

Mag

Fund for Heroes' Families Begins

Continued From 1A

we have hit upon a way of effecting substantial improvements in the morale and efficiency of our already good police and fire departments.

"We are taking a leaf from Detroit's excellent experience in this field, where some years ago a group of prominent business men and good citizens determined to strengthen and improve these two vital departments.

"They felt this could best be done by establishing an entirely voluntary fund, where by any policeman or fireman would have the sure knowledge that, if he were killed in the line of duty, his widow would be paid an immediate sum * * and the leading citizens of the community would take her and his family under their prospective guidance and help solve at least their financial problems.

"Our friends in Detroit tell us that this has not only been an act of broad humanitarianism, but that it has paid tremendous dividends to the community in improving the entire spirit of service of those two vital departments."

Detroit's Experience

In Detroit, since the Hundred Club was formed in 1952, it has given more than \$80,000 to 40 families of policemen and firemen who lost their lives while guarding the public safety. Still in the treasury is a balance of more than \$225,000 in cash and government bonds, on hand for future emergencies.

St. Louis is not so large a metropolis as Detroit, and the toll here is correspondingly lower. But seldom a year passes in which no lives are lost among the members of the city's police and fire departments.

Not all the deaths are incurred directly in fighting fire and crime. St. Louisans were shocked on the morning of Sept. 18, 1955, when four firemen were killed in a pre-dawn collision of a fire engine and a mail truck at Kingshighway and Manchester avenues—the worst vehicular accident in the fire department's history.

Of the four widows left by the 1955 crash, two were eligible for payments of only \$35 a month under the pension plan then in effect. As a result of subsequent changes, all four are now receiving half their husband's salaries, which were far from large.

Other Deaths



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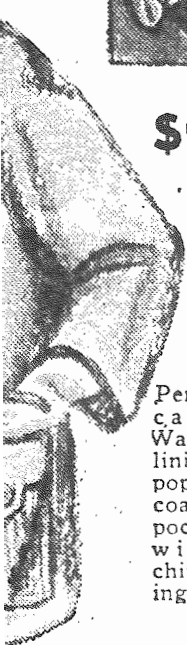
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ceiving half their husband's salaries, which were far from large.

Other Deaths

Since then, two other city firemen have died while performing their duty. One was suffocated fighting a blaze that followed an explosion in a night club on the DeBaliviere avenue "strip." Another was electrocuted when hit by a falling wire at the scene of a downtown four-alarm.

In the last decade, several St. Louis policemen have been killed in line of duty.

A detective was shot to death when he interrupted a pawnshop holdup. An officer directing traffic during the rush hour was fatally injured by an automobile. A patrolman was killed in a collision while answering an emergency call in a scout car.

Altogether, 142 firemen have died in action since the department was organized on Apr. 4, 1857. And police department records show a total of 128 officers killed in line of duty in the last 77 years.

Conceived in a spirit of the most admirable practical idealism, the "Backstoppers" by-laws include a foresighted provision against misuse of membership by attempts to exert "undue influence" to obtain "preferential treatment." The penalty is expulsion from membership.

"In plain language," explained one of the fund's organizers, "it means that if you're stopped for a traffic violation, for example, you don't try to evade a ticket by identifying yourself as a Backstopper.

"If you do, and if you're caught at it—brother, you're out of the ball park!"

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