

FIRE WATCH

ADMINISTRATOR ERIC ROBERTSON RETIRES

After 12 years of service to the Algona, Auburn and Pacific communities and 35 years of public service, VRFA Administrator Eric Robertson retired on January 1, 2019.

Eric Robertson began his public service in 1983 with the Washington State Patrol, at the age of 19. He was commissioned as a State Trooper, assigned to Enumclaw in 1985 and held several positions. In 1994, Robertson was elected to the Washington State House of Representatives, where he served two terms representing the 31st Legislative District in King and Pierce counties. Robertson was promoted to Captain at the Washington State Patrol in 1998, led the Office of Government & Media Relations and served as Commander of the Office of Professional Standards. In 2002, Robertson was appointed by President George W. Bush as the United States Marshal for the Western District of Washington, serving as the regional administrator for the Marshals Service. In 2007, Robertson was hired as the first Administrator for the VRFA. Robertson's accomplishments in that role include guiding the process to meld the Auburn and Pacific Fire Departments into a regional fire organization, bringing financial stability and sustainability, negotiating and implementing the annexation

improvements. Approved by voters in 2008, the projects included construction of a new fire station to serve the Lakeland community, a complete remodel of the South Auburn fire station, a new fire station in the newly-annexed Lea Hill neighborhood, and purchase of a ladder truck to meet the needs of the growing region.

Other hallmarks during his tenure as Administrator include improving the delivery of service to the communities of Algona, Auburn and Pacific, which facilitated the Washington Surveying and Ratings Bureau rating improvement in all three communities. Outstanding financial stewardship by the leadership team prompted a credit rating improvement by Standard & Poors, to an AA-, and allowed for the refinancing of the bond funds – creating a savings of nearly a million dollars over the term of the bonds. The VRFA is known for its strong regulatory compliance, never having received a finding during the annual audits by the Washington State Auditor's Office or its annual reviews by the Washington Cities Insurance Authority. Robertson holds "the hiring and development of an outstanding leadership team" as his paramount achievement.



and professional staff. His ability to build relationships throughout the community has served us all well. He's a constant presence at events in Auburn, Algona and Pacific, in support of our non-profits organizations and schools – and he serves the community through the Auburn Noon Lions Club."

Backus added, "Eric is recognized throughout the state for his keen understanding of organizational leadership, and he has guided the VRFA to more efficient management systems. His work as chairman of the Washington Fire Chiefs Legislative Committee has contributed to safer communities here, and around the state. The Board of Governance extends our very best wishes to Eric, but we will miss his steady leadership."

"As you'd expect from Eric Robertson, he has created a strong foundation for the VRFA, and has worked with our Board to develop a succession plan that supports a smooth transition of leadership," Backus said.

The men and women of the Valley Regional Fire Authority wish Eric all the best in retirement. ▪

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plan for the Lea Hill and West Hill additions to Auburn, assembling the district's first comprehensive facilities assessment, and overseeing capital project planning and construction of \$19.8 million in capital

Former VRFA Board of Governance Chair and Auburn Mayor Nancy Backus said of Robertson's departure, "In every decision, Eric Robertson strives to do the right thing – what's right for our communities and residents, firefighters



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VRFA BOARD APPOINTS SWEARINGEN CHIEF



BRENT D. SWEARINGEN

to serve as Fire Chief/Administrator, effective January 1, 2019.

“Chief Swearingen brings 34 years of experience in the fire service, significant academic achievements and industry credentials. During his tenure as Deputy Chief at VRFA, he has been a proven leader with demonstrated results,” said former Board

The Valley Regional Fire Authority Board of Governance did not have to look far to find retired Administrator Eric Robertson’s successor. The Board appointed Deputy Chief of Operations, Brent D. Swearingen

Chairman and Auburn Mayor Nancy Backus. “My fellow Board Members and I look forward to working with Chief Swearingen to continue the longstanding commitment of delivering outstanding service to the people that live, work and visit our communities.”

Former Administrator Robertson selected Swearingen from a nationwide field of candidates, to lead fire and EMS operations at VRFA in 2012. Swearingen began his career as a firefighter in 1984 at the Reno, Nevada Fire Department and served in a variety of supervisory and management positions before his appointment as Operations & Administration Chief, a post he held for eight years. He has been a longtime mentor to developing fire officers and has worked extensively as an assessor and subject matter expert for executive-level testing on the west coast. While at Reno, he served a stint as the Special Assistant to the City Manager, gaining a global perspective of administrative issues.

After completing high school, Swearingen joined the U.S. Army, serving four years. He served as a Russian Language Intercept Operator with a Top Secret security clearance, prior to his Honorable discharge. Swearingen is a graduate of the University of Phoenix with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Administration, a Master of Arts degree in Homeland Security Studies from the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California and a Master’s Certificate in Alternative Dispute Resolution from the University of Denver. Swearingen is active in the greater Auburn community, serving as a board member for both Auburn Kiwanis and Nexus Youth & Family Services. A Hookstown, Pennsylvania native, Swearingen is the father of four adult children and lives with his wife Lori in Ravensdale.

Congratulations Chief Swearingen!

NEW LEADERSHIP AND TEMPORARY ASSIGNMENTS

The appointment of Deputy Chief Brent Swearingen to Fire Chief/Administrator left the Deputy Chief of Operations position open and the opportunity for promotions within the VRFA. Deputy Chief Kevin Olson has moved from Technical Services to fill the Operations position. The following individuals have accepted temporary assignments.

- » **Planning & Logistics (P&L) Battalion Chief Dave Larberg** has been assigned to fill the Deputy Chief of Technical Services.
- » **P&L Captain Pete Connell** has moved to P&L Battalion Chief.
- » **Firefighter Gervase Henson** has moved from shift to fill the P&L Captain position.

- » **Captain Lando Alvarado** has been assigned to the South King County Fire Training Consortium to assist with the upcoming fire academy.
- » **Firefighter Jeremiah Mushen** has been assigned to Captain at Station 31.



FEBRUARY IS HEALTHY HEART MONTH

The Valley Regional Fire Authority encourages citizens to take a proactive approach to their heart health during the month of February and throughout the year. One of the most important steps you can take to maintain a healthy heart is knowing your blood pressure.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE A BLOOD PRESSURE SCREENING?

Often with high blood pressure there are no noticeable warning signs or symptoms until other serious problems arise such as heart disease and stroke. Anyone, even children, can develop high blood pressure. The good news is that high blood pressure is easy to detect and can be controlled through lifestyle changes such as increased physical activity, dietary changes and sometimes medication.

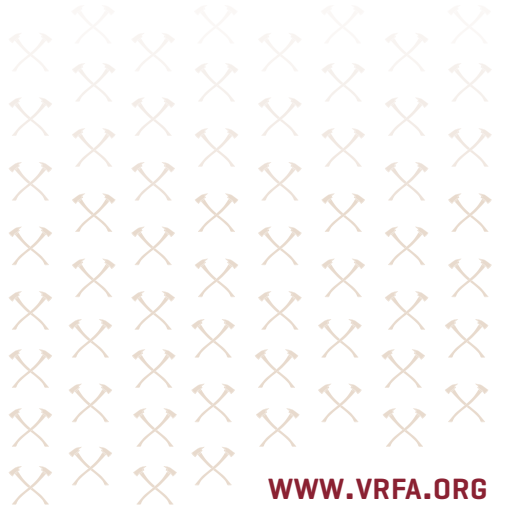
WHERE CAN YOU GET FREE BLOOD PRESSURE SCREENINGS?

We offer free blood pressure screenings at all five of our stations. VRFA stations are staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Firefighters, when in the station, are available to do blood

pressure screenings. For station locations please visit the VRFA website at www.vrfa.org.

LEARN CPR AND FIRST AID

We encourage you to learn CPR and first aid. By knowing CPR you may end up saving the life of someone you care about. We offer a CPR class the first Wednesday of each month and a CPR/First Aid class the third Saturday of each month. For more information visit the VRFA website at www.vrfa.org.



WWW.VRFA.ORG

FINAL MESSAGE FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR



ERIC ROBERTSON

The latter part of 2018 and the beginning of our New Year have been very eventful. As always, our first priority is to the citizens of Algona, Auburn and Pacific for their fire, rescue, and emergency medical services. We have talented employees and state-of-the-art equipment, but we never quit looking for ways to be better in striving to reach our standard of professional excellence.

We recently developed and implemented our Operating Budget for 2019. I am pleased to report that the administration proposed, and the Board approved, a budget which achieved our goal of meeting needs of our communities in the most cost effective manner. With inflation taken into consideration, we are funded at roughly the same level as the year prior.

I am pleased to report the VRFA’s annual independent financial and accountability audit, performed by the Washington State Auditor, produced a report free of findings – the eleventh consecutive! The audit reviewed our financial statements and found that our work was compliant with state law and our own policies and procedures. We strive to be good stewards of your dollars and are pleased with

these reports, which you can review by visiting our website – www.vrfa.org.

It has been a privilege to work with the men and women of the VRFA for nearly 12 years, creating the first regional fire authority in Washington state. Because of that collective work, we have established a model that others have replicated. As they say – “all good things must come to an end!” I announced back in October that I would be retiring, after over 35 years of public service, on January 1, 2019.

As one does, I have reflected on all that has been accomplished by our team since 2007,

I am proud of the men and women of the VRFA, as I know you are. Please continue to support them!

starting with our community supported bond measure for capital projects to strategically place our resources and improve our response times. That led to improvements in our Washington Surveying and Ratings Bureau rating, and to reduced fire insurance rates for our citizens. The VRFA has earned a reputation for its strong regulatory compliance, never having received a finding during the annual audits by the Washington State Auditor’s Office or its annual reviews by the Washington Cities Insurance Authority. Our outstanding financial stewardship by the leadership team prompted a credit rating improvement by Standard & Poors, to an AA-, and allowed for the refinancing of the bond funds – creating a

savings of nearly a million dollars over the term of the bonds.

My greatest accomplishment is having a hand in hiring outstanding professionals in their field, helping develop their skill-sets and professional values, and promoting the next generation of leaders to continue to build the organization and “answer the call” of public service. The VRFA has great people who do outstanding work; in prevention, administration, finance, information technology, and, of course, fire and EMS services.

The Board has selected Brent Swearingen as your new Fire Chief / Administrator to lead

the VRFA. Take a moment to read about Chief Swearingen and his extensive service record in this edition of Fire Watch. This is what I shared with the Auburn Reporter when asked to comment on the Board’s appointment: “I share the confidence the board has in Brent. He is a man of integrity and skill, always striving to do the right thing. For me, having the ability to leave knowing the organization I care so much about is in the hands of someone who is so talented and cares equally is heartening.”

I am proud of the men and women of the VRFA, as I know you are. Please continue to support them! ▪

COMMUNITY MEDICAL TEAM SEES SUCCESS IN THE FIRST THREE YEARS

Since its inception in 2016, the Community Medical Team [CMT] has consistently shown positive results, reducing the impacts on emergency response units and providing more specific care to residents in South King County. A significant change was noticed this past year when a full time social worker was added to the existing team of two full time firefighters, one from the Valley Regional Fire Authority [VRFA] and one from South King Fire & Rescue [SKF&R].

The CMT program is an emerging healthcare delivery model that assists patients with chronic health issues outside of the hospital setting. This more comprehensive approach is having a dramatic impact on the diversion of calls away from emergency units and has improved the quality of life for many of our community members. For example, in 2018 the team attempted to assist an older gentleman that had a series of strokes and had just returned from a skilled nursing facility. His insurance had run out. He was discharged and sent home from the care facility. While at home he began falling and calling 9-1-1. With no support network locally, the gentleman placed 15 calls to 9-1-1 over a 60-day period. The team looked at many options during that 60 day time period,

including in home care, moving him to another facility and any other viable solution. They worked with both local and county agencies but ran into a dead end with each option. They then turned their focus to the man’s sister in Florida [who happens to be a nurse]. With no funding for travel, the team had to think “outside the box.” In early October, with funding from South King Fire & Rescue, the man was assisted by the Community Medical Team with a ride to the airport, an escort through security and was helped directly on to a plane. Prior to assisting him at the airport, the team boxed his personal items and shipped them to Florida. They also helped him shower and prepare for the trip. He reached Florida safely and the team has followed up with his sister on several occasions. He seems to be doing much better in Florida. This is just one success story among many.

In 2019, the team is expanding to include an additional part-time social worker, Tamara



The individuals in the photo from left to right: Firefighter Nick Claiborne, Carrie Talamaivao, Lt. Roy Smith, Tamara Liebich-Lantz

Liebich-Lantz. Firefighter Nick Claiborne will continue to represent the VRFA while Lt. Roy Smith from South King Fire & Rescue will be new to the team this year. Social worker, Carrie Talamaivao, will remain with the team and work with Tamara to meet the increasing demand for case management in our vulnerable population group. This team is constantly learning and developing solutions to complex problems. We look forward to many more success stories. ▪

THE VRFA GIVES BACK



TOYS FOR KIDS

Every December VRFA staff, firefighters and families team up with the Auburn Food Bank for the annual Toys for Kids toy drive. VRFA members and their families collect unwrapped used toys and money from the local community. The money is used to

This year 1,327 kids from Algona, Auburn and Pacific received gifts.

purchase additional toys. Families in need are identified through the Food Bank and toys are distributed to those families at Auburn High School the weekend before Christmas. This year 1,327 kids from Algona, Auburn and Pacific received gifts. Special thanks to Deputy Fire Marshal John Monsebroten and Firefighters John Stivers and Colten Fogelberg for organizing this annual event.



OPERATION WARM

VRFA firefighters also provided brand new warm coats to local elementary school children the week before Christmas. Through Operation Warm, firefighters across the country have provided over 300,000 coats to children in need since 2012, leaving a positive impact and increasing school attendance, self-esteem and overall health and well-being.



300,000+
coats provided
to children

WWW.VRFA.ORG



VRFA Services

The VRFA provides CPR and First Aid classes, complimentary blood pressure checks, fire station tours, custom-fit bicycle helmets, custom-fit life jackets, smoke alarms, child car seat inspections and more.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

call **253-288-5800** or
go to **www.vrfa.org**

VRFA Administration

Brent Swearingen

Fire Chief/Administrator

Kevin Olson

Deputy Chief of Operations

Dave Larberg

Deputy Chief of Technical Services

Mark Horaski

Chief Financial Officer

Board of Governance

Leanne Guier

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Kerry Garberding

Pacific City Council

Troy Linnell

Algona City Council

Lynda Osborn

Algona City Council

Bill Pelozo

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David Storaasli

Pacific City Council



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