NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Mark A. Hartwig
Fire Chief / Fire Warden

DATE: **September 16, 2015**
CONTACT: **Tracey Martinez, Public Information Officer**
(909) 387-5950, 800-426-8689, pager #3307

Above and Beyond the Call of Duty

Three years ago San Bernardino County Fire Battalion Chief Steve Lasiter made the decision to donate bone marrow. On Saturday, Sept. 12 he met the man whose life he saved.

Lasiter originally signed up to be a donor after a former Captain's brother was diagnosed with leukemia. Though he wasn't a match in that case, a year and a half later he got a call from City of Hope in Duarte that he may be a match for another patient. There are over 9 million people in the bone marrow donor registry, and Lasiter was one of only two possible matches for Randy Pence. In the end, he was the perfect match.

Pence, a father of three, suffered from myelofibrosis, a form of leukemia that disrupts your body's normal production of blood cells. According to the Mayo Clinic, myelofibrosis is an uncommon type of chronic leukemia - a cancer that affects the blood-forming tissues in the body.

For the first year after the patient receives the donation, contact is not allowed between donor and recipient. After that time, if both parties agreed, they are given each other's contact information. Once allowed, Lasiter reached out to Pence and the two have been emailing each other for the last two years, but they never met in person until this past Saturday at Duke Medical's annual Adult Bone Marrow Transplant Program Reunion in Durham, North Carolina. While Lasiter lives in the Yucca Valley area, Pence lives 3,000 miles away in West Virginia.

Not only has Lasiter been a firefighter for 23 years, but he also served as a Marine for four years after graduating from high school. Helping people is kind of his thing, but this was a different experience all together.

"Being a firefighter, I've helped many people through the course of my career. I've never had the chance to see it all the way to the end and see how much of an impact something very specific I had done would actually impact someone's life," said Lasiter.

One of the original funders for a national registry of volunteers willing to donate bone marrow was the U.S. Navy, as the Marine Corps is a division of the Navy, more than one story came full circle when Lasiter decided to donate.

To learn more about how to donate bone marrow, visit www.bethematch.org. From their mission statement, "Be The Match Foundation was created by Admiral E.R. Zumwalt Jr., in 1991 to secure support for the work of the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP)."

Photos from the Adult Bone Marrow Transplant Program Reunion can be found at www.sbcfire.org; video at http://youtu.be/T7vTG3RMgRk. Photos courtesy of Duke Medical.

#