

Patrick Walker is the 10<sup>th</sup> District Vice President representing over 550 members in San Diego County. He works daily with management, elected officials, and Local 2881 officers to ensure the needs of our members are met. The San Diego Unit has experienced significant growth in the last eight years, with the addition of 14 Paramedic Engines and a Second Truck Company. Patrick states that their Truck Companies are staffed 4.0, and they are converting the remaining 2.0 Engines to 3.0 Municipal at all Fire Stations. By working with management, this is accomplished at a pace that provides opportunities to our members and avoids displacement.



The members in MVU staff seven Battalions, forty-five Fire Stations, four Camps, one Air Attack Base, and two Heli-tack Bases with four Transport Dozers supported by Pre-Fire, ECC, Resource Management, Law Enforcement, Defensible Space, Fleet Maintenance and Warehouse Staff.

Patrick feels supported in his role as Vice President by an engaged group of officers who are united in one goal, “ensuring we are doing everything we can for our members ranging from representation to benevolent activities.”

Patrick has been a Local 2881 member since 1997 when he was hired as a Firefighter 1 in Amador-El Dorado. He grew up in San Diego but worked throughout the state (AEU, SCU, RRU, MVU). In 2012, while working as a Fire Captain in the San Miguel Cooperative Agreement, he decided to run for Deputy Vice President and successfully obtained the position. From that point on, under the mentorship of then-Vice President Randy Scales, he completed the necessary training while engaged in a political battle within the San Miguel District. Former Local 2881 President Bob Wolf was his Fire Captain in Riverside, at one point, and Bob instilled in him the pride and benefit of union membership. This year, Patrick became the Vice President of the 10<sup>th</sup> District. It is a position in which he says he has “never been so busy, but it is rewarding to help others and ensure our voices are heard.”

Prior to becoming the 10<sup>th</sup> District Vice President, Patrick held the position of Deputy Vice President for three years. While in office, he saw a significant increase in staffing and maintained an excellent working relationship with management. As Deputy VP, Patrick worked alongside our members, in the trenches, during the San Miguel days, as well as most recently during the situation in Julian. Patrick spoke about San Miguel, and how ultimately, they returned to a standalone district, so all members were placed in vacant positions. Today, he is proud to say they maintain an excellent relationship

with L1434 (San Miguel firefighter's union) as unions members and department firefighters.

For years, Patrick admits he didn't necessarily pay attention to the union. He paid his dues, displayed the sticker, and went about his business. Then, like many, an issue came up that he was passionate about. He says he quickly found out that the Union is the voice of the membership; the Union can carry our messages to management and elected officials. He realizes that it is unrealistic to think he can fulfill every need of every member in his district, but together he believes, "we can make effective changes at all levels." Patrick states that he focuses heavily on political action, as elected officials and legislation are where real change can happen. He notes that these changes cannot happen without a union or without PAC. Patrick also relays, "In the 10<sup>th</sup> District – like so many others – we are intermingled with many other IAFF Local jurisdictions. This can be a challenge, but through good relationships and communication, we avoid issues." Patrick believes that the union is the reason we have made the advances seen today, which is why it is so important to be a part of the union. He conveys that, while there is still work to be done, if you look at accomplishments (such as salary and benefits) we have obtained over the last twenty years, it is certainly something to be proud of.

When asked about the accomplishments he is most proud of, Patrick says he is very fulfilled by his involvement with our fallen firefighters and their families. In 2017, his good friend and Local 2881 member Ryan Mitchell took his own life after going off duty. Ryan was a respected Fire Captain, and he had worked in almost every capacity in San Diego, from aviation to our off road program. Up until this point, Patrick only handled Type 3 services for retirees. He tried to handle Ryan's services on his own, but quickly found he needed assistance. Patrick reached out to our members, who immediately stepped in; a team was put together, and the job was done. Unfortunately, a few months later, they were struck with another loss – Cory Iverson. Patrick has planned and coordinated both Type 1 and Type 2 services for Ryan Mitchell, Cory Iverson, Braden Varney, and, most recently, Paul Rotondaro. Further, he assisted with several other fallen firefighter funerals in San Diego and Riverside.

Another one of Patrick's accomplishments is taking on the task of increasing their District's benevolent fund upon becoming Deputy VP. By working with other officers, the District obtained donations from many San Diego based corporations and philanthropic sources. Each year they have a fundraising unit/member party and are working on several other ways to raise money. The fund has been able to assist many of our members and their families during times of need. In addition, the fund has helped bridge the gap for travel costs to behavioral health retreats.

Furthermore, Patrick engaged with other Locals and San Diego County Supervisor Nathan Fletcher to establish the Ryan J. Mitchell behavioral health program in San Diego. He says, "This program will allow access to a variety of behavioral health

services for firefighters and law enforcement. The program, which the county approved for a \$600,000 initial RFP budget, will have many platforms such as via the web and telephone application at no cost to the firefighter or law enforcement officer.”

In the future, Patrick believes our union may be challenged with retaining members. He believes that there is growing negativity, and he is not sure what the answer is to correct it. Looking back to when he first started, Patrick notes that there was so much respect and common decency. Now, he says he sees union officer’s characters assassinated on social media by members who don’t do as much as bat an eye. “Instead of working together, it seems some are bent to oppose, no matter what the issue is.”

Patrick believes this is going to be a continued challenge. While he may not know the answer on how to correct it, he plans to personally combat it in his district through constant communication, whether it is through Facebook, email, or in person. Patrick is proud of the fact that most 10<sup>th</sup> District members are respectful of what the union does, and, when there is an issue, most come to him directly rather than “front [him] off on social media.” “We are firefighters, we are professionals, and we need to act as such,” says Patrick.

Patrick also mentions that the 10<sup>th</sup> District is launching a podcast as a way to communicate with the members. This podcast will cover a variety of topics and range from discussions with Firefighter I’s, the Unit Chief, and the District Vice President. Patrick tells us, “What is important to know about the podcast is that family and friends will be part of it too. Denelle Mitchell, the widow of Fire Captain Ryan J. Mitchell, will be the first to sit down with them and discuss how things were, how they are, and what is next.” He feels it is important for our members to hear this information.

At the end of the day, Patrick sees CAL FIRE Local 2881 continuing to be a leader and a strong voice, not only here in California but nationwide through the IAFF.

Patrick comments that he cannot thank his wife, Tawnia, enough. Being a District VP, a Battalion Chief, and a business owner, his time is limited. His wife handles business at home, and she makes it look easy. She is supportive and patient. This is what he is most proud of...his family.