It has been a great ride. May God bless each and every one of you -- my brothers, my sisters, my fire fighters, my friends!

Fraternally,



Vincent J. Bollon
General Secretary-Treasurer

