

Apopka firefighters hear harrowing tale about complacency

By Teresa Sargeant
Apopka Chief Staff

“That’s the way we’ve always done it.”

“I’ve been on the job 35 years. I know it all and I’ve seen it all.”

According to Dr. David Griffin, those are the most dangerous statements a firefighter can make.

He should know. Those were the beliefs he and his firefighter colleagues adhered to before nine of them perished in a furniture warehouse fire on June 18, 2007, in Charleston, S.C.

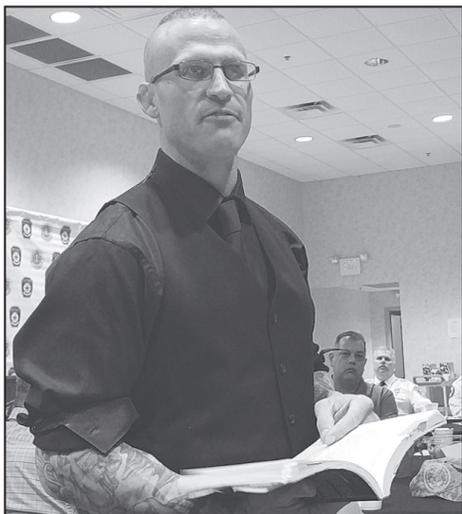
Since that day, Griffin had eventually resolved to speak about it, as well as pushing for the significance of change in fire agencies’ skills, protocols and their overall organization.

As a kickoff of last weekend’s golf tournament fundraiser, the Apopka Fire Department (AFD) invited Griffin as the keynote speaker to give his firsthand experience as the fire engineer of the first engine on scene June 18, 2007.

That day, a call originally dispatched as a trash fire eventually engulfed the Sofa Super Store, a 42,000 square-foot property located on Savannah Highway. The fire killed nine firefighters. This tragedy is considered one of the most scrutinized events in national fire service history.

Griffin weaved what would have been an eight-hour seminar into an estimated 45-minute keynote of his life story, his joining the fire service in 2004, and how the June 18, 2007, call drove him to painkillers, liquor, and blood sports to dull his survivor’s guilt.

He also presented exclusive video footage with radio traffic showing a minute-by-minute account of the warehouse fire. Along the way, he pointed out the ways he and his firefighters



Dr. David Griffin spoke to the members of the Apopka Fire Department.

handled the call, including their mistakes.

“I do not take pleasure in doing this,” Griffin said at the beginning of his keynote address. “This is not a badge of honor for me.”

The biggest takeaway from his address was his emphasis on changing what he called the old-school ways of firefighters’ training. He especially advised firefighters to hold each other accountable so as to improve their skills.

Griffin conducted over three years’ worth of research on the change process following the 2007 tragedy that he published as his best-seller, “In Honor of the Charleston 9: A Study of Change Following Tragedy.”

During the book signing that followed his presentation, Griffin said if he doesn’t retell the events of June 18, 2007, no matter how painful it is, then no one else will.

“A lot of people use the excuse that it’s hard to talk about it,” he said. “It is hard to talk about, but it’s even harder not to talk about it because if you don’t talk about it, nobody

remembers those guys. So it’s important for me to tell what happened that day so people understand the truth and realize it’s important to change.”

Proceeds from sales of the book and other items are going toward the Armando Borjas Jr. Scholarship Fund, which raises money for local youth who are aspiring firefighters and medical technicians.

The second annual Armando Borjas Jr. Golf Tournament occurred on Saturday, October 15, at Forest Lake Golf Course. The tournament also benefited the scholarship fund.

The scholarship fund was established in his name, which raises money for local youth who are aspiring firefighters and emergency medical technicians — “something Armando would be proud of,” Apopka Fire Chief Chuck Carnesale said.

Borjas was an Apopka firefighter who died from esophageal cancer on October 17, 2013.

Carnesale extended a warm welcome to all in the room who attended Griffin’s address. He recog-

nized Borjas’ family, who were in the room, as well as the following fire departments: Apopka, Orange County Fire Rescue, Lake County, Osceola County, Satellite Beach, and Ocoee.

Mayor Joe Kilsheimer welcomed the community including fire departments from other jurisdictions to the evening’s event. Acknowledging that the AFD is ISO Class-1 and has a new fire chief in Carnesale, Kilsheimer said the AFD wants to work with other fire agencies throughout Central Florida.

“One of the things I know about Chief Carnesale is that he is already well-known, well-regarded among other fire chiefs here in Central Florida,” Kilsheimer said. “We think we have a lot to offer here in the city of Apopka, but we want to work well and work in cooperation with other agencies across our

region because we think we have a lot to share, and, of course, when things happen, things like the hurricane (Matthew) last week, we were all on duty. We all go to work, and we’re all there to help serve the public and to keep focusing.”

Carnesale said the City Council gave the Apopka Fire Department the funds needed for the most up-to-date firefighting equipment, which is not so the department will “have the fanciest of everything,” but they have “the equipment needed.”

“There’s always room for change — staying vigilant, staying updated on new procedures, new tools,” Carnesale said about his department’s approach to training and preparing for calls.

Captain Michael Rich of the Orange County Fire Rescue called tragedies that occur nationwide like

the June 18, 2007, tragedy unfortunate, but helping those stories can relay firefighters learn from them.

In the case of the Orange County Fire Rescue, they try to “Monday morning quarterback,” or criticize their actions after a call, Rich said.

“It’s always eye opening, but I can’t say that any department in its history hasn’t done something like that. We all learn from it in our own ways and just continue to do so,” Rich said.

Now a fire captain in Charleston, S.C., Dr. Griffin has toured internationally, giving keynote addresses about leadership, organizational learning, development, employee motivation and change. His company, On a Mission LLC, offers organizational and motivational programs for businesses and groups. His website is www.drgriffin.com.

Hosted by Apopka resident and business owner, Rod Love, you are invited to come and learn about Orange County’s certified contracting W/MBE initiative and how this can grow your business and create jobs

Women, Minority & Veterans Business (WMVB) Networking Lunch & Munch November 3, 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. at The Catfish Place, 311 S. Forest Ave., Apopka (Please RSVP at BusinessRSVP@comsg.net)

Come and hear a special presentation by Orange County Business Development Division Administrator that will provide information regarding Orange County’s Certified Women/Minority Business Enterprise (W/MBE) initiative.

Greater Orlando Aviation Authority (GOAA), Central Florida Regional Expressway Authority, Orange County Public Schools and the Orange County Library will accept W/MBE certifications from Orange County, City of Orlando and the State of Florida.

This business networking luncheon will also provide local business owners the opportunity

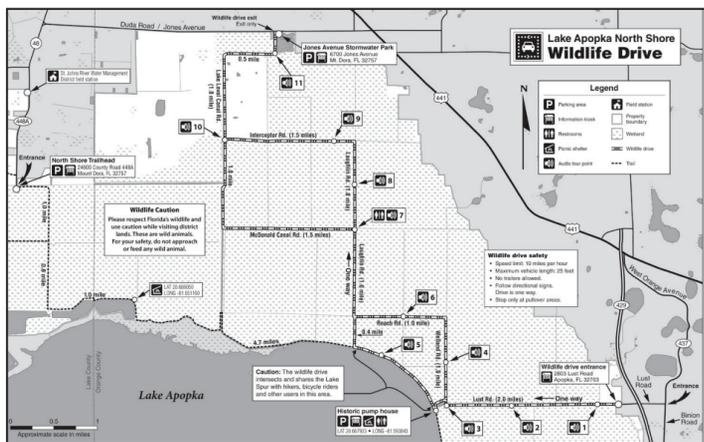
to interact with other business owners in an effort to increase local commerce and to hear from one another about

- Strength • Weaknesses
- Opportunities • Threats

(SWOT) as local business owners continue to expand their businesses through contracting, networking and marketing to ensure that Apopka continues to be the premier community in which to LIVE, WORK & PLAY.

Hear firsthand from a local small business owner as to how the W/MBE initiative has grown his business and created jobs.

RSVP at BusinessRSVP@comsg.net



This map shows the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive on the North Shore of the lake. It is open Fridays through Sundays and all federal holidays from sunrise to sunset.

Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive has 2.5 miles added to 11-mile drive

Beginning today, Friday, October 21, from sunrise to sunset, the St. Johns River Water Management District is opening 2.5 miles of new trails on the popular district-owned Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive. The new segment is designed to help alleviate traffic bottlenecks.

Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive’s address

is 2803 Lust Rd., Apopka.

In the 17 months the drive has been open, more than 81,000 visitors have experienced a variety of wildlife viewing opportunities along a network of wetlands, levees, and canals. For more details about recreation on district property, visit sjrwm.com/recreation.

Apopkan’s drawing wins first place in collegiate student art show

It was announced on Tuesday, October 11, that Juan Rodriguez of Apopka recently won first place in drawing in the Hand-picked Favorites Student Show at McMurry University’s Gypsy Ted Gallery, McMurry University.

Art professor Linda Fawcett judged the juried

art show. She has taught painting, drawing, art history and computer graphics/digital photography classes at Hardin-Simmons University, in Abilene, Texas, since 1981. Fawcett is also active in the Texas Association of Schools of Art, currently assistant to the president, and served as

president of the organization from 1996 to 1998 and from 2006 to 2008.

Founded in 1923 as a United Methodist institution, McMurry University enrolls more than 1,200 students and is located on 52 acres in Abilene, Texas, a city of over 118,000 people.

★ U.S. SENATE ★

DEBATE

OCTOBER 26, 2016

★ 7:00 PM ET ★

PATRICK MURPHY (D)

Broadcast live from
Broward College

MARCO RUBIO (R)

Florida voters face an important decision in the race for U.S. Senate. Read continuing coverage in this newspaper and tune-in to the statewide debate to learn more about the candidates and where they stand on the issues that matter the most to you.

For more information visit www.beforeyouvote.org

★ ★ ★ 7:00 PM ET ★ OCT. 26, 2016 ★ ★ ★

Ft. Myers - WBBH (NBC) Gainesville - WCJB (ABC) Jacksonville - WJXX (ABC) Miami/Ft. Lauderdale - WTVJ (NBC) Orlando - WFTV (ABC) Panama City - WMBB (ABC)* Pensacola - WEAR (ABC)*	Sarasota - SunCoast News Network Tallahassee - WCTV (CBS) Tampa/St. Pete - WFTS (ABC) West Palm Beach - WPBF 25 (ABC)
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*These stations will air the debate with a one hour delay at 7:00 pm Central Time

★ ★ ★ ★ MODERATOR & PANELISTS ★ ★ ★ ★

MODERATOR Todd McDermott Anchor WPBF	PANELISTS Neil Brown Executive Editor Tampa Bay Times	Patricia Mazzei Political Writer The Miami Herald
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