

Not unlike most people, nearly every horizontal space in my house gathers unopened mail. And not just the daily solicitations from the myriad of loan companies that have popped up, but some stuff that I really should have taken a look at when it graced my mailbox. Well, at the behest of my better half, I dug into those numerous piles to try and sort the wheat from the chaff. As I carried out this chore I came upon some pictures that were taken some years ago. Family shots of the kids when they were little and even pictures showing that I have, yikes!, aged more than I would like to admit. Thumbing through these pictures was an impromptu stroll down memory lane. I could remember when this picture or that picture was taken. Whether it was days at the lake or family functions, I could almost feel myself transported back in time to the place of these photos for a melancholy jaunt into the past. And then I came upon a picture that really grabbed my attention. This one did more than take me back-it made me remember why I love being a Portland firefighter. And what was this picture? Well, it showed nine guys in full turnout gear. Their smiling faces belied the fact that it was the middle of the night. Soot covered and grinning, these nine guys stood as one. It was after a knockdown of a room and contents fire somewhere in the west-end. There they stood, the nine of them in a charred room. One of them, the Captain, projected self-confidence and humility at the same time. He was clearly the leader of this band of brothers but didn't need to prove it to anyone. The crews flanked the three officers; these nine had subconsciously sorted themselves out by company but yet seemed to stand as one. The picture shows nine guys who are proud of the job that they had just performed. Middle of the night, fire showing in a couple of windows, they did what Portland firefighters have been doing for nearly two centuries. The call for help came in, they got on their rig, showed up where the trouble was and took care of business. But the photo showed something even more significant. These nine guys, not unlike any other crews that have worked together here in Portland or any other fire department across this country, had a bond that was established by the fact that they could *utterly* count on each other. And there, standing in the middle of this group aping a goofy grin was my ugly mug. Although this picture showed a moment in time, that feeling of why it is special to be part of a unique group overwhelmed me. With all that is going on with our union, with all the emotions and confusion that seems to grip many of us, I again remembered the very basic principal that makes what we do special. Even though the nine in the photo have moved on or work with different guys since that room fire, I would bet that, if they are still on the job, they work with people that they can count on just like that night on Cherry St.

I am glad that I had to sort my mail. It led me to that picture. It reminds me that, even though we come from many different walks of life, in the end it is being part of this group and being able to count on each other *utterly* is what matters most. After all, if we can't count on each other, whom can we count on? I wish for every member of Local 740 to be part of a picture like the one I've had the honor of being in.

Please join us at the hospitality room on Sunday evening, August 6<sup>th</sup> as we welcome firefighters from across New England to the Regency on Milk St. Kick off is 5:30p.m.