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WHAT'S WRONG WITH BEING A FOOL?

Webster's Online Dictionary refers to a fool as a person who lacks good judgment or is gullible and easy to take advantage of. Now who am I to argue with Mr. Webster, but I know a lot of FOOLS that are quite the opposite. In fact I think FOOLS are some of the best people in the fire service today.

The FOOLS, or the Fraternal Order Of Leatherheads Society, is a firefighting organization that was started back in the mid-90's by a group of Florida Firefighters, that focuses on the training and pride in the fire service. Today the International organization has a membership of roughly 11,000 Firefighters, representing over 5 different countries. The mission of the five "Founding FOOLS" was to attempt to preserve the rich traditions of the fire service. Traditions such as training, remembering fallen brothers and sisters, being proud of the job, and passing the information on to the next generation of Firefighters. By preserving these traditions, the FOOLS have helped return some of the luster back to the fire service.

I joined the FOOLS in 2002 and was amazed at the sense of camaraderie among the members. It didn't matter if you were a big city firefighter or a 6 month volunteer. You were all there for the same reason. To learn. To teach. To share information. There were no egos. There was only a sense of pride that made you want to do more. More for your department, more for your company, more for your community.

The FOOLS have been key players in major fire service training events across the country for many years. Many lead instructors at places like FDIC, Firehouse World, and FireRescue West are FOOLS. Many local FOOLS chapters have their own training sessions several times a year.

Unfortunately, there have been some misconceptions about what the FOOLS are about. Some say the FOOLS are just a social group, or a "good ol boys" club. I am here to tell you that nothing could be further from the truth. There has been local media trying to tie the FOOLS into fire department "scandals" and affiliate the group with people that have made poor choices. Now I am not saying that there haven't been FOOLS that may have made poor choices, but being a FOOL had nothing to do with the choice.

If anything I hope that being a FOOL has deterred people from making bad choices. Some people also think that the FOOLS are anti-management. This again is false. The FOOLS is proud to have Chiefs as members of the organization. Some very influential chief officers are members.

The FOOLS is not a political group, nor do we get involved in union or management issues. We do however proudly participate in and sponsor charitable events. Events like Relay for Life, St. Baldrick's, and Hero to Hero. This is one thing that has been a constant in the fire service. We always give back. We do more for our communities than almost any other professional organization. The fire service has always been a pillar of the community and the FOOLS strive to maintain this tradition.

The FOOLS do a lot of great things for the fire service. Many of which may never get noticed. That's OK. We don't do it for the recognition; we do it for a sense of pride. For a sense of "doing the right thing". Our members are proud members of the fire service and we are proud of that.

I encourage you to do some research on the FOOLS. Perhaps you have a misconception of the group yourself. Maybe you are already a member. Either way, thank you. Thank you for being a member of this wonderful fire service. I hope that this article has enlightened you a little about what the FOOLS are all about.