

History of the Piedmont Fire Seminar

The Piedmont Fire Seminar was conceived by the Forsyth County Volunteer Firemen's Association and the Forsyth County Fire department in 1975. The purpose of the training event was to expose local emergency organizations to the events, concerns, present tactics and future technology that effect the operations and well being of the emergency services. The Seminar was modeled after the "Fire Department Instructors Conference" but on a smaller scale and with a registration fee that was affordable to the vast number of rural and municipal organizations and the individual attendee who normally had to pay their own way. Classes were conducted by nationally recognized fire service leaders and by many instructors who were beginning their careers and have become renowned in their fields. The Seminar has been responsible for bringing information on products and techniques to many responders and organizations who would normally not have been able or had the opportunity to obtain training, which in turn has impacted the safety and well-being of the responder and citizens served.

The Seminar initially utilized the campus of Salem Baptist Church School from 1975 to 1980 with an attendance around 400. Due to the growth of attendance a move was made to the Reynolds Auditorium for the opening keynote address. Participants would then caravan to the Forsyth Technical Community College Campus for classes with an attendance of around 900. The route was led and controlled by the Forsyth County Traffic Control Officers who directed traffic and controlled intersections for non-stop travel to the Campus. Further growth in student numbers and exhibitors dictated another move in 1987 to the M.C. Benton Convention Center Complex in Downtown Winston-Salem. With this move, participation increased to over 3,000 people and 60,000 square feet of indoor exhibit space.

The initial registration cost has remained very affordable over the years starting at \$5.00 per person for many years to a present day cost of \$15.00 per person, which includes full access for the entire weekend, notebook, refreshments and other amenities. Many participants bring spouses and family members who are allowed access at no charge.

The indoor exhibits are the largest display in the region. The Seminar exhibits have become a "one stop shopping event" and provide a valuable learning experience and service to responders, administrators, directors and purchasing committees. The exhibitors have been a key to the success of the Seminar by space rental, contributions and giveaways, which has helped to keep cost down for the participant.

2005 marked the 30th year for the Piedmont Fire Seminar. We have again outgrown the location. Many more training opportunities exist for training now than 30 years ago. Request for exhibitor space exceeds what is available at the Convention Center. What started out as a small weekend training school now involves year round planning and administration by staff. For

these reasons the Forsyth County Fire and Rescue Association's Training Committee continued to evaluate the potential evolution of the Seminar and its future direction. In 2007 the seminar will be renamed to the Piedmont Fire Expo and in 2008 the Expo will be conducted at the Winston-Salem Coliseum Complex.

The Seminar has been a positive impact on the safety and well being of all involved. The greatest legacy of the Piedmont Fire Seminar is not confined to just the events of that one weekend per year but rather the life long ties and network of contacts that have developed over the years with the past instructors, exhibitors, manufactures, participants and staff that extend not only across the U.S. but to other countries as well.