

FIRE WATCH

THE VRFA ASSISTS WITH COVID-19 VACCINE DISTRIBUTION

As COVID-19 vaccines became available across our state, the VRFA worked with existing partners to expand their COVID testing site to include vaccinations. In early February, King County, the City of Auburn, and local fire agencies added a drive-through vaccination component to the COVID testing site located on the Auburn GSA complex. Firefighter EMTs who had previously provided testing also began administering vaccinations.

In May, King County Public Health relocated the vaccination site to the Auburn Outlet Collection to improve access and increase vaccine dose capacity. The new location can provide up to 6,000 daily doses if vaccine supplies allow. The Auburn Outlet Collection site also offers easier access by transit, accessibility to those without a vehicle, and mobility assistance from trained staff. Most significantly, the new site is entirely indoors, ending any weather-related disruptions.

Firefighters from Valley Regional Fire Authority, Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority, Bellevue Fire Department, Eastside Fire and Rescue, Renton Regional Fire Authority, and South King Fire and Rescue work with King County Medic One and King County Public Health to administer vaccines, Monday – Saturday.

“It is a unique experience for a firefighter. It’s a lot of work providing so many shots in a day, but it feels like we are making strides towards getting back to normal,” states Firefighter/EMT Justin Erickson from Valley Regional Fire Authority.

The drive-through COVID-19 testing site at the GSA Complex has also relocated thanks to a partnership with the Boeing Company. Community members can now receive COVID tests at the Auburn Boeing Campus, 2400 Perimeter Road, Auburn 98001. The site is open Monday – Saturday, 8:30 – 5:30. More information on COVID testing and vaccination



appointments is available at King County Public Health’s website kingcounty.gov/depts/health/covid-19.aspx.

PROMOTIONS | Fire Marshal’s Office Promotions/Appointments

With the well-earned retirement of Fire Marshal Karen Stewart, the Valley Regional Fire Authority promoted two personnel, a Fire Marshal and an Assistant Fire Marshal from within the division, and appointed one Deputy Fire Marshal.



DAVE CASSELMAN

Dave Casselman was promoted to Fire Marshal in March. Dave was hired with the City of Auburn Fire Department in 1994. Dave has a long career as a department instructor, mentor, and acting officer. He

spent 20 years as a King County EMS instructor, Medical Program Specialist, and Acting Fire Officer. He served another decade as the department’s JATC chair. Dave joined the Fire Marshal’s Office in 2016 and was promoted to Assistant Fire Marshal in 2019.



ANDREW BERGFORD

Andrew Bergford was promoted to Assistant Fire Marshal to replace Dave Casselman’s vacated position. Andrew is an 11-year veteran of the department and has previous experience in home/business

inspections in the private sector. After joining the Fire Marshal’s office in 2016, Andrew quickly proved himself an asset with his common-sense approach to problem solving and solid leadership.



ROBIN IRVINE

Firefighter Robin Irvine was appointed to the Fire Marshal’s Office as a Deputy Fire Marshal. Robin started her career with a neighboring department, Mountain View Fire and Rescue,

in 2002. She joined the Valley Regional Fire Authority when the City of Auburn annexed Lea Hill in 2008. She comes to the office with a strong background in the fire service and a passion for customer service.

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VRFA BIDS FAREWELL TO THREE

Recent retirements include Fire Marshal Karen Stewart, Firefighter Will Highley, and Firefighter David Swanson.



FIRE MARSHAL KAREN STEWART

Stewart's lifelong career goal was to become a teacher. Karen attended Western Washington University, obtained her degree in education, and began substitute teaching. Soon after, she decided to put her teaching skills to work as a Public Education Specialist for the Kent Fire Department. While there, Karen created and presented fire safety and injury prevention

education programs for schools, businesses, and community groups. Fourteen years later, she decided to embark on a new journey as a Firefighter/EMT and secured that position with the Auburn Fire Department (now VRFA).

For five years, Stewart balanced 24-hour shift work along with parenting two daughters. She then tested for and obtained the position of Deputy Fire Marshal. Six years later, she was promoted to Assistant Fire Marshal and the following year accepted the position of Fire Marshal. She made VRFA history as the first female in each of those roles and the first female chief officer.

As Fire Marshal, Karen strengthened relationships with city, school, and business officials. She also began gathering the data needed to initiate a risk reduction approach for all commercial buildings, ultimately leading to a safer community. In recognition of these and

many other achievements, Karen received the VRFA Professional Excellence Award in 2018 and was nominated for Fire Officer of the Year.

"The impressive list of accomplishments only hints at the true value Karen has brought to the fire service. She was the right person in the right place at the right time when she took over as the VRFA Fire Marshal. Karen assumed charge of a division that was struggling to establish its identity after the formation of the new fire authority. In short order, she had implemented new programs, professionalized positions, built new relationships with our customers, and established the VRFA Fire Marshal's Office as a model of a well-run bureau. Karen leaves our department much better than she found it," said Fire Chief Brent Swearingen. "We thank her for her dedication, insight, and friendship and wish her a happy and long retirement."



FIREFIGHTER WILL HIGHLEY

Thirty-seven years ago, Will Highley began his fire service career in Parkland, Washington. After six years there, he applied with and was hired by the Auburn Fire Department - now VRFA.

In his early days, working for a part-paid, part-volunteer department presented some challenging moments. "Sometimes, I was the only firefighter responding to 9-1-1 calls," said Highley. He recounted a harrowing call to an

apartment fire where he arrived alone in the fire engine, connected a hose to the hydrant, and was ready to enter the burning structure alone. "I felt a hand on my shoulder and turned to see a volunteer firefighter had arrived, just in time." It was then that he decided to apply with the Auburn Fire Department and has never looked back.

Throughout his career, Highley strove to expand his fire service knowledge through specialty areas. He served six years as a Public Information and Education Specialist, enjoying teaching fire safety in schools and emergency preparedness for community groups. Next, Will became a founding member of the department's Wellness & Fitness Team and worked to improve the health of his co-workers. He also took part in the first Truck Academy, mastering aerial ladder skills and operations that subsequently moved the department to a higher level of professionalism. His most recent and lengthy role was that of a Respiratory Specialist, where he tested and maintained self-contained breathing apparatus for over eight years.

"Just a cursory look at the achievements that Will has had in the fire service shows you his commitment to duty. He has been a dedicated and active member of our department, right up to the end of his active service. This past November, Will received a letter of commendation for a rescue performed with his crew at a house fire in September 2020. What his resume does not show is the way he performed his duties with grace and good humor," said Fire Chief Brent Swearingen.

Highley also enjoyed helping with community events. He raised funds for eleven years through his participation in the MS Ride as part of the VRFA cycling team, and he never missed an opportunity to help with the annual holiday Toys for Kids drive.

Though Highley is looking forward to "not setting an alarm clock," he says he has no regrets, "I wouldn't hesitate to do this job again. It has been great!"



FIREFIGHTER DAVID SWANSON

Grateful for his career in the fire service, Firefighter David Swanson looks back on the day that started it all.

"I was fifteen and headed down the wrong road when a friend invited me to a meeting of youth

Fire Explorers. I watched the firefighters training and working around the station and thought, "I want to do this." From that day forward, I focused on becoming a firefighter. The fire department saved my life," said Swanson.

David began volunteering for Pierce County Fire District 7 (Spanaway) at the age of 18. After that, he worked for the Puyallup, Caldwell (Idaho), and Bothell Fire Departments. Swanson was hired by the Auburn Fire Department, now VRFA, in 2001 and has served the residents of Auburn, Algona, and Pacific for twenty years.

He successfully tested for and obtained a VRFA Technical Rescue Team position, participating in high-angle, confined space, and water rescues throughout his career. David has spent time at each of VRFA's five stations, saying that

each has positive aspects, but what he enjoyed most was his co-workers.

"Dave occupies a unique space not only in the VRFA but in the heart of everyone who knows him. He is always trying to improve himself and those around him. Dave sets a high standard for himself and is never satisfied just because those around him may be. He brings a consummate entrepreneurial spirit to everything he does, so I know he will find plenty to keep him interested in retirement. We thank him for his service and wish him the best," said Fire Chief Brent Swearingen.

To those just starting in a fire service career, Swanson advises, "It is a marathon, not a sprint, so be humble and don't take yourself too seriously. Your career will go by fast."

SCHOOL PROGRAM GOES VIRTUAL



For the second year in a row, the COVID-19 pandemic kept us away from our annual school visits. We traditionally visit Kindergarten, first, and second-grade classrooms every spring to deliver fire safety and injury prevention messages. To continue bringing those valuable messages to students, we created virtual classrooms. Each classroom features videos of VRFA firefighters providing the same safety

messages taught during in-person visits. There are also many fun learning activities. Our virtual safety classrooms are available on our website for teachers and families to use. You can find them at vrfa.org/community/safety-information/virtual-school-program/

FIRE CHIEF'S MESSAGE | STAYING AHEAD OF THE CURVE



BRENT D. SWEARINGEN

Most people probably assume that the everyday mission of the VRFA is to respond to emergencies. While a great deal of planning and resources goes into the daily operation of the emergency services,

enormous efforts take place behind the scenes to prevent emergencies from happening in the first place – as illustrated by the Fire Prevention Bureau or giving mass COVID vaccinations. Constant effort is also expended in ensuring that resources will be available when and where they are needed as our community grows.

At the regular March 2021 Board of Governance meeting, our Board unanimously voted to adopt a capital facilities plan [CFP] for the VRFA. The CFP is a requirement of the current VRFA strategic plan. The CFP is a six-year plan that covers the years 2021 through 2027. The purpose of a capital facilities plan is to project

the needs of the citizens during the timeframe covered by the plan and then to develop facility plans to meet those needs. When developing the plan, some essential factors include trends in service demands, population, and economic development. Once future service demands are projected, alternative methods of meeting those demands are considered. If the best way of meeting future demands requires the rehabilitation, relocation, or addition of a fire station or support facility, the CFP identifies the priorities of action as well as funding options for improving the built base of the fire department.

Based on all the above information, the adopted capital facilities plan recommends the construction of an additional station in the north part of Auburn, the relocation of the Pacific station, the replacement or major rehabilitation of the headquarters station, and acquisition of long-term facilities for the fire marshal's office and support services that are currently located within the GSA complex.

Adding a new station is usually, at minimum, a three-year process from the time property is acquired. Therefore, it is not expected that all of these building projects will be completed in the planning period identified in the CFP.

The CFP will be updated as 2027 nears or when major unanticipated changes occur that would make the projections used in the plan to become obsolete. Such unanticipated changes could be a major annexation by one of our cities, changes in the law that requires a change in the services we deliver, or unanticipated development or zoning changes. The next iteration of the plan will also reflect the effects that the completed capital facilities have had on service levels, thus enabling us to refine and improve our forecasting models.

As quoted from the conclusion of the plan:

A Japanese proverb states that "The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago. The second-best time is today."

...the timeline of this plan is the next six years, the effects of implementing the recommendations presented will last well into the second half of the century, ...now is the best time to act on these recommendations to set the VRFA up for this future success.

You can find the capital facilities plan on the VRFA website: www.vrfa.org/documents/finance

Have a safe and healthy summer!

2020 OUTSTANDING EMPLOYEES RECOGNIZED

Each year the Valley Regional Fire Authority celebrates employee achievements by recognizing a Firefighter and Fire Officer of the Year, plus rewarding a member who exemplifies one of the organization's core values: selfless service, integrity, and grit. Recipients are chosen by their co-workers.



AARON MARTIN
FIREFIGHTER/EMT

**2020 FIREFIGHTER OF THE YEAR
AARON MARTIN**

Firefighter Aaron Martin, a nine-year veteran of the VRFA, takes on many extra duties in support of his community and co-workers. He currently serves as a Public Information and Education Specialist,

delivering safety messages to the community, and assists new employees as part of the Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee [JATC]. In addition, he helps co-workers cope with job-related stressors as a member of the Peer Support Team.

Aaron has stepped up to be a leader in both the VRFA and regional fire Public Information Officer programs, serving as a media liaison for our organization and other agencies in our region – even while off-duty. As a member of the JATC committee, he has proven his commitment to our organization by working to ensure the highest level of training for our new firefighters. Lastly, Aaron is a very active and engaged member of our Peer Support Team. He has a genuine and skillful approach to caring for the mental and emotional well-being of his fellow firefighters and teammates.

As noted in his award nominations, Aaron displays exemplary skill in all aspects of the job. He is a tactician on the fire ground and a thoughtful and thorough Emergency Medical

Technician [EMT]. Aaron is known for being a friendly, helpful, positive, team-oriented member of his crew, station, and the VRFA. His crew members say he is always willing to lend a hand, always ready to work hard to accomplish tasks and goals, always reliable, and true to his word.



BILL MACK
BATTALION CHIEF

**2020 FIRE OFFICER OF THE YEAR
BILL MACK**

Battalion Chief Bill Mack was selected as Fire Officer of the Year for his assistance in developing a capital facilities plan [CFP] for the VRFA. This document was a first for the VRFA and will

guide the department in the coming years. It will help determine needs for fire stations, equipment, and staffing to keep up with the growing demand for Fire/EMS services.

Mack has served the citizens of Algona, Auburn, and Pacific for 29 years. In 2020 he accepted a temporary Deputy Chief promotion to work on the CFP. During this same period, he worked eight weeks in a temporary capacity as Deputy Chief of Technical Services and chaired a fire station design committee. In November, after completing his assignments, he returned to shift as a Battalion Chief.

Though Bill was required to balance managing the Technical Services Division, working on the CFP, chairing the Station Design Committee, and continuing with his Blue Card Incident

Management responsibilities, he never faltered. He completed all tasks required of him with efficiency and professionalism. His dedication and leadership during 2020 exemplify why he is deserving of Fire Officer of the Year.



JEREMY ELLIOTT
FIREFIGHTER/EMT

**2020 GRIT AWARD RECIPIENT
JEREMY ELLIOTT**

Grit is a core value of the VRFA. Grit is demonstrated through perseverance, passion, resilience, and optimism. It is a never-quit attitude that reflects determination, focus, and endurance.

Chosen by his peers, Firefighter Jeremy Elliott is the recipient of the VRFA Grit Award.

Jeremy joined the Auburn Fire Department, now VRFA, in 2002. Along with firefighting duties, Elliott serves as a mentor for apprentice firefighters, is a Hazardous Material Specialist, participates on the JATC committee, and is an acting captain.

Co-workers have witnessed Jeremy's display of grit throughout his career as he constantly strives to improve himself and others. Despite experiencing setbacks and adversity, he continues to learn, grow and remain optimistic in pursuing his career goals. Jeremy's character, leadership, and commitment to do his best every day embody the meaning of the VRFA Grit Award.

THE VRFA WELCOMES NEW ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT



Nicole Eby is originally from San Diego. She moved to the Pacific Northwest a few years ago. Last spring, Nicole graduated from the University of Washington with a BA in Business Administration with a concentration in Finance and a minor in Economics. For the past year and a half, she worked part-time

as an administrative assistant/bookkeeper for a small seasonal business. Nicole says, "I am excited to be a part of the Valley Regional Fire Authority; it's a pleasure to support first responders as they support the community."

Welcome to the VRFA family, Nicole!

THE VRFA GIVES BACK

In December of 2020, a cherished restaurant in Auburn, Athens Pizza & Pasta, suffered significant damage following a fire. Demonstrative of the commitment we have to the community, VRFA Local #1352 raised money in support of Athens. The Local purchased \$1,000 in gift cards and raised an additional \$630 through a raffle. Local members presented the cash donation to the Athens owners.

FIREFIGHTER STAIR CLIMB

Annually, a team of VRFA firefighters participates in a stair climb event to raise money for blood cancer research. The stair climb is one of the largest fundraisers for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. The event traditionally takes place at the Columbia Center building in Seattle. Firefighters ascend 69 flights of stairs in full turnout gear and a self-contained breathing apparatus. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the event took place virtually in 2020. For more information regarding the mission of the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, please visit www.lls.org.

In addition to the raffle for Athens and the annual stair climb, members conducted quarterly trash clean up on State Route Highway 18. Firefighters have participated in the Department of Transportation Adopt-a-Highway program since 1999.



FIREWORKS REGULATIONS & SAFETY

The VRFA serves the cities of Algona, Auburn, and Pacific. All three have local ordinances that address the purchase and discharge of fireworks within their respective city limits. The rules are very similar and easy to follow. You can find specific information in your city ordinances or on the VRFA website at www.vrfa.org/community/safety-information/injury-prevention/#fireworks

The sale of fireworks is permitted to start at noon on June 28. Stands can operate between the hours of 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

It is illegal to discharge any fireworks in the City of Algona. Both Auburn and Pacific limit discharge to the 4th of July from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m.

The types of fireworks that are permitted are limited. A good rule-of-thumb is, "If it goes up or blows up, it is not allowed." Each city lists the specific types of fireworks permitted in their respective ordinance. Sparklers, fountains, and spinners are allowed in all three jurisdictions.



Stay safe this 4th of July, attend a public fireworks display.

In 2020, the VRFA responded to 26 fireworks-related calls in the three weeks leading up to the 4th of July. Eight of those calls were on July 4. One patient sustained injuries that required an airlift to Harborview Medical Center.

If you choose to use fireworks, we encourage you to take the following precautions:

- Use only approved, legal, and common fireworks from reliable, licensed retailers.
- Always have a responsible adult light all fireworks.
- Have a charged garden hose or a fire extinguisher handy.
- Use fireworks outdoors only, away from buildings, houses with wood shingles, trees, and dry fields.
- Avoid aerial-type fireworks.
- Light one item at a time, move away quickly and keep a safe distance away.
- Dispose of used fireworks by first soaking them in water.
- Ensure the safety of pets.
- Use eye protection.
- Respect your neighbors and clean up all debris.
- If a device doesn't light or fire, an adult should wait a minimum of five minutes before approaching the device.
- Rather than buying fireworks, attend a public fireworks display when available and make that a family tradition.



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

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Fire Chief/Administrator

Brad Thompson

Deputy Chief of Operations

Dave Larberg

Deputy Chief of Technical Services

Mark Horaski

Chief Financial Officer

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The VRFA is committed to our mission:
WE SERVE THE WHOLE COMMUNITY