

Brother or Sister,

We're glad to hear you are interested in starting an affiliate chapter. Our experience with F.O.O.L.S. International and the commitment made to the fraternity has been nothing short of fantastic for firefighters in our area. The Executive Board of the F.O.O.L.S. International are great brothers and sisters and are totally committed to the mission of the F.O.O.L.S. Do not be concerned about asking them for direction in starting your chapter, they have seen many come and go and will give you solid advice to help you get your chapter established and grow in a way that will foster brotherhood in your region.

Starting a new chapter can seem so simple when everyone is excited about it and looking to find a way to be involved. But carrying on long term takes real commitment and you'll quickly find that the numbers of volunteers to commit time rapidly diminish as you go along. So listed here are some ideas that our chapter found to work well or were advised to do by other chapters as we started and moved forward over the first year.

- **Take your time.** Be excited, but take your time.
- **Select your chapter E-board first. Be picky, everyone may be your friend but not every friend is a F.O.O.L.** Our area is made up of two larger metro areas that are separated by the yellow line in the road. I approached a Brother in the other city from mine and asked him to research the F.O.O.L.S. let me know what he thought and get back to me if he would be willing to help form a chapter. He liked what he saw so it started. We decided to select 5 others from each of our departments to be our Founders and chapter E-Board. This took a lot of thought and to be honest none of who we selected said no because they all have a F.O.O.L.S. heart. We founded in 2010. The most devoted members are those who come of their own accord, because they cannot help being a part of something that is written on their hearts.
- **Prioritize.** After you have your Founders and E-Board selected, come to a consensus on what you hope to accomplish with your chapter. Our chapter was originally formed because we all recognized that valuable traditions in our service were being lost or forgotten, so a big priority for us was preservation of tradition. Duty to our communities and to fellow firefighters was also prioritized. That duty included training, not only for us, but for the citizens we serve. Our community duty also included charity and service. Pride in ourselves through our own fitness, our actions on and off the job and the condition of our equipment in a constant state of readiness. Tradition, Duty and Pride were then incorporated into our logo. It was a full year from 2010-2011 that our founders and E-board worked through what we felt were priorities and what was required through by-laws and amending by-laws specific to our chapter. In 2011 we accepted our first applications for membership.
- **Quality before Quantity.** Pick your members selectively. Not as a group that thinks it's better than others, but as a group that is willing to commit to what the F.O.O.L.S. stand for. You want to avoid being perceived as an elitist group, but your members that are known to strive to be exceptional at their craft. You will find that many people wanting to socialize and experience the "fellowship", but are lack the commitment to the standards that the F.O.O.L.S. International and your chapter believe in. Though your membership may be devoted, you will not get everyone to be there 100% of the time, that is simply not realistic. Family always comes first, (you should promote that) ...meaning your family at home. Members who want to be there even when they can't be are great members. Members who believe in training, the fire service, their

community and it's well being make great members. Think about brothers and sisters who are excited and honored to be a part of what we do. Look for people who live the F.O.O.L.S. values on duty and off duty, even though they are not yet members.

- **Set obtainable bench marks.** Go slow, set obtainable benchmarks and goals, then try to improve on those goals each year.
- **Try to get to the annual convention.** The wealth of knowledge and the Brotherhood is well worth your time and expense. You will come away from convention with a sense of pride that is unexplainable. While you are there you will swell with pride realizing what you are a part of and what you have started in your area and you will feel connected to the greater fire service through like-minded men and women like yourselves.

A little bit about our own experience:

Cedar Valley F.O.O.L.S. officially formed in 2010, but I must tell you preparation to form was started a full year before applying for membership. We are now officially the Cedar Valley F.O.O.L.S. and are located in Northeast Iowa. We have currently have 41 members on our roster. We are blended between two career departments and 12 volunteer departments and both male and female members, including three retired members. Years of service range from 35 years to brand new. Our retired members left the job with 35, 33 and 29 years of service. Our dues are \$60.00 a year and that includes the dues to the International, to the local chapter, a benevolence fund and our chapters F.O.O.L. of the Year Award. Not all members are equally active, and you would be wise not expect that. We hold one fund raiser a year on or around April F.O.O.L.S. Day. Those proceeds are used to stay a float, training and support of our adopted charity, the Iowa Children's Burn Camp.

Our chapter has been meeting consistently on the third Thursday of each month. Our average attendance is about 50%. Of that average probably 35% are the same guys. Between family obligations, 24 hour shifts, other jobs and sickness, it is very difficult for the members to make every meeting. We do keep attendance. We also chosen to allow honored members to declare an associate membership. This membership is unique to our chapter, costs the same but what they are telling us up front is they want to support us but don't count on them to make meetings. These memberships are usually reserved for quality people, who are highly respected, but just do not have another hour to give. We have a couple of these memberships. We have devised a calender for meetings. Rather than all business all the time, every other month is a training month. This idea is not original, we picked it up at convention. The concept is to keep members interested in attending not only for the good of the chapter and it's business but to tap the desire to train and grow. Our members conduct the training. The training is hands on some months and classroom via power point presentations on other months. Some classes will be submitted for C.E.U.'s that are required for EMS certifications in this state. So far we have offered class time with:

- Chemical Based Suicides
- Highway High-tension cable barriers
- History of the Fire Service
- Hands on training we have conducted have included:
 - Train the Trainer in Forcible Entry
 - Silo and Grain Bin Rescue

– Ice and Cold Water Rescue

Something else for summer months include a Family BBQ. It was decided that we often forget the sacrifices our families make and that we should get them all together for a big thank you. Families should meet and kids should play so they can feel and be a part of the F.O.O.L.S. family. Our chapter buys the meat and members families bringing the side dishes. A beer or two might be enjoyed. Yes, we do consider this training; learning to fellowship..

The Cedar Valley F.O.O.L.S. hope this will help you in some way. I can tell you from a personal stand point that our chapter and it's members have been privileged to meet brothers and sisters from coast to coast, an experience that has enhanced our personal and professional lives. When you become a F.O.O.L. you are a member of an organization that is second to none. You will experience this on a local level with your membership, but when you walk into convention and experience it on a global level you will be amazed. The effort you have put forth to be a part of The F.O.O.L.S. Fraternity will pay many dividends, you will have become part of a truly fraternal fellowship.

Good Luck with your efforts! If I or my chapter can further assist you please do not hesitate to e-mail us or call me directly. We also have a Facebook page. Stop and say hi sometime. Stay Safe.

In Brotherhood,

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