

Summer
2025
EDITION

HALL OF FLAME NEWSLETTER



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Play Ball!

As many readers of this newsletter know, Hall of Flame Executive Director Chuck Montgomery has been fighting cancer for much of the past year. The leukemia-lymphoma, believed to have been caused by chemical exposures during Chuck's long career as a firefighter, was treated at City of Hope Cancer Care under the supervision of Dr. Amber Flaherty. The result is that Chuck is still hustling around as usual, vigorous as ever—so vigorous, indeed, that he was recently tasked with rounding the bases at a Cactus League game here in the Valley.



Staff and volunteers from the Hall of Flame Museum of Firefighting, along with his family, were proud to cheer Chuck on this past March at an Arizona Diamondbacks-Cincinnati Reds Cactus League game at Goodyear Ballpark, in celebration of his successful treatment. Dr. Flaherty had the honor of throwing out the first pitch! A little later on, it was Chuck's turn; he got to run the bases, from home plate up the first base line, which was lined by the Diamondbacks. He then jogged his way from first to third, with the crowd cheering wildly, and then from third to the plate, a route lined with Cincinnati Reds. Chuck high-fived all the players from both teams, and was met at the plate by Reds manager Terry Francona, who presented him with an autographed game ball, and a hug. It was a little like the last scene of *The Natural*, except with Chuck instead of Robert Redford.

The split squad Diamondbacks lost the hard-fought game 8-9, but a good time was had by all!

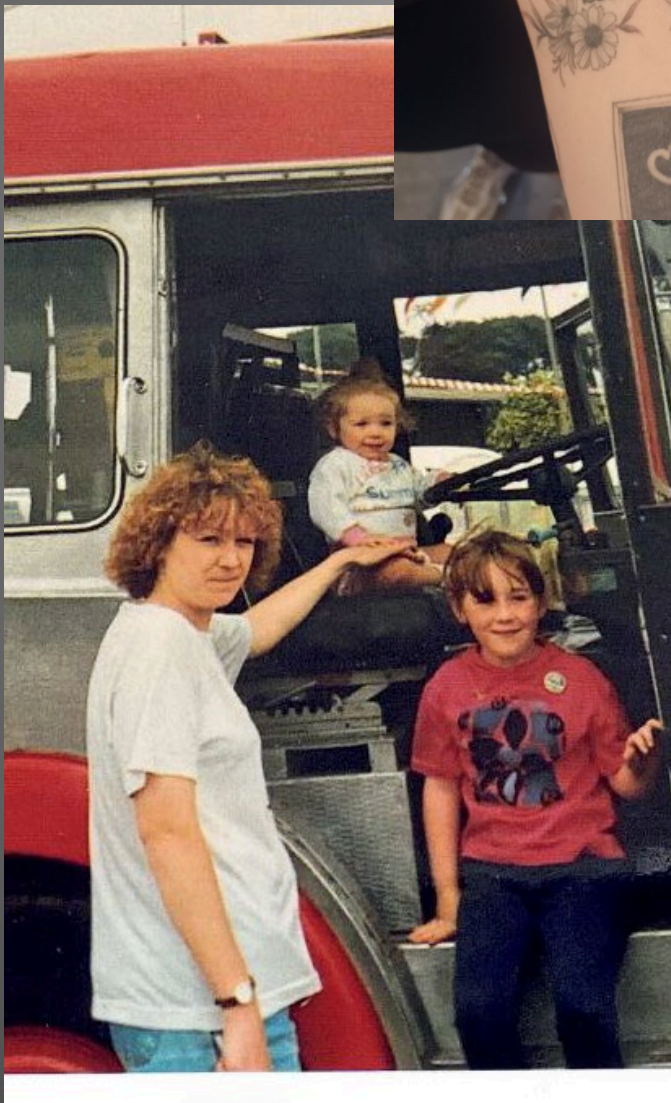


ERF Family Reunion

In April, the Hall of Flame Museum of Firefighting was delighted by a visit from the family of the late Don Youell from Coventry, England. The family has a special connection to one of the trucks in the Hall of Flame's collection: our 1968 ERF/HCB-Angus Pump Escape. Mr. Youell owned the rig for several years in the early 1980s, after her service in the town of Retford in Nottinghamshire.



The family's attachment to the truck is strong. In 2020 they sent us pictures of a detailed model that Mr. Youell built of the truck. On their visit, three of the Youell ladies recreated a photo from back in the day, in which one was a little girl and one was a baby. We also learned the rig is properly named "Sally" because of the letters SAL in her license; one member of the Youell clan, Jodie, went so far as to commemorate her grandfather's beloved rig on her arm as a tattoo!



The rig represents a collaboration of English manufacturers. Hampshire Car Body–Angus Fire Armour built more than 6,500 pieces of fire apparatus during its 61 years of existence between 1933 and 1994. The firm built the rig on a chassis by ERF (E. R. Foden), a major English builder of heavy duty trucks and buses. She was built for the fire service of Nottinghamshire, and served the town of Retford until its retirement around 1980.

She has a rear mount 750 gpm pump (with engineer panels on both sides of the truck), a 500 gallon booster tank, and capacity for about 1,000 feet of hose. The Perkins V-8 diesel engine allows her to travel at well over 60 miles per hour, and the crew compartment can accommodate 7 firefighters. She's also equipped with a Merryweather escape ladder which four men can remove from the rig, wheel into position, and extend to a length of 55 feet. Most of the rig's body is made of wood with aluminum cladding. The red portions of the truck are fiberglass, which greatly reduces her weight.

After the years the rig spent with Mr. Youell and his family, she spent time as a promotional vehicle for the European division of Mattel, the toy company. She was eventually owned by Mr. and Mrs. Peter Eichorn. The Eichorns donated the rig to the Hall of Flame in August of 1998, shipping her from France, where she was in storage, to Long Beach, California, from which Hall of Flame volunteers drove her—through L.A. rush hour traffic!—to her new home in Phoenix.



Volunteer Spotlight: Tim Leija



Hall of Flame Volunteer Captain Tim Leija has a distinction that many of our volunteers can't claim: He's a true, home-grown, born-and-bred Zonie.

Santos Timothy Leija III was born in Phoenix. His first name seemed "too old-fashioned, so everybody called me Tim." Even before he graduated from Glendale High School in 1993, he had already taken an interest in his future career.

"I was riding along with Glendale Fire, as it happens" he recalls, "I became a cadet, and hung around Station 152. It just grew on me, everything I saw. I liked how nice they were to patients, and how excited they were when they heard the tones for a fire."

He graduated from the City of Tolleson's fire academy with the class of 98/1. Soon after, he relocated to the northern part of Arizona.

“I started working at Grand Canyon National Park Airport as a firefighter,” Leija says. “Then I started volunteering with Tusayan Fire in 2006.” He was soon filling in for the Chief during his absences at the fire department for the small community near the Canyon’s south rim, and eventually came on as a full-time firefighter in 2006. His years with Tusayan Fire brought him into contact with people from all over the world who came to visit “The Big Ditch.” He also worked disaster relief for FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), allowing him to travel around the country.

After retiring from Tusayan, Tim returned to the Valley. Soon after, he ran into an old friend from Glendale, Chuck Montgomery, now the Executive Director of the Hall of Flame Museum, and was quickly drafted as a volunteer.

“Chuck made me pull weeds!” Tim wails.

His duties since have included everything from conducting tours to performing in a grass skirt in the APS Light Parade this past holiday season. With that kind of versatility, not to mention glamor, it’s not surprising he was elected Volunteer Captain.



Torchy's Tacos

Tuesday or not, we love us some tacos here at the Hall of Flame Museum of Firefighting. And we may have a new favorite: Torchy's Tacos, not just because they are seriously yummy—they are—but also because they're fans of the Hall of Flame, too.

Back around the holidays, the Torchy's mascot led one of the Hall of Flame's rigs in APS Light Parade, and supplied fabulous eats for the staff and volunteers before the parade began.



Fast-forward a few months, and representatives of the Hall of Flame had a wonderful time in April at the Grand Opening of the new Torchy's Tacos in Surprise! Among many other great people, we got to meet Michael Rypka, founder of the Austin, Texas-based chain, Surprise Mayor Kevin Sartor, Torchy's Catering Sales Manager Heather Bowman, the mascot from GCU and the mascot and spirit squad from Ottawa University. Torchy's also generously donated \$1000 to the Hall of Flame! Oh yeah, the tacos and queso were delicious, too!

A big throng of Torchy's fans had assembled in the parking lot of the complex, eagerly awaiting admission to culinary delights within; they were also drawn by the prospect of the day's grand prize: free tacos for a year! We're not sure who won; all we know is that it wasn't us. No matter, though. Torchy's Tacos are worth paying for!



Smokey Gets A Facelift

You didn't hear it from us, but...Smokey's had some work done! After years of standing vigil by the entrance to our Wildland Gallery here at the Hall of Flame Museum of Firefighting, the beloved bear had begun to show some signs of age, in the form of ragged, worn, bald patches on his muzzle. It had gotten to the point where kids on tours would sometimes make embarrassing comments about our vintage Smokey costume. So in April, the longtime resident took a brief leave of absence from the Wildland Gallery to undergo some expert repair by veteran costume restorer Velta Hargrove in Burbank, California. He's back on the floor now, looking like a million bucks. Not bad for an 80-year-old.



Hargrove's firm, Characters, Costumes and More, specializes in refurbishing mascots for government programs.

"We're a small company, but we're a licensed provider for Smokey, Sparky the Dalmatian, and Woodsy Owl," explains Hargrove. "We try to keep the price reasonable for the government."

Like so many people, she has fond memories of Smokey from childhood: "I remember seeing Smokey in Yosemite when I was a kid."

A Central Valley native who graduated from Cal State Long Beach with an M.F.A. in Costume Design, Hargrove broke in doing costumes for stunt shows. She eventually worked for Shafton, Inc., a large North Hollywood costume shop, and later moved on to "walkaround" characters ranging from Snoopy to Spider-Man and other Marvel favorites for Knott's Berry Farm. In addition to Smokey, Sparky and Woodsy, she and her team have built costumes for California Highway Patrol's mascot CHiPPER and Cal Fire's mascot Captain Cal. She gives credit to her skilled crew, including Martin, who is in charge of foam work and "covering the heads," Maria, who does the stitching, and Ed, who does the vacuforming.

"Our [Smokey] was in the Rose Parade," she notes proudly.

"We don't think of them as characters; we think they're important to people, and to the programs" Hargrove says of the costumes they work on. "We put a little love into them."

Only Smokey's head made the trip to California; while it was away, Hall of Flame Executive Director Chuck Montgomery replaced it on the body with the head of our Sparky the Dalmatian costume, resulting in a startling dog/bear hybrid. Chuck's reasonable defense of this move is that it was less upsetting than seeing Smokey headless. Our faded Sparky costume may be due for a trip to Burbank next.

GET OUT OF THE HEAT! & INTO THE FLAME*

*The Hall of Flame, That Is



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