

Jay W. Stevens

Jay W. Stevens, born in 1885, began his career in the fire service in 1900 when he became a volunteer firefighter in Weston, Nebraska. In 1903, at age 17, he moved to Portland, Oregon and joined the Portland Paid Fire Department on June 1, 1904. He was quickly promoted to Lieutenant in 1905 then Captain in 1906. A tireless worker for the public good, Stevens continued his ascent in the fire department when he was promoted to Battalion Chief in 1908.

In 1914, Portland, then a city of 300,000 citizens, elected to create a Fire Prevention Division of the fire department. The man chosen to lead it was Assistant Chief Jay Stevens. His assignment began on March 18th of that year. During his next three years, city fire losses dropped from \$1.7 million in 1914 to \$234,000 in 1917.

Stevens would leave Portland in 1917, not to rest on his successes, but to further the word of fire prevention. Before he left Oregon, he spent two months helping organize the newly formed State Fire Marshal's Office. From 1917 to 1921, he would head the "Fire Prevention Bureau of the Pacific," an organization on the west coast dedicated to the prevention of arson. This was taken over by the "National Board of Fire Underwriters" in 1921 and Stevens continued his leadership as the Assistant General Manager in the San Francisco office. In 1924 he began serving as the unpaid Fire Marshal of California, where he would continue his service under four consecutive Governors. He also served as the director of the National Fire Protection Association from 1922-1924.

As Stevens traveled the country to further fire prevention agendas, he would be named honorary Fire Marshal in 250 cities across the country. In one of his speeches to an assembly of 118 Oregon fire



chiefs, he was quoted as saying "Fire inspections are fire prevention; fire prevention is fire protection." His "Portland Plan" for fire prevention would eventually become the fire prevention plan for the National Board of Fire Underwriters."

Stevens was known to still be promoting fire prevention in 1956 when he headed up the International Association of Fire Chief's campaign to promote home inspections. Twenty-two states would

come on board for the campaign. It all came full circle when Portland Fire would win an IAFC award for home inspections in the late 1950s.

In an article in the IAFC magazine of February 1956, the following article showcases the praise Jay would receive from then Vice-President Richard Nixon:

Vice-President Praises Home Inspection Program

*Excerpt from the International Association of Fire Chiefs Newsletter
February 1956*

The Home Inspection Program of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) - one of the most worthwhile of all fire prevention activities - has been highly praised by Vice-President Richard Nixon.

In a speech, made a few months ago at the convention of the IAFC at Omaha, the Vice President of the United States congratulated Jay W. Stevens, IAFC Executive Secretary and Assistant Manager of the National Board of Fire Underwriters, San Francisco Office. He said:

"Four years ago (1952), the International Association of Fire Chiefs inaugurated a program of fire prevention, the purpose of which was the saving of the lives of 4,000 children that were being burned to death in home fires throughout America each year.

The plan called for the eventual inspection of every home by uniformed firemen; these firemen request the privilege of visiting the home and pointing out those hazards which cause fires, destroy the homes, and take human life. The success of this plan has been proven in many of the large cities of our country and thousands of smaller ones."

Life Story

Fire Prevention is the story of Mr. Steven's life. He has the distinction of having participated in every Fire Prevention Week since its inauguration in 1914 as a "day," and has been instrumental in its growth nationwide as a "week."

He organized what is believed to be the first home inspection program ever conducted by a fire department in 1914 while with the Portland, Oregon Fire Department, and following its outstanding success in that city has continually been striving to bring the program to every community in America.

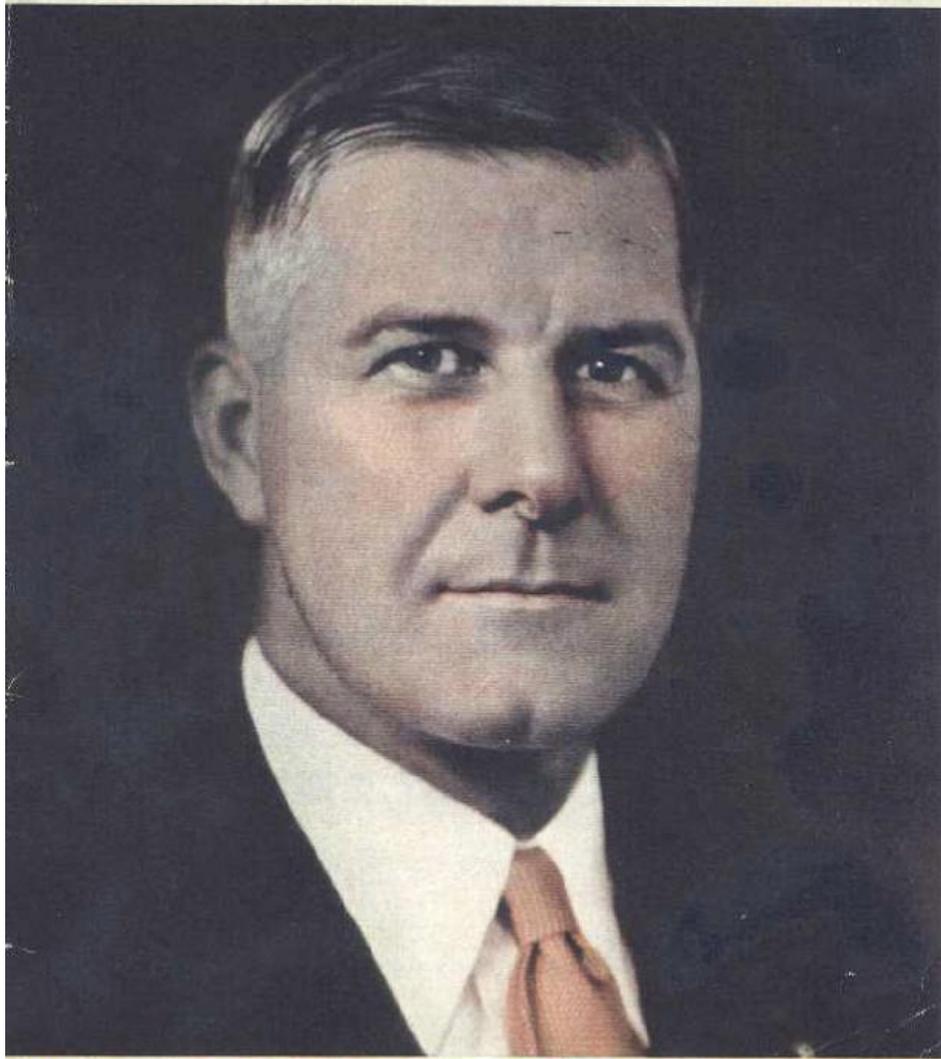
With the backing of the IAFC, which has served as the Executive Secretary since 1926, Mr. Stevens has sold his idea to our nation - sold it to the point that this year between five and ten million more inspections will be made. Within the next three years, Mr. Stevens is confident that 60 million homes in the United States and Canada will have been visited by local firemen.

Chief Stevens died on March 26, 1980 in Walnut Creek, California at age 95. He was affectionately known throughout his career as the "Father of Fire Prevention." His legacy also carries on in his family. His great grandson would become a firefighter in Gig Harbor, Washington.

Chief Steven's legacy also lives on in the collective consciousness of the American Fire Service. In 2016, he was inducted into the Hall of Leaders, Legends, and Legacies with the National Fire Heritage Center. This is a unique honor bestowed on only the most dedicated professionals.

Fire Fighting

DEDICATED TO THE FIRE FIGHTING FORCES OF THE NATION



JULY

JAY W. STEVENS

EX-LAUREATE SECRETARY
INTERNATIONAL ASSN. OF FIRE CHIEFS

1936

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