



2022 Fire Chiefs Leadership Seminar

Speakers' Biographies

Elisa Arcidiacono

Elisa Arcidiacono has covered public safety and cannabis policy for the League of California Cities for the last almost two years. She came to Cal Cities with nearly a decade of policy work with state and local first responders. Elisa formerly served as Assemblyman Tom Lackey's in-district Campaign Manager and Legislative Director in Sacramento, engaging on state policies around overall public safety. Prior to joining Cal Cities, Elisa spent the last three years serving as Justice Deputy to Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger, directly overseeing more than a dozen public safety departments. In that capacity, Elisa engaged heavily on emergency preparedness, response and recovery for the 2019 Tick Fire and 2020 Lake and Bobcat Fires in California's High Desert.

Jennifer Coyle

As the founder and President of North Star, Jennifer Coyle supports individuals and teams as a coach, consultant and strategic thinking partner. Jennifer works with individuals and teams, developing talent, expanding capacity, and helping departmental leadership align around goals that fuel exceptional results. Jennifer has a bachelor's degree from Georgetown University, and coaching degrees from Harvard University and the University of Miami. She is an executive coach mentor, and is dedicated to elevating the caliber of the global professional coaching industry towards excellence.

Kerri Donis

Chief Donis is the first woman to hold the position as Fire Chief in the Fresno Fire Department's (FFD) 145-year history. She graduated from Fresno State and competed at the Women's Softball College World Series where the Lady Bulldogs finished as the national runner-up both years she played. In 1996, she joined the FFD as a firefighter, promoted up through the ranks, and in 2004, she was promoted to Deputy Chief; in 2013, she was stepped in as the Interim Fire Chief; and in January 2014, she was appointed as the permanent Fire Chief. She also serves at the Fire Chief for the Fig Garden Fire Protection District who contracts service with the City of Fresno. As a 26-year veteran of the fire service, Kerri's

experience provides a great opportunity to influence the culture of the FFD, improve emergency service delivery for the community, City and Department. In 2004, the Fresno Fire Chief's Foundation (FFCF) was formed by FFD members and a group of community leaders, committed to addressing the unmet needs in fire & life safety education, furthering the mission of and vision of the Department within the City of Fresno. Chief Donis has a bachelor's degree from Fresno State, a master's degree from National University in Organizational Leadership and is a certified Executive Fire Officer from the Department of Homeland Security and Chief Fire Officer from the State of California. She is married to her wife Laurie (a retired Fire Chief as well) and they have two children, Torie (22) and Tristan (12).

Kevin Greene

Kevin joined the California Professional Firefighters with over 20 years of experience in public policy and nonprofit government affairs. His experience spans working in the California State Legislature, the Downtown Sacramento Partnership, serving as the Director of Government Affairs for the Sacramento Metro Chamber before joining the Office of Councilmember Angelique Ashby as her Chief of Staff, where he was responsible for developing policy and advocacy strategies. This experience makes him well-versed in municipal political processes and procedures, community relations practices, budgeting, public finance, problem-solving, and project management. Kevin is responsible for EMS policy, firefighter health, and safety and is an integral partner on the California Fire Service Behavioral Health Task Force, a joint labor-management initiative committed to making emotional wellness and post-traumatic stress injuries a health and safety priority in the fire service. Kevin lives in West Sacramento with his fiancé Angela, with Draper (cat) and Wyatt (pup). He enjoys cycling, reading, and cooking in his spare time.

Kurt Henke

Kurt P. Henke Principal and Managing Partner AP Triton, LLC With over four decades of experience in fire protection, Kurt Henke leads a dynamic group of consultants with AP Triton. Kurt saw a desperate need in the industry to provide long-term, creative, and sustainable solutions to an industry that required clarity. His organization addresses a broad range of challenges related to fire safety, public safety, and private sector safety, with excellence as the goal for every client. The company provides specialized consulting in emergency medical services, operations planning and preparedness, fire and life safety, wildfire protection planning, administrative services, and legislative advocacy. Notable clients include the San Francisco 49ers, the Carolina Panthers, and Alco Iron and Metals. Kurt's professional expertise includes working in every aspect of fire protection and prevention from the ground up. He is considered a "maverick," moving through the ranks from entry-level to the role of Fire Chief with the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District, the seventh-largest fire agency in the State of California. He has also held roles as a public sector union representative covering fire protection professionals, ultimately achieving the role of union president responsible for six different cities and districts spanning 16 years. Kurt has also served as the chairman of the California Metropolitan Fire Chiefs and has been honored as California Fire Chief of the Year.

Curtis Jacobson

Curtis Jacobson was appointed as the 8th Fire Chief with the City of Fremont in December of 2017. Prior to his selection, Chief Jacobson served the City of San Jose as a Firefighter, Fire Engineer, Fire Prevention Inspector, Captain, Battalion Chief, Division Chief, Deputy Chief, and culminated his last 3 years of his 25-year career with the San Jose Fire Department as the Fire Chief. He worked in every Bureau and Division including Operations, Training, Prevention, Support Services, and Administration. He was also an active member of the San Jose Firefighters/International Association of Firefighters Local 230 and served as President of the Santa Clara County Black Firefighters, a chapter of the International Association of Black Professional Firefighters. Chief Jacobson holds an Associates Degree in Fire Science from Mission College, a Bachelor of Science Degree in Political Science, and a Master's in Public Administration, both from San Jose State University. In addition to his formal education, Chief Jacobson completed numerous certifications through the California Fire Service Training and Education System, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the National Fire Academy. He is also Fellow of the Senior Executives in State and Local Government program at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Chief Jacobson was raised in the South and East Bay Area by a family deeply committed to public service in the fields of public safety, law, and social services. He remains active in the community through his membership on the San Jose Jazz Board of Directors and his fraternity, Phi Beta Sigma. His values are based in education, diversity, community engagement, and servant leadership. His favorite quote is from the Humanitarian and Greatest Boxer of All Time, Muhammad Ali who stated, "Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on Earth."

Pat Lynch

Dr. Pat Lynch has worked as a management consultant and subject matter expert for fire-rescue agencies since 2007. She brings a unique perspective to the public safety arena by virtue of her varied career in the public and private sectors and by her volunteer work with the Red Cross. She has presented at numerous fire-rescue conferences in the U.S. and Canada, written articles and delivered webinars for the International Association of Fire Chiefs, and provided assistance and guidance to public safety agencies and leaders throughout the U.S. DEI and succession management are among her many areas of expertise.

Marianna Marysheva

Marianna Marysheva is a seasoned executive with over two decades of organizational leadership experience. Marianna earned her Master in Public Policy degree from UC Berkeley, and has served various cities in California, including San Francisco, Oakland, Riverside, Irvine and now Livermore. Marianna's significant local government experience has shaped her into an innovative and creative leader with a track record of implementing programs to promote transparency and open government, building partnerships and promoting collaboration, and getting things done in organizations with multiple cross-pressures and competing priorities. Marianna has a track record of recharging and refocusing governmental functions, and making governmental entities more transparent, flexible, customer and business friendly, and

accountable. Marianna has been recognized for her commitment to public service, cross-agency leadership, public engagement, staff development, compassion and commitment to excellence. Marianna was named the 2012 Person of the Year in Mammoth Lakes and has been featured in the Wall Street Journal.

Rene Mendez

René has over 25 years of State and local government experience. Right after graduate school, he worked at the California Legislative Analyst Office, and then he spent five years with Solano County Administrator's Office followed by 8 years as the County Administrator for the County of Inyo. Before coming to Watsonville in July of 2022, he was the City Manager in Gonzales for 17 years. He holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Economics from the California State University, Stanislaus, and a Master of Arts Degree in Public Policy from Duke University. He was born to Miguel and Aurora Mendez in 1965 and grew up and worked on a farm in Stanislaus County until the age of 21 when he went away to Graduate School. He is the oldest of five brothers and considers his parents the two greatest influences in his life. He is most proud of the fact that all his brothers hold master's degrees from Universities throughout the United States (Sacramento State University, The Ohio State University, George Washington University and University of Michigan) and believes that with hard work, a strong family unit, service, and believing in oneself anything is possible. He is the proud father of two boys Alexandro (21) and Gabriel (18) Mendez and considers himself very lucky to have married Martha Amaya Mendez, who holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Spanish from California State University, Monterey Bay and has been Vice-Chair of the Inyo County Children and Families Commission (First 5) and Director of a children's ballet folklorico dance group in Inyo County and in Gonzales. Working with the Gonzales City Council, he was able to steer the City of Gonzales through the toughest recession in decades and the COVID-19 Pandemic where they achieved a 100% vaccinated community. He has implemented many long term local and regional initiatives in Economic Development, Youth Engagement, Early Childhood Development, Sustainability (Gonzales Grows Green – G3), Enhanced Community Engagement and Transparency, Broadband Access, Health in All Policies, Energy Reliability and Public Safety to name a few. As he starts in Watsonville, he is excited and looking forward to working with the City Council, Staff, and Community. He was a founding Board member for Monterey Bay Economic Partnership and Monterey Bay Community Power (now 3CE), the South Salinas Valley Broadband JPA, and currently sits on the United Way Board of Monterey County and Hartnell Foundation.

Russell Noack

Russell has more than 40 years' experience in government affairs, during which he has developed an unsurpassed expertise in complex insurance issues. After obtaining his law degree and his admission to the Bar, Russell served as legal counsel and government relations manager for Industrial Indemnity Company, a major California insurance company. Russell's unique ability to bring people together on controversial issues and achieve his clients' objectives is exceptional. His knowledge of such issues has not gone unnoticed. California Lawyer magazine named him one of the ten most powerful lawyer-lobbyists in California.

Russell has represented the Association of California Insurance Companies and the American Insurance Association. During this period, he was an instrumental leader in shaping reforms of the state's Workers Compensation System. Throughout his professional career, Russell has worked on a broad spectrum of issues while representing fire chiefs and districts, natural resource entities, financial institutions, airlines and health care professional organizations. Russell received a Bachelor's degree in history from the University of California, Davis and his Juris Doctorate from the University of San Francisco School of Law.

Dr. Stephen Odom, PhD

Dr. Stephen Odom is a notable healthcare and addiction treatment professional with more than 30 years of expertise in the field. He is the CEO of The Counseling Team International, and Founder and Chief Clinical Officer of First Responder Wellness and Shift Wellness. Dr. Odom's focus on Responders was born of his family's career backgrounds with the military, healthcare, law enforcement, fire, and education, and was honed as he created and led specialty programs for physicians, nurses, first responders and their families. Stephen has a comprehensive educational background in healthcare, holding a bachelor's degree in Organizational Behavior, master's degrees in Experimental and Clinical Psychology, a doctoral candidacy in Clinical Psychology, and a Doctorate (Ph.D.) with a focus in Healthcare Administration. He is also a licensed marriage and family therapist in the state of California. Dr. Odom has been coined as a wellness and behavioral health expert with peer-reviewed articles published on mental health, substance abuse and technology; was presented the National Behavioral Health Champion award in 2018; has appeared on The Today Show; the 2016 documentary film California High, and multiple print, radio, and podcast media channels.

Gaudenz Panholzer

Gaudenz Panholzer started his fire service career in 1977 as a volunteer firefighter with the Carmel Highlands Fire District (CHFD). After earning a bachelor's degree in Computer Science from the University of California, Berkeley, Mr. Panholzer became a full-time firefighter for CHFD. Gaudenz subsequently worked for just under two years with the San Ramon Valley Fire District before accepting employment with the City of San Jose Fire Department where he served for nearly 23 years. Chief Panholzer left San Jose at the rank of Deputy Chief in charge of the Bureau of Field Operations, and had served as a Firefighter/Paramedic, Captain, and Battalion Chief as well. As a Captain, he spent several years as a paramedic field supervisor and was a Training Officer for two years. Chief Panholzer left the San Jose Fire Department in August of 2013 to become the Fire Chief for the City of Monterey where he currently serves. Chief Panholzer has spent numerous years teaching Fire Service topics at the Community College level and served as the Coordinator for the South Bay Regional Public Safety Training Consortium's Fire Academy program. Gaudenz has represented the California Fire Chiefs Association on the California State Fire Training State Training and Education Advisory Committee since 2015. Chief Panholzer served as a Safety Officer on the California Task Force 3 FEMA USAR Team for nearly 10 years.

Christina Ro-Connolly

Christina (Tina) Ro-Connolly is a Partner at Oppenheimer Investigations Group LLP. Her practice is exclusively on neutral work: investigations and trainings. She previously worked as an attorney advocating for employers. But she grew weary of the constant battles and noticed, when reviewing these matters, that there were often missed opportunities early on for mediation and communication. She recognized the value of letting all parties be heard earlier in the process, addressing matters and seeking resolution before issues escalated. And, after overseeing many workplace investigations, she was intrigued by the role of a neutral investigator. That interest, coupled with a stroke of perfect timing, brought her to OIG. Tina has more than a decade of labor and employment law experience. Her investigations include allegations of discrimination and harassment, allegations of abusive conduct, sexual misconduct, retaliation and workplace misconduct. She has handled investigations against high-level executives and elected officials. She has worked in both the public and private sectors, including Title IX investigations and investigations under the Peace Officers Procedural Bill of Rights and Firefighters Procedural Bill of Rights. Tina also leads sexual harassment prevention trainings and workplace investigation trainings. Tina spent 11 years at the Contra Costa County Counsel's Office, advising departments on labor and employment matters. This included representing departments in civil service hearings, arbitrations and before the Public Employment Relations Board. Tina is a member of the Executive Committee of the Labor and Employment Section of the California Lawyers Association, a graduate of the AWI's Training Institute for workplace investigators and a frequent trainer and presenter on employment law matters.

Nat Rojanasathira

In the local government for nearly 20 years, Nat Rojanasathira has served the City of Monterey as its Assistant City Manager since 2019. As the second-in-command for the City of Monterey, he works closely with several departments including fire, emergency management, human resources, finance, information technology, parks and recreation, and library and museums. Nat served as a Fire Commissioner for the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District from 2013 to 2019, including two years as chairperson. He represented an area that included the communities of Martinez, Pittsburg, Bay Point, Pacheco, Alhambra Valley, and parts of Antioch. He has previously served on the League of California Cities' Public Safety Policy Committee and is currently on the City Manager's Department and Community Services Policy Committee. Nat is a graduate of Cal State University, Monterey Bay, with a Master of Public Administration degree from the University of San Francisco. He is an alumnus of the Local Governance Summer Institute at Stanford University and is currently enrolled in the Center for Homeland Defense and Security (CHDS) Executive Leaders Program at the Naval Postgraduate School. He is a member of the International City/County Management Association, is past president of the Municipal Management Association of Northern California, and serves on the Board of Directors for the Institute of Local Government (ILG). Nat and his wife live in Monterey, California.

Zaneta Seidel

Zaneta Seidel is an attorney investigator and partner at Oppenheimer Investigations Group LLP. Zaneta has conducted more than 100 investigations involving allegations of discrimination based on race, gender, age, sexual orientation and religion as well as allegations of sexual assault, sexual harassment, retaliation, bullying and other misconduct. More than 40 of her investigations have included allegations reported against high-level executives and elected officials. Zaneta has also conducted climate assessments and served as an ombudsman to help organizations understand and address workplace concerns of their employees. Zaneta also speaks to other investigators about the impact of race in workplace investigations, to promote cultural competency in our profession. Finally, she conducts Conflict Resolution and Effective Communication training for workgroups. Zaneta earned her undergraduate degree from UCLA and her law degree from Columbia University School of Law. Before becoming an attorney investigator, Zaneta practiced business litigation for eight years, first with Baker & McKenzie's New York Office and then with Bartko Zankel Bunzel & Miller after she returned home to the Bay Area.

Ryan Sharma

Dr. Sharma is an associate professor and the director of clinical training at California Lutheran University. In addition to teaching doctoral students in clinical psychology, he holds a private practice specializing in the behavioral treatments for anxiety disorders, particularly exposure treatments and acceptance and commitment therapy for OCD, panic disorder, and PTSD. He is board certified by the American Board of Behavioral and Cognitive Psychology and was elected as the treasurer and secretary to the board. Dr. Sharma is the contract psychologist for the Oxnard Fire Department and has made a commitment to improving psychological services for firefighters by training students and the community in firefighter culture.

Dan Stefano

Dan is the Fire Chief for the City of Costa Mesa Fire & Rescue. Dan is also the Department Director for the Fire Chiefs Department at the League of California Cities, and as such has a seat on the Cal Cities Board of Directors. In addition he is also a Past President for both the League of California Cities and the California Fire Chiefs Association.

Kristin Thompson

Kristin is the EMS Division Chief with Newport Beach Fire Department and has been in the role since 2015. Previously, she was with Anaheim Fire from 2007-2015 as the EMS Manager. Kristin also is a representative for Cal Chiefs in a number of areas: for the EMS Commission, as the Cal Chiefs EMS Section Secretary, and on the Behavioral Health Taskforce and SFT Curriculum Cadre for Behavioral Health and Cancer.