Firefighter Bids Farewell
A Knoxville firefighter reflects on his 30-year career and pens a touching, poignant and brutally honest goodbye letter to the citizens of his city.

Google Protection
Is your agency’s website meeting Google’s new security standards?

Back to the Beach
Glance at the schedule and see who is seeking office for NIOA VP, secretary

The dramatic story of a PIO suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, saved with the help of an NIOA member who recognized the danger signs and took action before it was too late.
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Clearwater conference countdown
The NIOA’s Executive Board has another stellar lineup planned for the 2018 Annual Training Conference. With topics ranging from the nation’s deadliest mass shooting in Las Vegas to the latest Facebook changes, this year’s event offers valuable information for all PIOs. Now’s the time to register and make hotel arrangements. For the latest reminders, see page 13

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2017–18 NIOA Executive Board

President
Brennan Matherne
Lafourche Parish Sheriff’s Dept.
(985) 532-4338
brennan-matherne@lpso.net

Vice President
Stephanie Slater
Boynton Beach Police Dept.
(561) 742-6191
slaters@bbfl.us

Secretary Lou Thurston
Newport News Police Dept. (Ret.)
(757) 472-8813
lthurston33@verizon.net

Immediate Past President
Mike Fronimos
Williston Fire-EMS Dept.
(859) 393-4317
mikef@ci.williston.nd.us

Past President’s Council Rep
Marlee Boenig
Bowling Green Fire Dept.
(270) 393-3702
Marlee.Boenig@bgky.org

Follow NIOA @
We are less than three months away from seeing each other again in Clearwater Beach!

My year as President has seemingly flown by, but I am extremely pleased with the way our lineup for this year’s conference has come together. We have some big names, some familiar names, and plenty of new topics we haven’t touched on yet. I am also grateful that Facebook has agreed to present at this year’s conference and, after the things we’ve seen in the past six months, I’m sure we all have PLENTY of questions for the social media giant.

Registrations are way ahead of where we were last year, so if you have not yet registered, be sure to do so as soon as possible so you are not left out. This conference WILL sell out!

For my second-to-last article as president, I wanted to give my own take on a topic that my predecessors have covered. Namely, I wanted to talk about the value of networking with your fellow NIOA members and maintaining relationships with your local PIOs.

In an earlier article, I touched on my experience teaching fellow PIOs. In the year since those classes, I have had multiple former students reach out to me to obtain advice on various issues. Most recently, a former student, local PIO, and fellow NIOA member reached out with questions on an incident involving a suspect’s death during arrest. I am always happy to help a colleague, but I was even more delighted that he seemed to have the situation well under control.

Similarly, we’ve seen several NIOA members attain the national spotlight on their agency throughout the past year. Once you’ve made connections with them at NIOA, it’s always reassuring to those individuals to hear some positive feedback in the midst of a crisis. Even if they don’t get the message right away, they know you are there and willing to help!

Similarly, at the local level, be sure you connect and meet regularly with your fellow PIOs and public communications professionals. With marketing playing a larger role in our jobs as PIOs, we’ve even incorporated some marketing professionals from private firms (one of whom happens to be a former PIO), and we’ve found their input to be extremely valuable to our PIO group. We also created a Facebook group so we can easily share links, videos, and information that we might ask each other to help push out to the public. We also use the Facebook group for some light-hearted posts.

That, in addition to our monthly lunch meetings, has built a strong rapport within the group, and we feel prepared and comfortable with each other, ready to work together through any emergency situation that arises.

If you don’t already have a local PIO group, try reaching out to your closest PIO colleague to start meeting regularly. Then you can try expanding that partnership to others in your area one by one. Be sure to let them all know about NIOA and the professional advantage to be gained by joining. Then you can bring them along with you to our next conference for further networking and learning opportunities!

I use this message to set the stage for you for our upcoming conference. You’ll have four days and nights (more for some of you) to connect with some of the best public communications professionals in the country. Don’t squander it by spending all the time in your hotel room or alone at the beach. There is no better setting to start conversations with perfect strangers than an NIOA conference! Get to know as many people as you can, and you will undoubtedly take away some knowledge and great connections!
C
oming to the conference and want to know what time
the Facebook session starts? Need the phone number
of a presenter because you have a follow up question?
Wondering where karaoke is being held? There’s an app for
that.

Just two months to go until the best PIO training conference of
the year. We’re busy behind the scenes working on an app that will
make planning your conference experience so much easier.

But first … are you registered? If you haven’t, get on it now
because seats are almost gone. Also, it’s way more expensive after
July 1.

Now back to the app. There are a few changes this year, so if
you’ve used it in the past, you’ll need to delete it and download it
again. The biggest change that affects us is that the app is called
AttendeeHub instead of NIOA.

The app is scheduled to launch on July 26, and that’s when you’ll
get an invitation to download it. If you don’t receive the invitation,
you can search for it by typing AttendeeHub in the App or Google
Play stores. After you’ve downloaded it, you’ll type NIOA 2018 in
the Search tab and download the event. To unlock all the app’s
advanced features and login, tap on the three lines on the top left
corner, tap login for more features and enter your details. The
final step is to open your email by exiting the app to get a four-digit
verification code. Return to the app and enter the code, then tap
verify to login to your mobile app.

Confused yet? Here’s a link to a short video that shows you how to
log in to the app.

The app will be a tremendous resource for you in planning your
conference experience, and for networking during and long after
the week is over. Please use the hashtag #NIOA2018 in your tweets
so that we can continue to grow our amazing organization, which
has been the platinum standard for professional information
officers networking and educational opportunities for 29 years.

Stay tuned for more details about the app in the coming weeks. If
you have any questions or feedback, I can be reached at slaters@
bbf.us. I looking forward to seeing you in Clearwater Beach!

App to guide conference-goers

By STEPHANIE SLATER
Reserve your conference spot today!

I will keep this very brief to allow more space for discussion regarding the upcoming training conference which, I’m sure everyone will soon agree, will be the best conference ever.

Yes, it’s only May/June. However, I don’t need to tell any of you how busy PIOs are no matter for what agency or in what area of the country you work. I would just like to take a small amount of space to remind you to make your travel arrangements early.

My suggestion is to take a small amount of time out of your busy day and make the few phone calls it takes to reserve your hotel room, book your flight and don’t forget to send in your registration so it reaches Lisa before June 30th to receive the member rate. Also, you must be a member in good standing with dues paid no later than June 30th to qualify for the member rate.

Remember, the conference fee does not have to accompany the registration. You can pay when you check in at the conference.

I look forward to seeing everyone in Clearwater in August.
NEW MEMBERS, cont.

Matthew Cimitile  
University of South Florida- St. Petersburg  
St. Petersburg, Fl  
cimitile@mail.usf.edu

Timothy Kelly  
US Airforce Reserve  
Raleigh, NC  
TJkpt1@gmail.com

Della Creech  
315th Airlift Wing PA  
Cornelius, North Carolina  
dellashiree1231@gmail.com

Cathy Williams  
Grand Rapids Police  
Grand Rapids, MI  
cawillia@grcity.us

Michele Mihalovich  
Assoc. of State Floodplain Managers  
Fitchburg, WI  
mitchy.934@gmail.com

Amir Mousavi  
City of Jeffersonville  
Jeffersonville, IN  
amousavii@cityofjeff.net

Maura Lamoreaux  
Kent County Road Commission  
Grand Rapids, MI  
mmlamoreaux@kentcountyrboads.net

Nancy Velez  
Kendall County Sheriff’s Office  
Yorkville, IL  
nvelez@co.kendall.il.us

Elias Mendiola  
Bloomington Police  
Bloomington, IL  
emendiola@cityblm.org

Michael Rosenwinkel  
West Chicago Police  
West Chicago, IL  
mrosenicinkel@westchicago.org

Scott Lee  
scottlee@stpspo.com

Region 6

Doug Sisk  
Duncanville Police  
Duncanville, TX  
dsisk@duncanvillepd.com

Meredith Timberlake  
meredithtimberlake@stpspo.com

Nicholas McDonner  
East Baton Rouge Parish EMS  
Baton Rouge, LA  
mnmcouder@brla.gov

Region 7

Cary Zayas  
City of Edinburg  
Edinburg, TX  
czayas@cityofedinburg.com

Shannon Jenkins  
Benton County Sheriff’s Office  
Bentonville, AR  
Shannon.jenkins@bentoncountyar.gov

and  
Naconna Cordeiro  
Naconna.cordeiro@bentoncountyar.gov

Zachary Fuchs  
Monarch Fire Protection District  
Chesterfield, MO  
Fuchs.z@monarchfpd.org

Region 8

Amanda Overton  
Adams County Sheriff’s Office  
Brighton, CO  
agoverton@adco gov

Region 9

Brian Holcombe  
Bakersfield Police  
Bakersfield, CA  
bholcombe@bakersfieldpd.us

Region 10

Cameron Satterfield  
King County  
Seattle, WA  
Cameron.satterfield@kingcounty.gov

Region 5

Monica Cordova  
City of Dallas  
Dallas, TX  
Monica.cordova@dallascityhall.com

Ashley Arnaud  
Louisiana State Fire Marshal’s Office  
Baton Rouge, LA  
Ashley.rodrigue@la.gov

Jessica Nolte  
Tucson Fire Dept.  
Tucson, AZ  
Jessica.nolte@tucsonaz.gov
THE TIPPING POINT

There is life after mental trauma

By TAMMY CHATMAN
Flight for Life, NIOA Region 5 Director

and

BETSY RANDOLPH
Oklahoma Highway Patrol

TAMMY: This is the story written by and about my good friend Betsy Randolph's journey through PTSD. It was brought on by the accumulation of years of trauma on top of trauma until Betsy reached the “tipping point” that nearly sent her to the place of no return.

The encouraging part of Betsy’s story is that she finally realized that reaching out for help was not a weakness but rather a sign of strength.

Thanks to Dr. Tania Glenn and her use of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), a technique that has been extensively researched and proven effective for the treatment of trauma, she found her way back to a normal life from the PTSD that nearly destroyed her.

BETSY: “There is life after mental trauma,” Tania said. I studied her hazel eyes. They flashed gold as they held mine, never wavering, never feigning her interest in why I’d traveled to Austin from Oklahoma City to see her.

Her gaze was steady, as were her hands. Her thin fingers rested easy on her jeans. That threw me off guard a little — seeing her in jeans. She was laid back, cool; my kind of cool.

I consider myself modest, but if forced, I’ll produce an impressive resume. Trusting people — head shrinks especially — isn’t something you’ll find on my resume. So then why, why did my eyes start to leak every time I opened my mouth to talk to this cool cat across the coffee table from me? I’m talking every freaking second my mouth opened; my eyes were dripping like a sieve, while at the same time I cussed this weakness within me for showing itself to this stranger, to a doctor — no less. I’d driven eight hours at the request (nagging) of my friend Tammy Chatman who obviously was mistaken about me being “broken.”

Tammy insisted that I needed to see Tania. She didn’t come right out and say it, but I knew she thought, “I’d gone ‘round the bend” was going to harm myself or worse.

TAMMY: One night, I happened to be on Facebook and one of my PIO friends who also knows Betsy, sent me a private message. In that message was a news clip from CNN with an interview of Betsy by Geraldo Rivera. I watched the clip and couldn’t believe my eyes. There was my friend Betsy, a vivacious, sassy and fun-loving person, looking back at me with that “1.000-mile stare.”

I reached out to Betsy after that, over and over again, trying to get her to see my friend Dr. Tania Glenn, a clinical psychologist in Austin, who works with first responders, military and others who suffer from PTSD. She is also a certified practitioner of EMDR.

I had met Tania a number of years prior through our work with the Survivors Network for the air medical community.

I talked to Betsy about Tania and EMDR and she agreed to see her but then, at the last minute, Betsy backed out of the appointment. She told me she was going camping and she was OK, which was not the case as the months that followed would reveal.

I was disappointed that Betsy did not follow through with seeing Tania but I still kept reaching out to check on how things were going. I could see Betsy was losing interest in the things she loves such as gardening, writing, and life in general. There were no signs of hope or joy in her voice when we talked and the feedback on Betsy’s
condition from my other PIO friends in the area was not positive. I feared that she would not survive this.

Then out of the blue another opportunity presented itself where I thought that I could convince Betsy to seek help. She was on the agenda to speak at the NIOA Annual Training Conference in Clearwater in August 2015. I was so happy to see Betsy but knew immediately that things were worse than I had suspected. Gone was the confident and vibrant person I knew and in its place was someone full of pain and fear as she faced the prospect of talking about the Nolen encounter in front of her peers.

Betsy barely managed to get through the presentation. After it was done I talked to her again, hoping to convince her that life was not going to get better unless she reached out to get help. Betsy promised me she would go see Tania.

So I called Tania and asked (begged) her to give Betsy a second chance. To my relief she said yes. I called, texted, sent private Facebook messages and emailed Betsy to make her promise that she would go. Betsy made the appointment with Tania and kept promising me she would show up but I was afraid she would cancel at the last minute. The day she was to drive to Austin I contacted her; she was on her way! I sent a text to Tania and asked that she let me know if Betsy showed up for the appointment. What a wonderful feeling when Betsy texted me that night after her appointment and said “I wish I had done this a year ago!” I thanked God for opening Betsy’s mind and heart so that she would accept the assistance that she so desperately needed.

BETSY: “Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional.” Tania interrupted my thoughts.

A nod of my head was my only response. I didn’t trust my voice for the moment, but in my head the voices were screaming — like they had been for months.

“You deserve to suffer,” the voices shouted. “This is all your fault, you coward. You should have killed him when you had the chance.” Tania prodded me to speak. I think she got tired

---

**EMDR**

**What is EMDR?**

EMDR, or Eye Movement Densensitization and Reprocessing, is a method of treating Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

**How does it work?**

The patient recalls a traumatic event while simultaneously undergoing bilateral stimulation, which can consist of moving the eyes from side to side, vibrations or tapping movements on different sides of the body or tones delivered through one ear, then the other, via headphones.

**What does that do?**

EMDR enables people to heal from the symptoms of emotional distress that are the result of disturbing life experiences.

EMDR therapy shows the mind can heal itself much as the body recovers from physical trauma. The brain’s information processing system naturally moves toward mental health. If the system is blocked or imbalanced by the impact of a disturbing event, the emotional wound festers and can cause intense suffering. Once the block is removed, healing resumes.

**SOURCE: WWW.EMDR.COM**
of watching me blow my nose and boohoo like a baby. She reached a hand out and gently touched my arm. So I told her the story of how I’d come to be sitting in her office. I started from the beginning, finally sharing with her — the consuming guilt that nearly killed me began as a bungled arrest.

On October 1, 2010, I’d just started back to work in Logan County, OK. I’d been off work for most of 2009, for a line-of-duty injury, requiring a reconstruction of my right wrist. So when I stopped Alton Alexander Nolen, his girlfriend, and baby around 6 p.m. on State Highway 33 west of Langston, I didn’t want to fight. I just wanted Nolen to comply with my requests. I’d stopped him for what I believed was a fake paper tag and, when his license came back suspended, I told him he was going to jail as he was sitting in my front passenger seat.

I came around the car and got a handcuff on his right wrist before he assaulted me, broke my finger, tearing ligaments off the bone when my fingers were caught in the handcuff. He ran away but after a 12-hour manhunt, the OHP tactical team brought my prisoner back to me, and I transported him to jail with additional charges.

Nolen could have gotten away any time before he assaulted me, but he likes to hurt people, especially women. He knew his license was suspended before he even walked back to my patrol car. And he knew there were two felony warrants for drug possession and possession with intent to distribute against him. He heard the dispatcher say that Oklahoma County wanted him and there was no bond. He was going to jail and there was no getting out. Still, he sat in my car and didn’t try to get away. He was calm, so I was calm. That was my mistake. One of many I made that day.

Fast forward four years. I was in Public Affairs and heard a woman had been killed at a food processing plant in Moore; it didn’t affect me because it wasn’t a Patrol issue. I didn’t take any calls. Not until the next day, at least. That’s when a buddy from one of the news stations called and told me the guy that beheaded the woman at the food processing plant on September 25, 2014, was the same guy who assaulted a trooper back in 2010 in Logan County.

I still remember the goose bumps that covered my body as I realized what I was hearing and what it meant … to me.

But what kept eating at me was the fact I didn’t do my job properly. In my opinion, I didn’t protect Colleen Hufford, the 54-year-old mother and grandmother Nolen beheaded. I didn’t do what I was sworn to do.

...what kept eating at me was the fact I didn’t do my job properly. In my opinion, I didn’t protect Colleen Hufford, the 54-year-old mother and grandmother Nolen beheaded. I didn’t do what I was sworn to do.'
TIPPING POINT, cont.

my fault.
Even though Nolen is on Oklahoma’s death row now, his punishment will never be enough to relieve the guilt I feel.
I handled that guy (maggot) with kid gloves, partly because of all the racial controversy that was going on around the country concerning law enforcement. I was kind when I should have performed a felony arrest per policy, per my training. I spoke to him like he was human when he was anything but. Colleen’s death weighs heavy on me, day in and day out. Tracy Johnson’s mental struggles plague my heart. That’s what I told Tania in her office that day.
I’m not going to lie. When Tania explained that she was going to use EMDR to help me I thought it was hocus pocus nonsense. But at this point I was willing to do it, partially so Tammy would leave me alone. I’d also gotten crossways with the brass at work for saying on national TV that I wished I had killed Nolen when I’d had the chance. I was angry all the time. I wanted to punch people in the face on every traffic stop, and even though I love Jesus — the F-word had become my go-to word for everything. So I knew something had to give. I wasn’t me any longer.
“Whatever Doc’ — let’s just get it over with,” I thought.
“Relax,” said Tania. “I just want you to breathe.”
Afterward, I spent a couple of hours with one of Tania’s associates, ate dinner then crashed at the hotel. I checked in with Tania before driving back to Oklahoma the next morning. What I told her was something that to this day still amazes me. “I didn’t have any nightmares! I slept like the dead. That’s the first night’s sleep I’ve had without nightmares since this whole thing started.”
EMDR was an emotional experience for me, one that was the key to unlocking the door to healing and recovery from trauma. We embraced, I didn’t even cry, and I drove the speed limit all the way home. OK, that last part was a lie.

TAMMY: EMDR is the most proven intervention for healing trauma. EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) is a psychotherapy that enables people to heal from the symptoms and emotional distress that are the result of disturbing life experiences.
Repeated studies show that by using EMDR therapy people can experience the benefits of psychotherapy that once took years. It shows that the mind can heal from psychological trauma much the same way the body recovers from physical trauma.
EMDR therapy combines different elements to maximize treatment effects. It gives attention to three time periods: the past, present and future. Focus is given to past disturbing memories and related events, then to current situations that cause distress, and finally to developing the skills and attitudes needed for positive future actions.
EMDR therapy uses an eight-phase treatment approach. The length of treatment depends upon the number of traumas and the age of PTSD onset. Generally, those with single-event adult-onset trauma can be successfully treated in less than five hours. Those with multiple traumas may require a longer treatment time.

BETSY: Tania and Tammy were both available to me any time I needed to text or call. Throughout the beheading trial, which gained international attention, when I was nauseous, angry, or anxious, Tania and Tammy were always available. They both have been beacons of light on a rocky shoreline as I felt myself being tossed to and fro, used and abused by the legal system I’d sworn and given my life to.
There were dark, stormy days that lingered for weeks — where I feared I’d never see land again; Days, where without my faith in God, I’d never have survived. I know He sent His angels to protect my feet from slipping; Angels in the forms of friends and family who love me in spite of me. Angel/Warriors — like Tania and Tammy — who’ve linked arms with me to present a unified front against the enemy.
From the beginning, when I arrested Nolen, to when I came to NIOA to present in August 2015, “When a PIO Becomes the Story,” I’ve learned that PTSD is about cumulative events, not just one event. I’ve learned how someone in law enforcement for more than 20 years can suffer multiple traumatic events — and those need to be addressed properly.
Think of it as carrying a backpack and every time you experience trauma it goes into the backpack. It gets heavier and heavier over time until you can no longer bear the weight. Eventually, you will experience a trauma, which becomes your “tipping point.” You don’t have to wait until then to seek help. If you seek help sooner, the backpack becomes lighter and easier to carry, but if you try to ignore the weight, you will seek other means in which to rid yourself of the pain. Those behaviors typically are negative. They can and do destroy families, lives and careers.
It’s important that law enforcement professionals, other first responders and dispatchers get professional help to get past the mental trauma that holds us hostage and robs us of our peace. Mental trauma lies to us about who we are, about the good we do every day and, sometimes, it makes us want to harm ourselves — as if that will help anyone.
Only you can choose. You can decide to medicate yourself, ignore the symptoms and claim that you don’t have a problem or need help or you can call someone who is certified and practices EMDR, like I did. I didn’t want to keep on hurting or hurting my loved ones.
If suffering really is optional, I chose not to do it anymore. I’m living proof; there is life after mental trauma. There are grandbabies to spoil, motorcycles to ride, flowers and trees to plant, books that need to be read and written. Life is good and it is worth living.
There’s no way I can ever thank my friend Tania for caring so much for me and insisting that I get the help I needed, but I’d like to try. You see, I have this mental image of Tammy’s tiny frame, kneeling at the front of the stage with her mammoth camera — cheering me on as I presented in Clearwater. She wasn’t taking photos, she was being present. She was there when I needed her. And I desperately needed her.
So, thank you, Tammy. A truer friend, I have not.
Dear Knoxville,

Today I will not answer your calls for help. I will no longer try to save your homes, your property or your lives, and there are a few things I’d like you to know.

I’ve been with the Knoxville Fire Department for 30 years now, and my tour of duty is at an end. I’ve been on something like 10,000 emergency calls. Hundreds of house fires. Overdoses. Car wrecks. Plane crashes. Dead or dying people, and weird crap that defies all logic. It’s been a meaningful, honorable career, and although you’ve scarred me, I’m glad I did it.

I’m also glad it’s over. I know every time I hear a siren, I’m going to feel that pull. I’m going to feel like wherever they’re going is where I’m supposed to be. Retirement will take some adjustment, but I’ll manage.

For over 133 years this cycle at KFD has gone on without pause. Most every year, the new recruits begin and the surviving old firemen retire. My class of recruits were better than those who came before us. We were smarter, better trained and better equipped, just like those who have come after us. Every year we get more and better tools to help you. I leave the city in good hands.

It’s been an unbelievable ride. I’ve seen the most astonishing things with this job. People at their very best and absolute worst. The awesome power of fire, nature and the human spirit. I’m amazed at how tough people can be, how brave and devoted to each other they are. It’s incredible how people’s lives can be humming along beautifully and then be unexpectedly torn apart in seconds, never to be the same again.

It was quite a show, but of course, nothing worthwhile is free. I’ve put on heavy clothes and worked by a fire when it was 97 degrees out for long hours. I’ve been so covered in ice that I couldn’t take off my gloves. I’ve been too exhausted to stand up again after loading up my third air bottle at a big fire.

I’ve been puked on, spat on, bled on, and let’s not even get into excrement. I’ve had to change uniforms three times in one day. The stench has been so bad in some houses that I had to shower when we got back to the station. I’ve missed so many birthdays,

Dean J. Fontaine, Knoxville Fire Dept. Engine Company 17 (Retired) is pictured at the scene of one of many fires he helped fight over his 30-year career.

See FAREWELL, page 12
FAREWELL, cont.
holidays and special occasions with my family.
Now listen, I’m not complaining. I’m just saying it ain’t been “Baywatch.” If you’ve ever thought about getting into this kind of work, you need to know this. And the glory? “Nothing ever ends poetically. It ends and we turn it into poetry. All that blood was never once beautiful. It was just red.”
I’m one of the lucky ones; I’m getting out in excellent physical condition. I’m just spent, and sleep doesn’t help when it is your soul that is tired. I’m tired of seeing what a car doing 60 does to a pedestrian. I’ve grown weary of hearing the sound that comes out of a mother when you tell her that her child is dead, and I’ve had enough of the vacant stares you get from people who’ve lost everything in their house fire. A fireman’s psyche soaks up grief like blood to bandages, and I’m full up.
Now I’ll be gone, but you won’t be forgotten. I know why that one telephone pole is newer than the others on that street, and it wasn’t pretty. I remember all the houses where babies died, and the places where I was the first thing newborns saw. I’ll remember a single, tiny red handprint on the inside window of a crashed car. The spots where I had close calls look as familiar to me as my own front yard. I’ve been terrified, and calmed the terrified.
There’s a whole ‘nuther Knoxville out there that you don’t see, and it doesn’t often make the news. You may think bad things rarely happen, because you rarely see them. This job has made me think death and disaster are around every corner, but the truth lies somewhere in between. When you’re at work, we’re at your retired, dying neighbor’s house. When you’re asleep at home, we’re working a wreck on the road you take to your job.
There are secret hidden hobo camps with dozens of homeless people living in them, and they’re right off busy streets you drive. The bums all find someplace else to be when we go in to retrieve the frozen, dead bodies of their comrades. There are a lot of people in Knoxville who die and have only us to grieve for them. No one else in the world even notices that they are gone, and that’s profoundly sad. Dying people are terrified of being alone when they pass. I don’t know what difference it makes, but it’s very important to them. Someday I’ll understand why.
We’re the Knoxville City Fire Department, and if you call, we will immediately drop what we’re doing and come running, 20,000 times a year. We’ll be there in about four minutes, anytime — day or night — in a blizzard, a tornado or on Christmas Eve, and we will do everything we can to help you. Bank on that.
We’ll put ourselves in harm’s way for you. Dozens of us have already died for you, and we don’t even care who you are, what color you are or how much you make. Often we can’t do enough, but we will try our damnedest, and you don’t owe us a thing. Not even a “thank you.” And we’ll come back as often as you need us. Now where else are you gonna find friends like that?
You expect a lot from us. You demand that we be honest, trustworthy, professional and compassionate. From what I’ve seen in my career, we almost never let you down. I haven’t seen a more honorable and dedicated group of people. We are carefully selected, and our standards are high. Scandals are incredibly rare here.
When you regularly share traumatic experiences with a group of people, you form a bond. It’s the reason war veterans want to get together 50 years later. We feel like no one can understand us, except us. You had to be there. They call it a brotherhood without exaggeration. The firefighters in this town really do a fantastic job of taking care of each other.
So anyway, thank you for giving my life meaning and purpose, and for the cookies at Christmas, the cards and letters, the phone calls and cakes. Thanks for all the awesome stories I have to tell at parties. Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Badget, for the ham every year. Thank you all. (I know I earned my pension, and it was part of the contract, but I want to thank you for that as well.)
I was there for your huge, life-changing events. The days you’ll never forget. You trusted me with the most valuable things in your lives, and it has been a true privilege to serve you.’

‘I was there for your huge, life-changing events. The days you’ll never forget. You trusted me with the most valuable things in your lives, and it has been a true privilege to serve you.’

(Editor’s Note: This open letter first appeared in the Knoxville News-Sentinel)
By LISA McNEAL
NIOA Executive Director

The NIOA conference will be here before you know it. We have a few reminders for you.

• If you signed up as a member but your dues have not been paid, we need to receive those funds by June 30. If not, you must pay an additional $100 to attend the conference.
• June 30 is also the deadline to receive the discounted member fee for the conference. After that date, conference fees are $725.00 for members and non-members.
• You can register for the conference now but pay at the door.
• If someone else is doing your registration, please check with us to make sure we have received it. In past years accounting and training divisions have failed to register individuals. No day-of-conference registrations will be accepted.
• All conference fees must be received by the time you check in at the conference-no exceptions.
• If you’d like to bring some items from your department to use as door prizes, please do!
• And finally, if you have registered and are unable to attend, please contact me so we can remove your name from the list.

Questions? E-mail me at nioa@comcast.net.

We look forward to seeing everyone at the conference.

The NIOA Annual Training Conference returns to the Sheraton Sand Key Resort in Clearwater, FL, August 26-29. Seats are still available, but the conference is expected to be another sell out.
Conference at a Glance

Sunday, August 26

Advanced Crisis Strategy – Crisis Communications Plans
Judy Pal - Former Special Advisor to the Police Commissioner - NYPD

Conference Orientation
Regional Meetings
President’s Reception
Trivia

Monday, August 27

Opening Ceremonies
Las Vegas Shooting
Director Carla Alston and Sergeant Jeff Clark, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department

Building the Airplane as We Flew It: The DAPL Protest
Maxine Herr and Rob Keller

Candidate Introductions
Vendor Introductions

Facebook for Local Government and Law Enforcement: Tools, Tips, and Best Practices
Eva Guidarini and Emily Vacher

Karaoke

Tuesday, August 28

Come Hell or High Water: Baton Rouge’s Summer of Tragedies
Casey Rayborn Hicks, East Baton Rouge Parish LA Sheriff’s Office; Deputy Chief Jonny Dunnam, Baton Rouge LA Police Department; Lt. J.B. Slaton, Louisiana State Police. Introduction by NIOA Past President Don Kelly

Your Agency, Your Beat: Own the Story and Break Your Own News
Capt. Adam Myrick, Lexington County SC Sheriff’s Department

Business Meeting and Elections
How to Combat Burnout from the Electronic Leash
Dr. Sara Garrido

Networking

Wednesday, August 29

Natural Disasters
A panel discussion moderated by Kerry Sanders of NBC News. Participating in the panel will be Becky Herrin, retired from the Monroe County FL Sheriff's Office, Kese Smith of the Houston TX Police Department, Gina DePinto of Santa Barbara County CA, Bill Murphy, Todd Derum and Steve Kaufmann of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection Unified Command.

There’s An App For That — Managing Social Media From Your Smartphone
Det. Scott Glick, New York Police Department

Managing 3 National Incidents in 8 Hours
Corinne N. Geller, Virginia State Police

Murfreesboro in the Crossfire: The Cost of Free Speech vs. Public Safety in the Era of Resurgent White Nationalism
Mike Browning, City of Murfreesboro and Ashley McDonald, Murfreesboro Fire Rescue

Officers Swearing in Ceremony
Closing Reception

COPS returns as the exclusive sponsor of the NIOA’s Annual Training Conference.
In July 2012, I was appointed the Public Information Officer for Murfreesboro Fire Rescue Department. I had no formal PIO training (par for most of us placed in this position). My sole qualification for this role was basically my Bachelor's in Mass Communications with an emphasis in Public Relations.

Just one short month after being appointed, I had the chance to attend my first NIOA Conference in Nashville. I was so nervous as to what this week of training would entail. Being a little naïve, I just “knew” I was going to have to get up in front of a bunch of people I didn’t know and host a press conference or do a media interview on the spot. Little did I know, this would turn out to be one of the best training opportunities I would ever receive!

The relationships I developed through networking have proven valuable time and time again, and have led to great opportunities that I might not have otherwise been privy to. The sessions were not only interesting, but they contained so much useful information.

After that first conference I was hooked! I have attended every year since, with the exception of last summer when I gave birth to a beautiful baby boy.

I am passionate about what this organization has to offer PIOs; from the newly appointed, all the way up to the most experienced. All of NIOA's members have something to contribute to our unique mix, giving us a wealth of experience, knowledge, and assistance just a phone call, text, or email away. It is, by far, the best training conference out there for people in our field.

That passion has recently caused me to reflect on my desire to do something more for the organization. It would absolutely be an honor for me to serve as Vice President alongside Stephanie Slater, who I’ve come to admire. I believe that together, we can positively lead the efforts to advance the NIOA as well as create new and exciting networking and training opportunities for our membership.

Thank you for your consideration and support in this endeavor.

Ashley McDonald
Murfreesboro TN Fire Department

Ben Tobias
Gainesville FL Police Department

I have been a sworn police officer for the Gainesville, Florida Police Department since 2005, and the department’s sole PIO since 2012. I have had the opportunity to be part of amazing things at my agency as a result of being PIO, and have been afforded the ability to travel and speak at numerous conferences and symposiums about my experiences.

My decision to run for Vice-President, however is not due to my experiences and successes as a PIO. Running for this position and/or getting elected does not make me a better PIO than anyone. My passion is ensuring that my colleagues receive the best possible training, ongoing education, and networking opportunities that NIOA can provide.

I have served as President of the Florida Law Enforcement PIO Association since 2015 and have helped plan successful annual training conferences for Florida PIOs with the help of my amazing team. I have been lucky to have made national connections that have afforded me the ability to secure wonderful presenters for these conferences and to provide amazing networking opportunities for attendees. I also have a background in hotel convention management, which helps me plan conferences that are financially sound – getting the best product for the price.

It is my hope that my fellow NIOA members will allow me to use my leadership skills to continue the work that I have been able to accomplish on the state level and expand that to the national level.

Again – I am not seeking this position because I’m a better PIO than anyone else. I simply want to use my training and experience to help provide the best possible training opportunities for PIOs around the country.
Ignatius Carroll Jr.
Miami FL Fire-Rescue

It is an honor to come before you to express my strong interest in the position of Secretary for this prestigious organization. I have been with the City of Miami Department of Fire-Rescue since March 1989. During my 29 year career, I served 10 years in operations as a firefighter/paramedic, 3 years in the Fire Marshal’s Office and in 2002, assigned to the Disaster Management/Public Affairs Division working as a special projects coordinator and department photographer. Some of my responsibilities included responding along with the PIO to photograph emergency scenes for dissemination. Although I was not a department spokesperson, collaborating with the reporters and photographers allowed me the opportunity to identify the needs of the media and cultivate relationships.

In November 2003, I was appointed the acting Public Information Officer. With no experience, I conducted my first live interview during the Free Trade of the Americas (FTAA) demonstrations in downtown Miami. That was one of the most horrifying moments during my time as PIO. Having to comment on the department’s response to the civil disturbance taking place behind me was petrifying. Not only was I concerned for my safety, but nervous I would make a statement that was inaccurate or inappropriate. Fortunately for me, the relationship I developed with the media along with their guidance, I navigated my way to delivering an adequate interview.

After two years in the position and attending training classes, I was officially appointed the PIO position. I learned about NIOA from Detective Delrish Moss, the PIO with the Miami Police Department, and one of the most recognized PIOs in South Florida. He encouraged me to join NIOA if I truly wanted to advance my communication skills. He now serves as the Police Chief for the City of Ferguson in Missouri.

In 2006, I became a member of NIOA and was surprised by the amount of people attending with the same objective...how to be a better communicator. In life, you try to overcome your fears, but the most common challenge we ALL face is speaking before a group of people. Public speaking can cause a high level of anxiety, but with my affiliation with this new-found group help me overcome those fears and gain confidence.

For the last 12 years, I have been a devoted and active member of NIOA and each year it continues to get better and better. When you can gather a wide range of knowledge and experience for communicators in one area, you capitalize on the importance of coaching, training, education and networking. Who better to assist or guide you than a fellow PIO? NIOA and its members helped me to improve upon my skills year after year. During my tenure as PIO, I was named the PIO of the Year for the State of Florida, moved up the ranks to Lieutenant, then Captain, and currently serve as a PIO for the State Emergency Response Team and South Florida Urban Search & Rescue (USAR) TF-2. The meaningful relationships with NIOA members provided quality experiences that enhanced my learning journey.

As PIOs, we look for more innovative methods to accomplish our objectives and serve our community. NIOA continues to offer creative solutions that attribute to the success of our abilities. So, now it is our time to demonstrate our passion, commitment, and contribution to the evolution of this organization.

With a vibrant, diverse and evolving organization, we will tackle the challenges of the future with a new vision while maintaining the traditional values. I look forward to working with our team as we continue to create an incredible membership experience. Thank you for your consideration and support.

Maureen Parenta
Bergen County NJ Prosecutor’s Office

I ask to be considered for the position of Secretary for the NIOA. Here’s a brief review of my background:

For eight years, I have worked as the Communications Director for the Bergen County Prosecutor’s Office, an agency serving a county of more than 900,000 residents, the highest county population in New Jersey. My always interesting and various duties include press relations, community outreach, event planning, and production of educational videos. In a previous professional lifetime, I have produced television programming and pitched clients’ messages in public relations.

I’m so lucky in many ways. My bosses are very supportive of training opportunities, and the NIOA is the ideal source to gain knowledge and build relationships. In the spirit of sharing information and assisting those in our profession, my office donated Active Shooter DVDs to each conference attendee in 2013.

I have been a member of NIOA since 2011 and participated in our annual conference every year since 2012. It has been my privilege to serve as Region 1 Director since 2013, and I’ve had the good fortune to have helped out with conference planning and suggesting presenters.

If I can contribute to the important mission of the NIOA, I would be pleased to serve on the Board.
Google, the most widely used Web browser in the world, thinks a majority of state and local government websites aren’t doing enough to protect the people visiting them. And starting in July, that browser is going to start prominently telling those users that the sites they’re visiting aren’t secure.

And as of right now, a lot of those governments disagree — at least on paper — that they need to do anything about it.

The security measure in question is encryption, and specifically the basic encryption implied by a website having a URL that starts with HTTPS instead of HTTP. Of the 50 state government websites, 29 have front pages that are not encrypted. Of the 10 most populous cities in the nation, six have non-HTTPS front pages:

- New York City: Site not encrypted
- Los Angeles: Site encrypted
- Chicago: Site encrypted
- Houston: Site not encrypted
- Phoenix: Site encrypted
- Philadelphia: Site not encrypted

Philadelphia has a beta version of a new website here that is encrypted, but that site has been in beta for at least a year and a half.

- San Antonio: Site not encrypted
- San Diego: Site encrypted
- Dallas: Site not encrypted
- San Jose, CA: Site not encrypted

The problem is likely even more widespread than that. The government website and digital services company ProudCity embarked on a project about a year ago to gather information on trends among local government websites and estimated that less than 20 percent of city websites in the U.S. had HTTPS. Vision Internet, another government website builder, estimates that about 25 percent of its clients had encryption before they stepped in.

A lack of encryption means, in so many words, that hackers would have an easier time seeing, stealing or manipulating information traveling between the user and the website.

**“The Bare Minimum”**

Google Chrome, the Web browser that carries the majority of traffic on the Internet today, is led by people that think every single page should be encrypted — even the ones that don’t carry sensitive information in either direction.

If an unencrypted Web page carries sensitive information, that information could be visible to hackers. And toward that end, a lot of the government websites that don’t encrypt their main landing pages do encrypt the pages that actually ask users for information — whether that’s renewing a driver’s license, paying for a parking ticket, signing up for notifications or something else.

Even if a page doesn’t handle sensitive information, there are still reasons to encrypt, according to Google spokesperson Ivy Choi.

“HTTPS is the only way for sites to ensure that the site they create is the site that users actually see, because without HTTPS, an attacker can modify the site in any way they want,” Choi
wrote in an email. “For example, if a government site is on HTTP, an attacker could change or delete the information on the site, or add offensive imagery, etc.”

A big concern is photos and videos, which are often hosted on different servers but embedded into a government’s website. In those cases, even if the site itself is encrypted, a hacker could get in by targeting those assets.

And then there’s third-party software, long a weak point in government websites. Embedded third-party software can offer hackers a back door that allows them to do a lot of things.

Encryption also is the direction most of the Internet is going in. Most Google Chrome traffic is to HTTPS pages, and federal agencies are under strict orders to encrypt as well.

The Looming “Skull and Crossbones”

What many working in the government technology arena worry about is the message Chrome will be sending to users, and what impact it might have.

“At a time when people’s faith in government is low, especially with security issues that are coming up in the news around government and security, when you go to a government website and you see ‘not secure’ in a browser, regardless of whether you’re submitting information or not, that further decreases people’s faith in government to secure their private information,” said Luke Fretwell, ProudCity’s chief executive officer.

That “not secure” message, some think, will act as a general indication that something is wrong — a vague one.

“I think having a not secure message for the average user is gonna be ambiguous, so they’re just not going to know what that means,” said Michael DeAngelo, deputy director of Washington Technology Solutions.

It might serve as a general indicator that something is wrong. And ultimately, some argue, something is wrong.

“If you’re not taking the most basic steps, I think that’s something you should really be concerned with,” said Craig Lubsen, a spokesperson for the Indiana Office of Technology. “The industry is clearly driving this, and citizens may lose confidence when they start putting the unsecure messaging up there … whether it’s a skull and crossbones or something, citizens are going to have doubts about the business they’re doing with the government.”

Why Government Lags Behind

There are a few reasons so many state and local government websites don’t encrypt. But they mostly boil down to the same thing: If there’s no sensitive information coming across a Web page, why make the extra effort?

The attitude has manifested itself in the form of policies, written or unwritten, in state governments. Take the unencrypted main landing page for the state of California, for example. The state has a policy stating that encryption is necessary for “confidential, sensitive or personal information.”

“CA.gov doesn’t contain any sensitive information, it’s not a transactional website,” said Bryce Brown, a spokesperson for the California Department of Technology. “It’s only a central portal from which you can access other websites and their services.”

Similar guidelines explain the status quo for the states of Washington, Indiana and Florida.

How Easy Is Encryption?

A lot of companies that build websites for government are moving toward HTTPS. ProudCity encrypts by default, Vision Internet is moving toward encryption by default and NIC urges all its clients to consider HTTPS.

Not everybody is interested.

“Some of the feedback we’ve received, and we’ve been in conversation about this, is, ‘It’s public record, people can get it anyway,’” said Rodney Caudle, NIC’s director of information security.

This despite the relative ease of encryption relative to yesteryear. Back when encryption was mainly used for e-commerce, it could cost a significant amount of extra time and maybe a couple hundred dollars to build encryption into a site. Now there are free tools like Let’s Encrypt that let any website owner move to HTTPS.

But that’s not going to work for everyone. Let’s Encrypt only offers domain verification and not extended verification, which is a higher standard and takes more effort to attain. The certificates that come from that service also only last 90 days, while others will last a year.

Domain verification is easier, but it’s also not as secure.

“There have been cases — and it’s relatively easy to do — you can impersonate an organization and get a domain validation cert, whereas it’s much more difficult to get an extended validation cert,” said Thomas Vaughn, chief information security officer of Florida.

And that’s not to say anything of the other security measures that vendors recommend governments take when building a website.

“There’s actually quite a bit of work you have to do to make sure you have HTTPS on your website, and then you have to worry about security policies and sub-resource integrity,” Caudle said.

Whatever resistance is there, change is in the wind. Aside from Google Chrome’s looming deadline, government cybersecurity is beginning to creep into the national dialog. There’s the investigation into foreign actors hacking into voting technology in the November 2016 elections. There are destructive ransomware attacks on a regular basis. And then there’s simply a desire to do something about it: The Center for Digital Government regularly finds in surveys of government IT workers that cybersecurity is their No. 1 priority.

In that environment, many find that covering basics like Web encryption just makes sense, even if it’s not a huge concern for every corner of the Internet.

“It’s just a model of behavior that we think’s more appropriate for the times,” DeAngelo said. •

Bend, Oregon, a mid-sized city located in the heart of the state, had a population of about 18,000 in 1977. Forty years later, a lot has changed and grown, including the Bend Fire Department. As a sleepy mill town, there was little need for a PIO: with no internet, few media outlets and many slow news days, it would have been a boring job.

In the ensuing decades, the position was filled as needed by the Fire Marshal, who mainly used it to describe the rare large incident or as a pulpit for the standard fire prevention messages. Bend was too small to make the national news outside of the occasional flood or wildland fire. Community support was taken for granted, because we were “the good guys” and didn’t need to bother the citizens for extra funding.

However, a furious pace of growth in the past 15 years brought that era to a close, and now the PIO is a busy person. In addition to meeting all manner of media to discuss emergency incidents, the City and the Fire Department have a great need for continually building public support and trust. Because of our growth, our

See MEGAPHONE, page 20
‘... the PIO today is not only the agency ambassador to the community, but also must be adept at translating the nuances of operations to the person on the street.'

Megaphone, cont.

The fire department has requested additional funding through a local option levy, so community support is essential for us to provide the services that people have come to rely on.

Something else that caught my attention years ago: the reporters often make factual errors based on ignorance of basic operational principles, and this makes all of us look bad. Bend is in a small media market, so the local stations tend to hire reporters just out of J School.

In fact, the PIO today is not only the agency ambassador to the community, but also must be adept at translating the nuances of operations to the person on the street. Since the Holy Grail of journalists is ACCESS, I have found that the best way to get our messages out to the community accurately, to build community trust AND resilience, is to provide the press with the best access they can get, to build relationships with the media personnel and to include a strong and resonant safety message whenever possible. Our aim is to be as transparent as possible, as much as possible, so that when we are not able to be so, the media will understand.

I make an effort to pitch at least a story per week to all media partners, either about some cool training we are doing, a new project we are undertaking, a cardiac arrest save or that proverbial Big Fire. We provide HIPAA training for the media, so they can ride along and tell our story first person, and we invite them to an annual meeting (with coffee and snacks) to fill them in on any changes, talk about significant issues (The Journalist and PTSD, for example), and request their feedback and questions. Some Chiefs prefer to be less public, so this strategy allows the PIO to craft the message and the media to be the megaphone.

In return, we have received consistently favorable articles, far more accurate reporting, and a strong partner in community protection and resilience. At least one outlet here in Central Oregon specializes in longer and more in-depth stories, and they are always looking for material that sets them apart from other stations. In addition, we try to get in to the radio and TV studios whenever they invite us, for interviews and on-air commentary. One radio station has recorded 4 sets of seasonal safety tips, edited them and is willing to share them with any other outlet. What a way to get our messages out!

We have raised the expectations and the knowledge level of our community with accurate information that our citizens can trust, and we have actually reduced the anxiety level of those firefighters who wind up in front of the camera. Possibly the most rewarding aspect of this is to watch the young nervous rookie reporters grow into poised and confident journalists as they head off to a bigger market position! In fact, this aspect of our work as PIOs can hopefully make life easier for all of us, as journalists become more in tune with emergency services, report more accurately and look to emergency services as partners.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Contact the author at dhowe@bendoregon.gov
Social media decorum in the 21st Century

By CHRISTOPHER COOK
NIOA Region 6 Director

We have all seen it. Another agency that has their heart in the right place; however, they stray out of their lane to make public comments about an incident or sadly worse, about a line of duty death that doesn’t belong to them.

Social media has paid tremendous dividends for public safety and other entities that need to get their messaging out and educate the public. Humanizing our profession, building of trust in communities, and quickly disseminating important information have all been positive rewards with the integration of social media into our agencies. With all these good things that social media has afforded us, public information professionals need to adhere to the basics of respect, dignity, and professionalism. This article will highlight a few topics that will drive this point home and serve as reminder to all of us on the best approach when commenting or sending well-wishes to another agency.

In April, tragedy struck Dallas as two DPD officers and were ambushed while responding to a theft investigation. Journalists began putting out erroneous information attributed to sources that were filled with falsehoods and a complete disregard to the sanctity of life and decency. There were even some well-intentioned law enforcement organizations that wanted to convey their support to Dallas, but unfortunately began purporting the same misinformation that one of their officers has succumbed to their injuries.

See DECORUM, page 22
Decorum, cont.

the day before his life actually ended based upon media reports.

The basic rule is to allow the home agency to confirm any and all information related to a serious injury or line of duty death. There are many reasons for this, including the right of maintaining dignity, respect and basic reverence for the home agency. Critical incidents are fast-moving and involve many factors that another agency may not be privy to and therefore should refrain from offering condolences and other comments that might convey to readers the extent of injuries or death. Trust me on this, there will be plenty of time for the profession to offer official condolences and words of support once the home agency has had time to handle their internal and family notifications.

Simply put, it’s not your news to break. The most appropriate time to offer words of encouragement is once the home agency has made their public notification. I know in times of stress and sorrow, we want to push thoughts and prayers to our neighboring agencies, but they must be carefully worded to not purport misinformation or offer confirmations to the extent of injuries or death.

Let’s change gears for a moment and talk about the incorporation of humor. As communication professionals, we all know there is a time and place for humor in our posts. I have noticed some great use of humor and unfortunately, I have also seen some inappropriate application of it that sometimes backfires for the organization. My rule of thumb is typically to run a humorous post by my colleagues. If they hesitate along with me, then I normally move on without using it. Timing is also important so make sure you don’t have a humorous post set on automation to go out. Once it’s out there, the post is in the public domain and even if you delete it, someone invariably will have already snapped a screenshot for it to live on in infamy.

The last item of topic would be when mentioning other agencies and organizations in a post. It’s just common courtesy to give a neighboring agency a heads up before placing their information or tagging them. This could come in the form of a simple phone call or private direct message. While giving a shout out to another agency wouldn’t normally require this type of notification, mentioning another agency about a crime spree probably would. It’s always better to err on the side of caution and get your notifications in place. The other organization being mentioned will be appreciative and likely return the favor down the road.

In conclusion, this article serves as a basic reminder of social media decorum in the 21st Century that we should all strive to adhere to. As members of the National Information Officers Association, we set the gold standard in best practices and communications.

Lt. Christopher Cook serves as the Public Information Officer for the Arlington, Texas Police Department, the 50th largest city in the United States. As a guest speaker and published author, he is active in many professional communication organizations, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the National Information Officers Association.
Ohio public health, hospitals, first responders and hundreds of volunteers team up for large-scale emergency preparedness exercise
Preparing for Emergencies
Yearly exercise helps ready for real-life incidents

By MICHELLE DAY
Franklin County OH Public Health

We always think it will never happen here but that doesn’t stop us from preparing for the day that it does. I’m talking about mass causality incidents and unfortunately some of us have already had one happen in our area or have had to set plans for the day one might occur.

I’ll begin with setting the scene. Franklin County Public Health, Columbus Public Health, Central Ohio hospitals and sometimes first responders participate in a large-scale emergency preparedness exercise coordinated by the Central Ohio Trauma System (COTS) that can involves hundreds of volunteers that play “victims” for first responders and hospital emergency room staff to treat. Some of these volunteers are part of the Franklin County and Columbus Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) that is on standby for public health emergencies but can serve for other types of emergencies, while others are community volunteers that assist with this yearly exercise.

As a PIO at Franklin County Public Health, I assist with helping our MRC coordinators recruit volunteers from the community and invite the media to attend to showcase how we prepare for real-life large-scale emergencies. Weeks leading up to the exercise, I blanket social media, our website and partners with “Please Share” messages to get the volunteers we need to make the exercise successful. Social media, more so Nextdoor, serves as the best and fastest avenue for recruiting

See EXERCISE, page 25
volunteers and informing the public that we’re hosting an exercise so they aren’t alarmed on the day of exercise play.

Since assisting with volunteer recruit is only one part of my PIO duties for these exercises, I also pitch the exercise to local media (TV, radio and print) so they can inform the public what we do to actively prepare for an incident that we hope never happens. April 2017 was the first time I served as PIO for these exercises. This particular exercise was the largest mass causality exercise ever conducted in Ohio with more than 500 volunteers, dozens of first responder departments and all Central Ohio hospitals participating.

The scenario was chaotic as it involved three scenes with three different incidents - mass shooting, bombing and large truck driving into a crowd - at three venues in Central Ohio. Media was staged at the mass shooting incident since that’s where I was based for the day. Since this was an exercise, I allowed them to get close to the scene that had law enforcement with guns drawn and first responders triaging victims so they could properly showcase what happens in a mass causality incident. We had great media coverage from TV, radio and newspapers.

This year, the scenario, number of volunteers and partner involvement changed. We utilized about 300 volunteers, no first responders and 12 Central Ohio hospitals for “victims” injured during a tornado. I was once again involved with helping recruit volunteers and getting the media to cover the exercise. I used the same social media and partner assistance as in 2017 for volunteer recruitment.

As far as media coverage, all three local TV stations and a community newspaper covered the exercise. I had to do a little additional persuading to get the media to come to this exercise since there wasn’t any injury action happening, just actor makeup application, at the actor gathering location. To get both angles of the story, I worked with hospital media relations staff to setup media access to cover the exercise at the hospitals. Even without having injury action actively occurring, I assisted the media with obtaining great video and interviews to share with the public.

I love participating in these exercises as it’s a great way for me to practice my media relations and public messaging skills in preparation of a real-life event. If the day ever comes that I’m needed to serve as PIO for a mass causality incident, I’m professionally prepared but can you ever really be mentally prepared to share that type of information? •