



## John D. Mulligan

October 8, 1943 - January 9, 2026

John Mulligan lived a life defined by leadership, public service, and a pioneering spirit. From the start of his fire career in California, to his long-standing legacy at Poudre Fire Authority, his contributions changed the way first responders operate across the country.

John was born on October 8, 1943, in Oakland, California, to Phil and Grace Mulligan. A highlight of his childhood, starting at age 10, was riding the Greyhound bus alone from Los Angeles to Atlanta to spend summers with his aunt and uncle. This 2 ½-day journey—navigated with just a sack lunch, \$20, and bus changes in Dallas and Memphis—fostered an early independence and an ability to navigate complex situations that defined his life and career.

He spent his formative years between Claremont, California, and Atlanta, Georgia, where he graduated from Dykes high school in 1962. A gifted athlete, John participated in football, golf, tennis, and band. He earned a tennis scholarship to Mt. San Antonio College before moving on to California State University at Fullerton. While at CSUF, he balanced a diverse range of interests, serving as a local radio weatherman and setting a long jump record that stood for a decade. He later graduated with a BA in history, eventually adding an AA in Fire Science from Allan Hancock College and a Master's in Public Administration from CSUF.

His distinguished 44-year career in the fire service began in 1967 at the West Covina Fire Department, followed by a move to Lompoc Fire Department. Shortly after, in June 1972, he married Kathryn (Kit) Stone. After taking a Fire Captain's position with the Cucamonga Fire Department, John's leadership trajectory accelerated quickly and was promoted to Battalion Chief within two years. He was instrumental in the merger that formed the California Foothill Fire Department. In 1976, at the age of 32, he returned to Lompoc as Fire Chief, making him one of the youngest people in California to hold that title. During this period, he became a vital figure in Southern California wildfire management, spearheading the development of a communications system that allowed departments to coordinate more effectively during major incidents.

In 1978, John moved to Colorado to become the Fire Chief for the Fort Collins Fire Department. Under his guidance, the department merged with the Poudre Valley Fire Protection District in 1981 to create the Poudre Fire Authority, where he would serve as Chief for 33 years. John was a true trailblazer in the state; he hired Colorado's second female firefighter in 1979 and fostered unprecedented collaboration between departments along the Front Range. His influence extended to the national level where he chaired the International Chiefs Hazardous Materials Committee. In this role, he was a driving force behind the 1990 federal law requiring large, visible placards on commercial vehicles carrying hazardous materials—a change that continues to protect first responders today.

John and Kit welcomed their son James in 1978, and their daughter Shawnie in 1980. John remained a constant force in the lives of his children. He played a pivotal role in their upbringing, championing their scholastic accomplishments and making it a priority to attend nearly every athletic endeavor they participated in. He was a father who led with his heart, frequently sharing stories of his children's successes. His pride in James and

Shawnie was a defining characteristic of his life that he shared with everyone around him.

Upon his retirement in 2011, PFA honored his immense legacy by dedicating a fire engine with a bell bearing his name and naming the training facility he developed in 1995 in his honor. These dedications were done to recognize John's commitment to innovate and support his departments and the communities they serve.

In his later years, John embraced a love for travel, trekking across the globe with Kit to capture wildlife and landscape photography. He remained an active outdoorsman, enjoying golf, hiking, and camping. The true light of his eye was his family, particularly his grandson Sean. John is survived by his wife, Kit; his children, Bryon, James (Thanh), and Shawnie (Aaron); his grandson, Sean; his grand dog, Scooter. He is also survived by brothers Bob Mulligan, Kevin Cushman (June), Bill Mulligan (Suzi), and sister Annette Mulligan, while being reunited in memory with his parents, Phil and Grace.

A reception will held in the church following the service.

In lieu of flowers, the family would like any donations sent to:  
First Responder Trauma Services. Please visit their website: <https://www.frts911.com>

A link to John D. Mulligan's donation page will be added soon.

# Previous Events

## Celebration of Life

JAN **23**. 10:00 AM (MT)

Timberline Church - South Auditorium  
2908 S Timberline Rd, Fort Collins, CO 80525  
South Auditorium  
Fort Collins, CO 80524

# Tribute Wall

JC

“ My thoughts and condolences to John’s family and to all the firefighters who worked with John. He was a great person and always had a positive attitude and was quick to laughter. I worked with John when he came to the Lompoc Fire department in California.

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**jim cooper** - February 11 at 01:39 PM

MG

“ As a retired PFA firefighter who knew Chief John Mulligan from his beginning as Chief, I can say that all of PFA mourns his loss along with his family and the City of Fort Collins. We owe a deep respect and gratitude for all that he accomplished during his tenure as Chief developing PFA into one of the highest respected fire departments in the country. He was a visionary who saw the many benefits of merging our two area fire departments into the Poudre Fire Authority in 1981. I am proud of the fire department that Chief John built and that I got to work there for almost 18 years. Thank you Chief!

*Marty Gorman PFA retired*

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**Marty Gorman** - January 24 at 10:59 AM

RM

“ *It is with deep sadness that I reflect on the passing of Fire Chief John Mulligan, a truly remarkable leader and a genuinely good man.*

*Chief Mulligan was one of the easiest people to get along with—always accommodating, approachable, and kind. During my time as Mayor of Fort Collins, when he served as our Fire Chief, we made it a point to have lunch together every month at one of the fire stations with the firefighters. Those gatherings were some of my favorite memories. He used them as a wonderful way to introduce me to the men and women of the department, and in the process, I got to know him even better. His warm, humorous personality lit up every room (or station bay) he entered.*

*He cared deeply about his firefighters—their accommodations, their work environment, and their overall quality of life. He was the kind of leader who invested in people first, knowing that strong teams build strong communities.*

*Tall and robust in stature, Chief Mulligan looked every bit the part of a leader—and more importantly, he acted like one. He embodied the very essence of true leadership, the kind that President Dwight D. Eisenhower so eloquently described: “The art of leadership is getting someone to do something you want done because they want to do it.”*

*Hats off to a job extraordinarily well done, Chief Mulligan. You will be greatly missed, but your legacy of service, camaraderie, and genuine care lives on in the Fort Collins Fire Department and in the hearts of all who knew you.*

*Rest in peace, Chief. Thank you for everything.*

*Ray Martinez, Former Mayor of Fort Collins*

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ray Martinez - January 20 at 05:58 PM

JB

“ John and I both graduated from Cal State Fullerton and as far as I know we were the only former Titans working for the City of Fort Collins. He and I talked about it whenever we saw each other. John was a real good man and was a great Fire Chief who will be missed. RIP John. - Jerry P. Brown (Parks and Recreation)

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**Jerry P. Brown** - January 18 at 05:47 PM

LC

“ My cousin John Mulligan was a good man and served so much in his long career in fire fighting and Chief. He was the same age as me, and we had many years enjoying those eras with all our families. Love and prayers go out to all his family, as John is with our Lord in peace. Such a great Obituary story written for him!!!  
Linda Campbell

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**Linda Campbell** - January 15 at 04:24 PM

BM

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**Bill Mulligan** - January 15 at 04:17 PM