

William Conway

William P. Conway was born on February 2, 1901 in Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1924 he married Helen and together they moved to Southgate, Kentucky and started a family. Bill and Helen had three daughters, Rosemarie, Patricia and Ruth. Bill took a job as a chemist at the Acme Steel Plant in Newport and would eventually rise to become Chief Chemist. Over the years their daughters each married and gave them numerous grandchildren and great grand children, of which Bill and Helen were very proud.



In 1926, Bill decided to serve his community by joining the Southgate Volunteer Fire Department. Conway quickly became enamored with the volunteer fire service and began rising through the ranks. He served as department secretary, as well as various fire officer positions including Assistant Chief under then Chief Cliff Specht. In 1935, Chief Specht retired and Bill Conway became the seventh chief in the history of the Southgate Volunteer Fire Department. He would remain chief for the next 29 years. Chief Conway faced a great deal of adversity during his time as Chief. The Southgate Volunteer Fire Department operated on a budget funded almost entirely on fundraisers and donations. Conway managed to keep his department operational during the great depression and World War II, when money was tight for everyone. Still the fire department grew and Conway always found the money to purchase needed equipment, including a brand new pumper in 1949. Chief Conway had a personality that attracted volunteers. He realized that a volunteer fire department needed to be a social gathering place with humor and fun to keep volunteers interested in coming around. I am told that Chief Conway was quite the jokester and some of the old films and pictures that I have seen bear that out. During his tenure as Chief, the ranks of the Southgate Fire Department grew immensely. In 1949 the membership of the department had risen to a whopping 170 members, of which 60 were active firefighters.

Chief Conway practiced and preached safety on the fire-ground long before most chiefs gave it any consideration. He had a simple message of safety that he preached to his firefighters. Conway said and I quote "You didn't start the fire, so don't get yourself killed trying to put it out." When I joined the Southgate Fire Department in 1972, that same message was passed along to me by then chief Ray Muench. Today we have volumes of books and national standards and codes trying to convey the same

message that Chief Bill Conway said in 15 simple words. "You didn't start the fire, so don't get yourself killed trying to put it out."

In 1934, Chief Cliff Specht and then Assistant Chief Conway were instrumental in the organization of the Northern Kentucky Firefighters Association. The first meeting of the association was held in Southgate. Conway served two terms as president of the N.K.F.A. He was a firm believer in promoting co-operation among neighboring departments. This led Conway to become active in the Kentucky Firefighters Association. He served on various committees, including the Education Committee of which he was a prominent member for several years. During Conway's era the annual convention of the KFA also served as an educational opportunity with classes and lectures on the newest advances in firefighting. Chief Conway served as an instructor as well as a guest speaker at many conferences during his career. In 1947 William P. Conway was elected as the nineteenth president of the Kentucky Firefighters Association. Chief Conway continued to serve the KFA for many years after his term as president.

Perhaps the greatest tribute to Bill Conway is the legacy that he left in the Southgate Volunteer Fire Department. This small department in a town of fewer than 3500 citizens has established itself as one of the best known and most respected fire departments in the commonwealth of Kentucky. Chief Conway laid the groundwork and established the tradition that was followed by Chief Ray Muench as KFA president in 1975 and Chief Sie Jewell as KFA president in 1985. Both Chief Muench and Chief Jewell have been previously inducted into the Hall of Fame for their many contributions to the KFA. John Daley the president of the KFA in 2008, also got his start as a member of the Southgate Fire Department. Bill Conway laid the groundwork for all of these great leaders to follow and started a tradition of excellence in the Southgate Fire Department that I and those who follow me as Chief must work hard every day to carry on.

It is only fitting that the man who put the Southgate Volunteer Fire Department on the map of the Kentucky Firefighters Association is inducted posthumously into the KFA Hall of Fame. It is even more fitting and appropriate that the man to present the award to the family of Chief William P. Conway is the man who followed so successfully in his footsteps, Retired Chief and KFA Hall of Famer Raymond A. Muench. Accepting on behalf of Chief Conway are his three daughters