

History of the Wisconsin Alliance for Fire Safety

By: Dan Gengler



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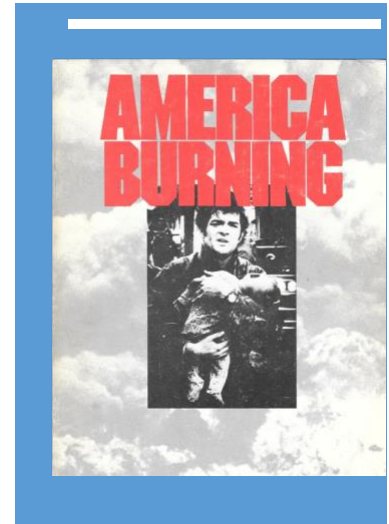




During a fifteen-day period in 1987, the city of Milwaukee experienced three fires that took the lives of seventeen children and three adults. Those events prompted the Milwaukee Mayor Henry Maier to create a task force to address the fire threat in the city. The task force reached the conclusion that fire safety education, especially among children, was the key to reducing tragic fires. Their conclusion prompted the creation of The Wisconsin Alliance for Fire Safety, an organization that promotes fire safety and burn prevention, and also, supports burn survivors throughout the state of Wisconsin.

The genesis of the Wisconsin Alliance for Fire Safety evolved over many years and too many fire and burn statistics not to have made an impact on the changing the dynamics of fire prevention. The watershed *America Burning Report* requested by President Richard M. Nixon in the early 1970's was a study as to why 12,000 American citizens were dying in fires annually. The report analyzed years of data including causes of fires, geographical and populous economics. Contributors to the report were from the National Fire Protection Association, Underwriter's Laboratories, American Insurance Association, U.S. Department of Commerce, national fire service organizations and educational fields. A very interested, committed and diverse grouping of professionals.

Results of this report identified many aspects of national fire safety while imposing some very aggressive changes to the fire service mantra, “We’ve always done it this way!” Fire protective clothing, fire equipment upgrades, fire service training and the creation of the National Fire Academy were just a few of the strong assertions that could change the fire fatality trends of the times. Note the cover was a picture of a fire in Milwaukee in February 1970 where the child died and ten years later, the firefighter pictured went on duty disability pension from injuries sustained in a 1979 fire.



Addressing the specific fire fatality equation, the report stated fire department and fire safety educational outreach was the key. Educating the public on four fronts was the formula outlined by the report:

- Fire Prevention – every building has fire potential that could lead to injury or death, therefore, check-listing and rectifying hazards become a priority as all fires start small and active fire prevention vigilance potentially limits ignition sources.
- Early Warning – Home smoke alarms were in their infancy when this report surfaced and the aftermath highly accentuated the need to offer quicker identification of fire threats.
- Evacuation Planning- Once a fire has been identified, getting out of a fire challenged building was identified as paramount in saving lives. Having a plan to “get out and stay out” was a basic fundamental element for survival. Meeting at a particular location and then calling the new “9-1-1” format was also mentioned to help.
- Lastly, the influence of early containment and potential extinguishment came in the form of residential fire sprinklers that would offer the optimum in home life safety. The residential fire sprinkler had not been invented at this point and took nearly six years to legitimately produce.

With this guide, the government working with the nation’s fire service were able to introduce the suggestions to most of the country. In 1985, President Ronald W. Regan called for another study as 8,000 Americans were still dying in fires. Smoke alarms helped reduce fire fatalities and more than 110 firefighters in the country were dying annually. America Burning Revisited Report was distributed in 1987. The study produced nearly the same results and suggestions to reduce the incidence of fire fatalities. The America Burning Recommissioned Report of 1999 was the latest in the series when lives lost to fires still accounted for approximately 6,000 dying. Fire safety education of all citizens, much less those of the state of Wisconsin, became the key.

Moving forward to 1989, the Milwaukee Fire Department entered into a long relationship with the Wisconsin fire sprinkler industry with the first annual Burn Center Golf Invitational, BCGI. It was initiated by a National Fire Sprinkler Association (NFSA) residential fire sprinkler workshop that was followed by a brainstorming session to have a golf tournament raising funds for St. Mary’s Regional Burn Center in Milwaukee. The first event was held in September of that year and raised \$19,000 for the charity. As of 2015, the BCGI has raised more than

\$2,135,000 for the hospital and related charities while becoming the impetus for starting and becoming the major funder of the WAFS.

Members on the BCGI committee included Milwaukee Fire Captain Dan Gengler and Fire Lieutenant Niles Ottesen, members of the fire sprinkler industry and St. Mary's Regional Burn Center. One committee member was Tom O'Connell, NFSA Midwest Regional Manager. O'Connell was one of the founding members of the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance when he served the Chicago Fire Department as Captain. O'Connell was heavily involved with fire prevention. For the first two years of committee meetings, he urged Gengler to start a similar organization in Wisconsin.

In January 1991, just prior to Gengler being appointed to Deputy Chief of Administration, he approached Milwaukee Fire Chief August Erdman and asked if he could start an association like the Illinois organization. Chief Erdman thought the idea was excellent and mentioned he could help recruit some quality and influential charter members. The first meeting was held at the headquarters of the Milwaukee Fire Department on February 22, 1991 with twenty diversified people attending and committing to the concept.

Original members included Larry Ceretto, formally of the Milwaukee Fire Department then as Dean of Fire Science at the Milwaukee Area Technical College, Appleton Fire Chief Richard Davis representing the Wisconsin State Fire Chiefs Association, Larry Lenox, Milwaukee Public Schools, Dr. Bonni Yordi, Wisconsin Electric Power Company, Dave Fantle, Wisconsin Gas Company, Brad Bauman, Wisconsin Bell, Joe Vorce, Johnson Controls, John Papador, Honeywell, Bob Stedman, WI Fire & EMS Legislative Leadership Coalition, Bill Blazer, Wisconsin State Firefighters, Franklin Fire Chief Dave Bublitz, St. Francis Fire Chief Andy Nearing, Jeff Crouse, City of Milwaukee Building Inspection, Dave Malek, Star Fire Sprinkler Corporation, John Bakes, Wisconsin Fire Sprinkler Association, Tom O'Connell, National Fire Sprinkler Association and Martin Richter, United States Fire Sprinkler Corporation and Gengler. By September, 1991, all were elected to serve one or two-year terms in September.

The first Executive Committee, the board's initial review and advisory group was Chairperson Gengler, Vice-Chairperson Richter, Secretary Vorce and Treasurer Malek. Attorney Nick Padway, then President of the City of Milwaukee Fire & Police Commission drafted the first Constitution & By-Laws of the organization. He did so as an in-kind gesture to help a cause he supported. Padway was the Alliance's gratis legal advisor for the next 16 years. The board adopted the constitution unanimously and revised it three times in the subsequent 15 years.

The Executive Committee members changed over the life span of the organization with Gengler remaining the chair for all of them. Several in-coming officers really helped move the organization forward with their talents and commitments. Kay Luedke, US Fire Protection, was probably the most significant. She held the Treasurer position for nearly 15 years and was an active voice in support of Alliance programming. She, too, was active with the Burn Center Golf Invitational.

The Wisconsin Alliance for Fire Safety Board of Directors then created the mission statement: *“To promote, encourage and foster fire safety, burn prevention and public fire safety education. We support burn survivors of all ages as well as sponsorship of the “Summer Camp for Burn Injured Youth.”*

Working with Wisconsin Senator Herb Kohl, the newly formed Wisconsin Alliance for Fire Safety reached 501©3 status March 17, 1992. Getting to nonprofit so soon after charter meant financial support would help sustain organizational growth. Brad Bauman was able to get a \$500 donation from Wisconsin Bell to help the WAFS open a bank account in late 1991.

Malek was the BCGI Chair and was instrumental in getting some of the financials under control in the early period. He was the first treasurer for the Alliance and established accountability from the start. Reilly, Penner & Benton became the audit firm for the entire existence of the WAFS. Once the nonprofit status was obtained, the firm ensured rules for compliance were strictly adhered.

In early 1992, the WAFS Board of Directors established some functional committees, the most productive were the membership and educational components needed to establish acceptance and direction. Chaired by Larry Ceretto, the membership Committee embarked on statewide recruitment. Following the Wisconsin Department of Industry and Labor Relations (DILR) districting, the state was divided into five geographical districts. The committee looked to recruit all fire departments and fire safety minded organizations into the fold.

The initial campaign to recruit members yielded an excellent response from southeast Wisconsin with relatively respectable reaction from other areas of the state. An early WAFS event helped the recruitment cause, The WAFS Fall Fire Safety Recognition Luncheon. At the time the Milwaukee County Fire Chiefs Association had twenty-one county fire departments as members and all attended the second annual luncheon in 1992. The speaker was Jim Dalton of the National Fire Sprinkler Association. Dalton was one of the presenters of the 1989 summit about residential fire sprinklers. This luncheon and its successful response of 129 attendees helped launch recruitment to what was now seen as a viable fire safety affiliation. By the end of 1993, more than 500 WAFS members were recruited at a one-time \$10 admission fee.

The other major influence on the motivation and success of the WAFS was the Education Committee. Co-chaired by Larry Lenox and Brad Bauman, the committee came up with the organizational logo that stood as the identity for all twenty-four years. They also produced the first WAFS brochure that was used in the recruitment campaign. The group developed what became the WAFS mission through its FireSafety 2000 long range plan. The Board of Directors saw this as an energetic, futuristic and aggressive project that would put pressure on the organization to be responsive and productive to its mission.

FireSafety 2000 established aggressive goals for the WAFS to seek by the year 2000.

- Establish a statewide fire safety educational program to help citizens understand the importance of home fire prevention habits.

- Get the citizens of Wisconsin to understand the life-safety early warning value of smoke alarms by installing them according to state and local requirements and maintain them according to manufacturer's recommendations.
- Educate all in the critical response to early warning by establishing and practicing a fire escape plan with the whole family participating.
- Educate the state on the life-saving and property saving value of the residential fire sprinklers concept.
- Provide statewide grants for local Survive Alive House/Safety House Programs.
- Establish a *free* camp for burn injured children to help them cope and overcome their burn injuries to reach their maximum potential in life.

The WAFS accomplished these goals and several more by 1999. The camp was realized in 1992 with eight campers going to the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance "Burn Camp." The Wisconsin based camp began in 1995. The Newspapers-in-Education program outreached to nine southeast Wisconsin counties in 1998 and reached all 72 counties by 2002. Survive Alive House grants of \$500 started in 1994 to several fire departments statewide.

The Education Committee moved on when new Board Director, West Allis Fire Chief Ray Schrader took over the chairmanship and helped develop a trade show booth and additional fire safety outreach fire and burn prevention materials. The booth and outreach became quite prominent at the state's fire chiefs and inspectors conventions. Many had served on this committee from the fire service, fire alarm and fire sprinkler industries making its work most productive in the acceptance of the WAFS movement.

FireSafety 2015, under Education Committee Chair Mike Hafeman, DeTech, Inc., a home alarm system company, revised the FireSafety 2000 Goals in 2006 to set new direction for the organization. The energetic proposal met Board approval to engage in more fire/burn prevention outreach in the state using schools, reaching parents and using the web site with an effective fire safety curriculum. Working productively to generate revenue to enhance existing and developing new programming was paramount. And lastly, outreaching to all corners of the state that programming for burn survivors exists through projects like the *Summer Camp for Burn Injured Youth* and *World Burn Congress*.

The camp became the flagship of the WAFS early in its history. In 1992, Director Tom O'Connell was instrumental in getting young Wisconsin burn survivors to the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance (IFSA) experience at Camp Duncan in northern Illinois. To get Wisconsin children there, we needed a network of resources to find eligible kids. This was not a hard task.

Chairperson Dan Gengler went to the three hospitals in the state that had burn units, Children's Hospital of Wisconsin and St. Mary's Regional Burn Center in Milwaukee and UW-Health Burn Unit in Madison. Jody Rosenau, Linda Butke and Andrea Williams represented these hospitals respectively and with more energy than needed. Rosenau and Butke represented the WAFS as counselors at the 1992 camp in Illinois.

Being invited to camp meant paying the IFSA \$650 per camper to help their organization offset administrative, activity room and boarding costs. The IFSA camp was held in June and final payment was made when the first fire service organization jumped in to help. It was the Wisconsin State Fire Inspectors Association with a check for \$1,000 in late October that first year that completed payments for eight Wisconsin burn injured children. They had the time of their young lives.

Getting the campers to the Illinois camp was tasked to anyone who could help transport them. Gengler contacted fire departments near where Wisconsin campers lived and several parents drove their children to the camp. This helped with relationships that helped eventually foster partnerships with the Wisconsin State Firefighters Association and the Professional Fire Fighters of Wisconsin.

For three years, the WAFS was privileged to have eight young Wisconsin burn survivors attend the camp. Before the third camp, the IFSA mentioned that the WAFS could send children in 1994 and '95 but would have to find another camp after as their camp was getting more and more populated. Immediately a steering committee was formed to have Wisconsin fund its own camp. The group decided to host the camp by 1995.

The original team of four was expanded by inviting new influences with the same vigor to help. Included were Bob Kane, Mainstream Theatrical Productions and burn survivor, Renee Kielich, St. Mary's Burn Unit supervisor. Kane, himself a burn survivor, was part of the location search team. He was high energy and dedicated to make the camp an experience for campers and counselors. His group settled on Camp Timber-lee outside Troy Center as the best camp site and a reasonable location for travel.

Kielich took the project on for college credits to create the original camp policies and direction. Her efforts resulted in a very comprehensive and top quality system that set the pace for success. Kielich created a detailed format for all aspects of the program including recruitment of campers and staff, training for staff, rules for campers, activity concepts and so on.

A very productive member of the original steering committee has been Alden Taylor. After the 1993 camp, Gengler was able to get WITI, Milwaukee Channel 6 to do an interview with a camper. The exposure got a lot of interest piquing in the Milwaukee television market, the first real media outreach. A feature *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* article with front page picture also helped with the recognition. Ms. Taylor contacted Gengler, then a Milwaukee Deputy Fire Chief, and mentioned she wanted to help. She said her son was a burn survivor and that she wanted to start a camp too. Her influence and philanthropic support has been monumental in the success of camp and its activities ever since.

Meetings were held monthly from April 1994 to the Wisconsin in 1995. St. Mary's burn care nurse Tracy Unertl was the first Activities Director and she was thoroughly immersed into

making the week-long event fun for everyone. At every meeting, Unertl explained the changes in her schedule. She did a great job and set the pace for excellence.

One element was to have a name for camp. Several members of the original steering committee got together to give the camp a purposeful title. They conjured up the *Wisconsin Alliance for Fire Safety Summer Camp for Burn Injured Youth*. They believe the Illinois camp, called *Burn Camp* had a negative connotation to it and felt their suggestion covered the concept. Member, Milwaukee Fire Lieutenant Mark Zellner was very emphatic about this as his rationale was that the burn camp reference was more negative than positive for campers. He also recruited a friend to produce the first camp brochure and it was Robert A. Zimmerman who coined the tag phrase on the brochure; *“There is no healing power more miraculous than the support of a friend.”*

One of the obstacles was how to get campers from home to the camp if parents didn't deliver them. From the beginning, the camp had kids come from all corners of the state. With some firefighters taking campers to Illinois, the Professional Fire Fighters of Wisconsin (PFFW) stepped in and committed to being the chauffer service. Ultimately, the PFFW assigned Dave Bozanko to sit on the Burn Camp Steering Committee. He later joined the WAFS Board of Directors.

With all preparations in place, the first camp commenced with counselors showing up August 5, 1995. Nearly all first year staff were from the fire service or health care fields. Camp supplies and materials were stored in Cypress, the lower storage room used to this day during WAFS camp week. Twenty-two counselors showed up the first day for introductions, training and familiarity with the camp grounds.

On Sunday, August 6, thirty-seven anxious campers started to arrive at the noon hour. It was fun seeing the wide eyes and anxiety on the faces of the new campers. Gengler distinctly remembers the look of 9-year old Deshawn Parker, a physically burn scarred and scared boy. His mother saw a need to help him quickly adjust. She told Gengler that she was so impressed with the welcome and surroundings that she was going to stay and send her son home. He stayed, and as an adult, still helps with the camp activities staff.

The camp started with 37 campers and ended with 34 that week. One child was homesick, another lost a grandparent and the third said she wasn't burned bad enough to stay and went home.

Then the week started. Thanks to Kane, Kielich and the Burn Camp Steering Committee's preparation, the fun started immediately. The only thing not prepared for was the weather. Temperatures for the week were in the high nineties and even reached 102° one day. The heat index for the week was more 100° nearly every day. Burn scarring does not allow sweating from the closed pores and makes higher temperatures even more uncomfortable as the heat transfers to other areas of the body. Fans were purchased, enough for each cabin attempting to bring some relief. Rain one day didn't dampen any activity of fun.

From the beginning, safety was a paramount concept for all. That was to ensure the counselors and staff were in a safe environment. This would result with the campers being safe as well. The Health Center was coordinated by Andrea Williams, UW-Health, and prepared to handle almost any medical emergency. Camp counselor Tom “Doc” Schneider, Head Surgeon at St. Mary’s Regional Burn Center was readily available for advanced situations. There were additional health care professionals in attendance serving as staff or counselors and included several paramedics and EMT’s.

Only one incident happened the first camp of note. An intern at UW-Health had an allergic reaction to riding a horse. Since he never had been on a horse before, he didn’t know he was allergic. His reaction made him very uncomfortable, so he went home.

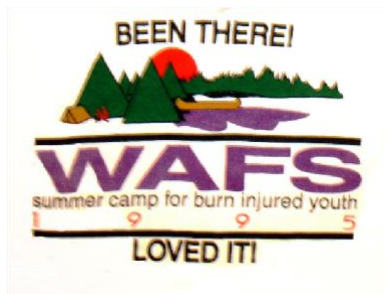
An interesting note was that one counselor appeared on Saturday only to say he was going home Sunday night as he had to work that Monday morning. This created a little dilemma as staff was just enough to handle the numbers at camp. The next day a man rode in on his bike as he had heard about the specialty camp. He was a recent burn survivor and was curious. Bill Ester, hearing of a need for another counselor said he’d be back in a few hours as he rode his bike back to Burlington, about 15 miles, and returned to finish the week.

The first *Media Day*, was held on what has become the traditional Thursday of Camp Week. It has since been renamed *Visitor’s and Family Day* to take the stigma of commercialism out of it. The day was to thank supporters for their investments and to prove their donations were of tremendous value to campers and staff for personal growth and acceptance.

Media from Milwaukee and Madison showed up often in the early years giving the camp some very great exposure. There were about fifteen Walworth and Waukesha fire departments that provided apparatus for the campers to ride that first day. Over the years, the support of the volunteer fire service from this part of the state has been a great emotional lift for all associated with the camp. Flight for Life and Medflight helicopters from Milwaukee and Madison were a treat for all attending. Hot dogs and hamburgers were provided by the PFFW being served by burn care nurses from St. Mary’s to the nearly 200 in attendance.

Another tradition was started that day with a short *program* explaining the activities of the WAFS and then followed by fire departments and organizations holding fundraisers and presenting checks. More than \$5,000 was donated that day.

Each year the camp has a new theme. The first camp theme was *Been There, Loved It!*



The high attendance came in 2001 when 97 young campers attended with seventy counselors and staff. The number of staff was higher in large part due to a Native American theme for the week. A village was set up and the culture was accentuated by nine Native Americans living that week at camp while performing their ancestral activities.

Earlier that year, Mary Gengler was picked to become the first full-time employee of the Alliance serving as Executive Director. Her business background helped grow the operational and financial aspects of the organization. Her skills gradually made the Alliance a solvent and well respected entity encouraging outside support from all over the country.

In 2016, the WAFS sponsorship of this specialty camp reached twenty-five years with nearly 1,500 camper experiences. Along the way, the WAFS has witnessed campers growing into responsible adults and as with the general population, there have been some that have not done as well. There were a few incarcerated and even committed suicide. The camp staff have always been very dedicated and over the years, have made a difference in the betterment of the WAFS investments to create opportunities to help the graduating campers reach their maximum potential in life. All this while attempting to make each camp create *"memories to last a lifetime!"*

Bill Ester, mentioned previously, later served as WAFS Executive Director for two years and was the WAFS conduit to the Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors. Starting in 1996, the WAFS sponsored three survivors to the Phoenix Society's World Burn Congress (WBC). The Phoenix Society organization is the leading national nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering anyone affected by a burn injury through peer support, education, and advocacy. It reached well beyond the borders of the United States and has participation throughout the world.

Several annual attendees were members of the CSM Survivors Out Assisting in Recovery (SOAR) team. Ester and Doug Huskey, both burn survivors and capable of personal funding served as chaperones and managers for the sponsored SOAR members unable to personally fund or even physically travel without assistance. Quality commitments by both.

Committed to helping burn survivors cope with their injuries, the WBC annually holds a four day conference in late summer or early fall somewhere in the country. The WAFS had sponsored someone every year since 1996. In 2009, the WAFS applied to be host of the 2012 WBC in Milwaukee, WI. With the team of Bill Ester, Dr. Thomas Schneider, Columbia St. Mary's Burn

Unit plus Dan and Mary Gengler, WAFS, presented won the support unanimously by the WBC selection committee.

Planning and monetary support started immediately to ensure a successful campaign. More than \$400,000 was needed to underwrite the conference. The Phoenix Society pledged to raise more than half the commitment. The BCGI committed to help support the effort and did so to more than \$100,000 over three years. CSM with other Wisconsin organizations and businesses provided the remainder of funding commitments.

There were ten subcommittees created to produce the event. WAFS and CSM volunteers sat on seven of these committees; Program, Youth & Family Program, Hospitality & Entertainment, Volunteer, Transportation, Media/PR and Funding. Hotel/Food/Beverage, AV and Registration comprised the Phoenix Society commitment. Meetings were monthly starting in 2010. This was a professional and competent assemblance of committed individuals.

A subcommittee was formed by the WAFS and CSM to create a larger contingent to attend the 2011 WBC. CSM employees, Darlene Sargent, Melissa Kersten and intern Elaina Meier with WAFS Executive Director Kathy Meulmanns and Dan Gengler teamed to create a process to provide scholarships for burn survivors to WBC. This process helped to start the escalated commitment to send more Wisconsin burn survivors. The intent was to commence this program with the 2011 WBC in Cincinnati, OH. Thirteen burn survivors and 2012 WBA Committee Chairs attended the conference to learn and to shadow in preparation for 2012.

The 2012 WBC conference in Milwaukee had nearly 1,000 survivors, family, fire service and health care professionals attend at the Hyatt in downtown Milwaukee. A great program along with excellent weather and social events made for a very successful conference. Tremendous feedback identified that the hosts and city made for a memorable experience. More than 200 volunteers ensured the timely and efficient execution of the activities. A great moment for the WAFS/CSM partnership.

The 2012 WBC and each since has had an abundance of new faces attend and benefit from the annual event. Because of the escalation of attendees, new sponsors have stepped up to assist in the funding of travelers to the conference. The Bosanko Brothers for Burn Camp and Paul Davis R Restoration & Remodeling-Madison Golf outings have helped make it possible for more burn survivors, camp staff and burn care professionals to attend. More than fifteen annually attend with this WAFS program.

Additional programming in March 2009 was born from camp that included the *Winter Leadership Program* that started, coincidentally the time the Phoenix Society launched their teen program. The intent was to get last year and former campers, ages 17-25 years, together to guide them into young adulthood. The first session highlighted post high school opportunities from trade school to university education. It also featured how to write checks and having healthy finances. Included were resumé preparation and public speaking sessions. This is where camper

Jeff Jordan got his launchpad to public presentations. Through the years, the focus on teamwork, self-improvement and fun have been the benchmark criteria to help personal growth.

An annual free *camp picnic* has been a more recent highlight to introduce new campers to staff and to be a reunion of former campers. Held in Madison each June, the picnic provides a free lunch and camaraderie to all attending. PFFWCF Alliance for Fire Safety Program Director Jenna Jordan conceived the picnic and has coordinated since the event its inception in 2013.

The camp bike ride was started in 2011 with six campers taking a trip from La Crosse to end up at camp's opening in August. Facilitated by Lon Haldeman, renowned bicyclist, and assisted by small team, the group rode for several days making stops each night along the way. Years since, the ride ended up at the picnic. Most riders believe their experience helped make them more confident in their personal lives. Camp steering committee member Laurie Laz was able to recruit Haldeman and help facilitate the event through Paul Davis Restoration outside of Madison. Another great program started by the WAFS.

The Young Burn Survivors Conference presented by Dustin Wise has another beneficial project to help teen burn survivors grow in confidence and attitude. Held in Oklahoma, the program focuses on meaningful incentives and motivation to take control of their personal and interpersonal lives. As designed, this project that gives young adult burn survivors motivation long after the weekend experience.

Very early in the existence of the Alliance, communications were sent out to members and ultimately every fire department by a quarterly, then semi-annual newsletter. Updates on the growing fire and burn safety involvement statewide by organization provided the readers with the positive affect the WAFS was making. Pictures of camp and other activities gave visual proof of productivity along with member and outside support of the organization. The importance of such communications and coordination of the outreach was originally created by Board Director Joe Vorce of the Johnson Controls Company.

The Alliance followed the IFSA with the "Too Hot for Tots Baby Bath Thermometers" in 1995 with commitment to get scalding prevention tools in the hands of newborn parents. Several key hospitals in the La Crosse, Appleton and Milwaukee helped get the thermometers to more than 4,000 families. A federal grant was obtained to expand the program statewide. Hospitals have since adopted this valuable burn prevention device to keep infants from burn injuries. A Federal Emergency Management Agency grant of \$63,000 secured by then Executive Director Mary Gengler in 2003 helped get this valuable program statewide to hospitals.

The Fall Fire Safety Recognition Luncheon was initiated as a prototype of the ILSA's Fire Prevention in 1991. The Illinois event was about fifty years old then and it was felt Wisconsin needed to identify those people and organizations that dedicated time, energies and funding in the name of fire and burn safety. Recognition awards are annually given to corporations, individuals, fire departments, retired fire service personnel and legislators for their efforts in the cause.

The WAFS luncheon has been the only statewide activity with this type of recognition. WAFS camp staff and counselors are also given award credit for their active and beneficial support at the camp. Guest speakers have included the President of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and other national organizations. The most impressive presentation was from Vina Drennan, wife of FDNY Captain John Drennan who died forty days after sustaining devastating burn injuries in a fire. Her message was extremely emotional and meaningful for prevention education and enforcement. The state's fire service and supporters of the mission of the Alliance have attended the lunch.

One of the FireSafety 2000 Goals was to create a statewide educational outreach program. In early 1998, Chairperson Gengler was sharing a beverage with Tom Hayes, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, when they were discussing their respective occupations. Hayes working with the Newspapers-in-Education (NIE) Department and Gengler with the Milwaukee Fire Department.

Hayes mentioned how the paper would devote a special section on a topic, insert it in a daily newspaper and have them delivered to schools. Sponsors would pay for the educational program that would encourage students read for current events, take home and possibly get parents to become subscribers. Brainstorming, the two came up with a fire safety theme. Hayes explained that there was a cost to do the graphics, layout, printing and delivery of the papers. Gengler was excited about the potential and stated the WAFS could get the money, approximately \$60,000 that year.

The concept was great in theory only if valuable content could be written with educational information. Using the basics of the *America Burning Report*; fire prevention, early warning, evacuation planning and residential fire sprinklers, the search began on getting corresponding content to match the report's fire safety global suggestions. Initial providers included; Underwriters Laboratories, Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition, Wisconsin Gas and Wisconsin Electric Power Companies, Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, UW-Health, St. Mary's Regional Burn Center and American Family Insurance to name a few. Since then the NFPA, SafeKids, Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors, State Farm Insurance and others have contributed.

The WAFS received its funding support for the program from Board member's companies or respective organizations, Wisconsin Gas and Wisconsin Electric Power Companies contributed annually until they merged into We Energies. The BCGI was the largest donor with St. Mary's, later Columbia St. Mary's Foundation as the only organizations participating every year since 1998.

The first edition went out October 6, 1998 to the nine counties in southeast Wisconsin from the Illinois border north to Dodge County and Lake Michigan west to Dane County. Approximately 90,000 fourth through sixth grades students received the eight page special section that was deemed an advertorial since it only printed submitted content with no advertisements.

Hayes submitted the special section to the Newspapers Association of America for their 1999 annual NIE Conference competition. More than 1,200 newspapers were represented by membership worldwide. The WAFS project finished third in the competition for overall submissions and first in fire safety. Quite an honor right out of the box. Layout creator Dou Goldner deserved a tremendous amount of credit with his ability to make the message enticing, believable and educational.

The newspapers were mandated to have nonprofit NIE departments to encourage the younger generation to read and hopefully support paper subscriptions. Rules of engagement meant there were a lot of restrictions in order to keep the nonprofit status of this department.

In 2002, with the additional help of the BCGI and a donation by the Troy Center Fire Department, the program expanded statewide and has reached more than 2,200 schools in fourth through seventh grades and in 2015 had reached more than 1,250,000 students since 1998 with approximately twice that amount reading the section as subscribers or point-of-purchase buyers.

Gengler retired from the fire department in 1999 and moved to the National Fire Sprinkler Association, NFSA, as Midwest Regional Manager for the nonprofit organization. He was successful in 2004 to have the NFSA Board of Directors dedicate \$100,000 for a national NIE fire safety programming to include the life-saving value of fire sprinklers. The project required matching funds by sponsors supporting the concept. In a few years, the national NIE Fire Safety Program concept reached approximately 2,000,000 students and more than 20,000,000 daily readers of newspapers in 16 states

In 2004, the Professional Fire Fighters of Wisconsin (PFFW) contributed \$10,000 to the project as incentives for teachers to submit activities that made their classrooms, students and families more fire safe. The PFFW became a committed and greatly appreciated sponsor from then on. Though not the flagship program that the camp had become, the NIE project definitely reached more with the trust that incidences of fires and all the tragedies associated would change the camp population.

Besides the NIE program, the Alliance ventured into several public awareness programs to expose the state with fire safety messages. One such program was a package of ads played on the Milwaukee Brewer and Green Bay Packer broadcast networks through Milwaukee radio station WTMJ. The 30-second ads were aired for two seasons as either the third inning break ad or the last played after broadcaster Bob Uecher signed off from the game played that day.

The Green Bay Packer ad was also a 30-second overview of the *America Burning Report* suggestions. Both ads were positive and received good reviews. The national Fire Sprinkler Association-Wisconsin Chapter also ran ads that included similar messages about fire safety and fire sprinklers. It helped with awareness to the point that Charlie Sykes, noted radio personality quoted statistics from the ads when fires occurred in the city.

A second media campaign was with Channel 12 WISN-TV in 2002. The WAFS provided

\$30,000 of sponsorships to run a week-long series on fire safety. Sponsors paid \$5,000 each to have 30-second ads play that week. An aggressive station news producer took a theme from the year before from a Minnesota TV station highlighting the fact that children, when sleeping, reach a rapid eye movement (REM) stage that puts them into a deep sleeping pattern. This stage makes it more unlikely to wake from loud noises, like activated smoke alarms.

The series was informative but needed additional influence to authenticate its already established findings. It was evident to the WAFS that the producer was in the series more for recognition than benefit. When challenged as to why the fire and burn safety commercial ads paid for didn't correspond with the series, the marketing department skirted the issue. They mentioned future contracts would address the dilemma of the WAFS could do an expensive Inframercial.

That challenged the WAFS to a new height, create a message and get it viewed across the state on network television. The same year the WAFS received the thermometer in 2003, Executive Director Mary Gengler wrote another FEMA/United States Fire Administration grant and received \$55,000 to underwrite the media outreach project. Again using the *America Burning Report* template the grant created a 34-minute, three-part educational video titled: *A Burning Issue: Is Your Family Safe?*

A Burning Issue: Is Your Family Safe? was produced for the Wisconsin Alliance for Fire Safety by marketing communications firm Peg Paul & Associates. The video was a community education tool for fire and life safety educators to use with adults. Narrated by Ron Hazelton, home improvement editor with the ABC Television program *Good Morning America*, the step-by-step production addresses fire prevention, smoke alarms and escape planning, and home fire sprinkler systems. The video presented in whole or as separate segments and is in both English and Spanish.

The grant included development and production and air time in all five Wisconsin television markets (Green Bay, La Crosse, Madison, Milwaukee and Wausau) as an Inframercial, no commercials plaid during broadcast. It aired in each market numerous times from early & late morning, afternoon and prime time.

Because of its fire safety messages, the video was distributed at no charge by the nonprofit Home Safety Council (HSC) through its online resource the Expert Network. Membership to the Home Safety Council meant receiving a copy of the video. More than 2,000 were distributed nationwide under the WAFS label and support of the HSC, quite the national endorsement.

The video received one of the most prestigious awards in advertising and video and film production – a Bronze Telly Award, honoring outstanding television commercials and programs as well as video and film productions. The video was among more than 12,000 entries from 5 continents. In 2004, the video also earned an International Gold MarCom Creative Award. Both awards for excellence were announced in separate ceremonies in Europe.

“It is truly an honor to receive such distinguished recognition for this video,” said Dan Gengler, WAFS Chair. “We are delighted to share the credit with our partners, who are helping us convey key home fire safety messages through thousands of fire departments across the country. Our thanks go especially to the Home Safety Council and to Peg Paul & Associates.”

The WAFS was always looking for extension of the educational concept. UW-Health burn care supervisor Andrea Williams, also with the camp, offered an opportunity to pursue another venture. Williams was part of the team that treated a young patient for accidental scald burns at home.

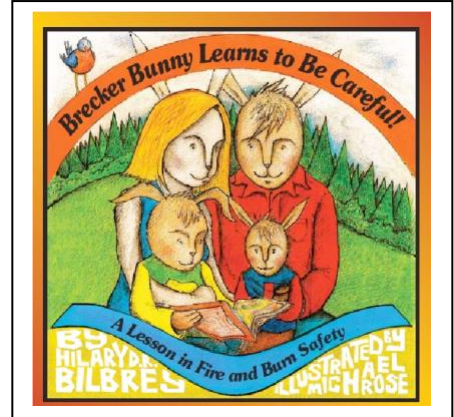
On Williams suggestion, mom Hilary Bilbrey, an Oxford scholar and children’s book author, met with Dan and Mary Gengler to discuss a book she had started for burn safety. Bilbrey presented her concept with 32 lines of rhymes that had burn safety as the theme. She was looking for funding and help with her perceived project. The Genglers agreed and said the WAFS would help support where it could.

With only the short story as a start, making it a tool for toddlers to first grade became the thought process for success. At 18 months, children can have their minds molded for youth to adulthood. The concept of a child’s book with fire and burn safety messages inclusive was motivation to help make a change in future generations. The Alliance wanted to be a leader in this pursuit by getting it produced.

The Burn Center Golf Invitational became the funding mechanism to move forward. Gengler approached Underwriters Laboratories (UL) to find a focused book like this did not exist for toddlers as young as the target audience the parties were seeking to reach. UL agreed and offered to help.

Bilbrey’s cousin was an artist was retained to do the illustrations. Quite a number of options were presented before the team settled on as the face of the lead character of the book, Brecker Bunny. UL stepped in to help with specific fire safety tips for readers to pass onto the listening child. These tips were signified as *Safety Smart*[™] and had special pages after the story to explain the individual safety concepts. Of course, the tips were part of the story by visually showing fire and burn prevention, early warning of fire, evacuation planning and even residential fire sprinklers.

The final draft was ready in late 2006 and titled, *Brecker Bunny Learns to be Careful-A lesson in Fire and Burn Safety*. The BCGI donated enough funds to get 30,000 first edition prototypes produced. The book turned out great with one major challenge, UL decided that its *Safety Smart*[™] was indeed a trademark that could not be used as it was promised to another UL client. With that obstacle being addressed and some communications it was agreed that all future editions would be changed accordingly and that the message from the President of UL would be removed from the back cover.



Bilbrey changed the *Safety Smart*[™] tips to *Brecker Bunny's Buddy Tips*. The process left the WAFS with nearly 25,000 books that UL stated could not be distributed because of the trademark error. The WAFS convinced the UL that the intent was not to sell but to give away. After some negotiations UL finally signed an agreement under those circumstances that the books would not be sold.

The fire safety checklist of the NIE Fire Safety Program and a calendar of fire safety actions for different times of each month was added to help all understand how to make their living environments safe from the tragedies of fires and burn opportunities.

The program sought benefactors and received enough over the next year to reproduce the book. All told, more than 120,000 copies were printed by HM Graphics of Milwaukee with a wonderful printing discount. Wisconsin Congressman Gerry Kleczka helped with several grant requests as fundraising for this program exceeded \$200,000.

Sponsors of the *Brecker Bunny* book ranged the gambit of committed organizations; Columbia St. Mary's Foundation, UW-Health Hospital, Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, We Energies, American Family Insurance, Burn Center Golf Invitational, Bosanko Brothers for Burn Camp, FM Global and a few others.

WAFS Executive Director Mary Gengler and WAFS Administrative Assistant Jenn Scroggs embarked working with the state of Wisconsin to find every state licensed day-care and preschools in the state for delivery of the books.

The Wisconsin State Fire Inspectors Association partnered with the WAFS to deliver the books to all 72 Wisconsin Counties and the day-cares and pre-schools within. It was a very calculated attempt to get fire safety and burn prevention messages to this young audience, and just as important, the readers disseminating the messages back to their respective homes. It proved to be an effective way to get the fire service into these locations to not only deliver, but to read to the children.

Testimonials were pouring in like crazy. Children were not content with having the book read just once. They wanted it read time after time. The WAFS heard parents, teachers, babysitters and so on exclaimed the value and entertainment of the story.

Subsequently, the BCGI funded 5,000 copies of a Hispanic version of the book that reached the Spanish speaking community centers around the state.

One area that was addressed from the beginning of the WAFs was to become solvent in the support of its ever growing list of initiatives. Several organizations and functions stand out. Anyone who has or had contributed was greatly appreciated.

Some of the historic events that helped the organization grow are the result of these listed efforts:

In 1995, West Bend Fire Chief Meyer offered a very unique fundraising opportunity, it was a circus from Ohio that sold tickets in advance of fundraising performances at K-Marts around the state of Wisconsin. Barron Eric Von Uhl was the proprietor of the circus and he used a telemarketing firm to pre-sell the tickets. The WAFS was informed that as much as \$100,000 could be profited. Because Chief Meyer provided validation that the circus was legitimate, the Board voted to OK the project.

Unfortunately, Von Uhl had hired a telemarketing firm that booked the locations and sold tickets but they also skimmed funds off the top. The circus did net about \$15,000 but the bad press from some crooked telemarketers gave the Alliance a challenging public relations issue. Camp later exposed the WAFS as a very legitimate organization and it moved on to better exposures. Unfortunately Chief Meyer was not treated so well. His community called for his resignation albeit, his history proved him to be a caring and generous man.

Since the beginning of camp, the Walworth county Fire service has been a great supporter of camp. In the early days, fire departments were contributing checks on then Media Day of \$25 or \$50. They since have supported camp upwards of \$10,000. The Troy Center Fire Department held a statewide fire department 40" LED TV raffle in 2000. Assistant Chief Jerry Arnest coordinated the raffle that ultimately raised over \$20,000. That raffle helped set the camp and the 2001 NIE Fire Safety Program expand from nine state counties to all 72.

In the camp's early years, the first Racine Fire Fighters Local 321 Packer Party was a major fundraiser. It was held at the home of Mark Geisler with a big tent in his front yard with food, beverages, raffles and several big screen TV's as incentives to raise funds.

After a few years, the event moved to Racine firefighter Dave Peterson's large property. The fundraising outing later was assumed by the Bosanko Brothers for Burn Camp. Four firefighter siblings; oldest Dave-Racine Fire Department, Rich-Kenosha Fire Department, Robbie-Wauwatosa Fire Department and youngest Phil, Assistant Chief with the U.S. Air Force. Each brother bought a collective synergy to the event thus making it extremely popular and quite helpful for the causes of the Alliance. Funds raised helped support the Newspapers-in-Education

Fire Safety Program, World Burn Congress & *Brecker Bunny* support, and enhance the Camp Scholarship Program. Over the years, more than \$150,000 had been raised for the statewide enhancement of fire and burn safety in the state.

Dean Koselek, Greendale Fire Department lieutenant and camp counselor for many years, suggested to the Kettle Moraine Harley Owners Group (HOG) Chapter that they get involved with the camp. Koselek's relative John Gutch was the HOG Chapter member that organized a 2001 event. It was a poker ride that was organized to raise money for the camp. Gutch approached the WAFS Board suggesting the Kettle Moraine HOG Chapter would need \$10,000 seed money to raise a significant amount for the camp. After much discussion and trust, the Board supported the venture.

The ride was a success for an initial event with a decent amount of riders ending up at the Wisconsin State Fair grounds for food, beverage and raffles. One item was a wooden wagon made by prisoners at the Waupun State Correctional Institute. A fun story went with that one.

The Tuesday of camp week, the Chapter had organized a ride from New Berlin's Hal's Harley, Kettle Moraine Chapter's Headquarters to camp. More than 80 riders were in procession for the first Bike Ride for Camp. It has become an activity ever since with more than 200 riders making the trek on several occasions over the years.

On Visitor's Day (renamed from Media Day) Gutch and other Chapter members presented a check for \$25,000, of which was included the \$10,000 seed monies. Critical was the pride this new partnership created. Attending that day and riding his motorcycle with wife Karen was Ralph "Moose" Wandersee. Ralph, a chief officer of the Watertown Fire Department and President of the Fire & Iron Chapter 17 Motorcycle Club. Members are primarily firefighters. He was attending camp after Executive Director Gengler had made a presentation to the Jefferson County Fire Fighters Association informing them of the camp and he wanted to check it out.

Wandersee saw the value and opportunity to help. His Chapter organized a Poker Run that had proceeds go to camp. Riders in their first ride were from the Green Bay Fire Department, Fire & Iron Chapter 141. Chapter 141 held its first ride the next year and within two years the groups combine for more than \$100,000 raised for the camp. Each have held rides and several other F & I Chapters have joined the band wagon for young burn survivors. Wandersee and wife met a young camper and fell in love with her. In the following years they pursued adoption of the child and have since help provide her with opportunities she had dreamed about. She is one of many loving stories happening because of camp.

WAFS Board Director Jim Hirsch, Paul Davis Restoration, Inc.-Madison decided to host a Madison area golf outing in 2005. He had his staff coordinate the event that was held at The Oaks Golf Club east of the city. Beautiful weather helped kick off their first successful event. Hirsch's wife, Laurie, was a dynamo in making the event a classy and efficient fundraiser. She introduced a few new twists to the outing that later moved to the beautiful Blackhawk Country

Club in Shorewood Hills. She also has become a valuable member of the camp steering committee.

Revenue from this event began to climb and it was decided that the event filter money through the nonprofit Alliance to the burn unit at the University of Wisconsin – Health Hospital to support their unfunded budget needs. Burn care supplies and equipment was funded by this event and helped build a new relationship with the UW-Health Burn unit. A children's play area was funded by the outing to help visitor families of burn patients.

Through the years, over \$150,000 has been raised by the efforts of the PDR Invitational Golf Outing. The dedicated group help spur on supportive relationships with the Madison Fire Department and Professional Fire Fighters of Wisconsin.

These are but a few efforts by people dedicated to help make a difference in the state of Wisconsin for fire & burn prevention. The Alliance became a respected leader in addressing the fire and burn safety concerns of the very young to senior with the plan to reduce future tragic incidents. The intended result would be to protect the lives and prevent bodily harm to anyone inside and outside the state. Without their altruistic generosity, the Alliance could and would not have made an influential change in fire and burn statistics. They can't be thanked enough.

All this history bought the alliance to 2014 when it was felt that new influence was needed for continued existence and growth of the Alliance. There was much attention given to options of keeping the organization moving forward if another influence could raise the bar. Board Director and PFFW President Mahlon Mitchell stepped up to offer his organization's offer to take on the organization's mission.

Mitchell had been one of the influences consulting the thought of dissolving the organization and finding a new host. In his review, he recommended that the professional Fire Fighters of Wisconsin Charitable Foundation had been incorporated and become 501©3 nonprofit organization. Nationwide, similar firefighter state labor organizations have taken parallel directions. In fact several had contributed to the WAFS camp over the years.

It was not a popular decision to pursue this organization change. Thoughts of support being lost was of primary concern. Assurance that recognized established programming would continue was another concern. It took several months before the Wisconsin alliance for Fire safety Board of Directors had weighed the benefits of handing over the Programs and funds to the PFFWCF. Director Mitchell vowed that the PFFWCF would make alliances with all who have supported the WAFS in the past and that program enhancement would be the outcome of the transfer.

With the confidence that the PFFWCF would follow other states in making sure the programs and existing funds would be wisely moved to the PFFWCF, the WAFS Board of Directors voted December 2014 to dissolve the nearly 24-year organization to become property of the PFFWCF effective January 1, 2015. To help ensure the transition would follow the Board's decision,

several existing Board Directors were recruited to sit on the PFFWCG Board of Directors; Dave Bosanko, Dan Gengler, Mike Hafeman, Jim Hirsch and Mahlon Mitchell.

In early 2015 PFFWCF Board of Directors meetings, the Board moved to keep the same Mission Statement of the WAFS, *“To promote, encourage and foster fire safety, burn prevention and public fire safety education. We support burn survivors of all ages as well as sponsorship of the “Summer Camp for Burn Injured Youth.”*

New PFFWCF Board Director Jim Hirsch moved that *Alliance for Fire Safety* be retained as the existing program identifications to help in the transition. It became a very positive statement to help the transition.

The other moves that helped make the transition positive was to retain WAFS Program Assistant Jenna Jordan in that role with the new foundation. Her duties were expanded to incorporate new projects and ensure existing programs moved forward rather than backward. Having Terre Kent and Bill Klar as co-Executive Directors responsible for the fund raising and organizational managers of the foundation was important. But the organizational responsibility fell on the shoulders of the PFFWCF Charitable Foundation with Chairman Mahlon Mitchell and Vice Chairman, Steve Wilding who also serves as Secretary/Treasurer of the PFFWCF. Both have significant influence on the foundation affairs.

More than a year and half after the WAFS dissolution and the assumption by the PFFWCF of its programming and finances, it appears to have been a very productive move in assuring the future success and creation of beneficial programming for the mission of the Wisconsin Alliance for Fire Safety.