

FIRE WATCH

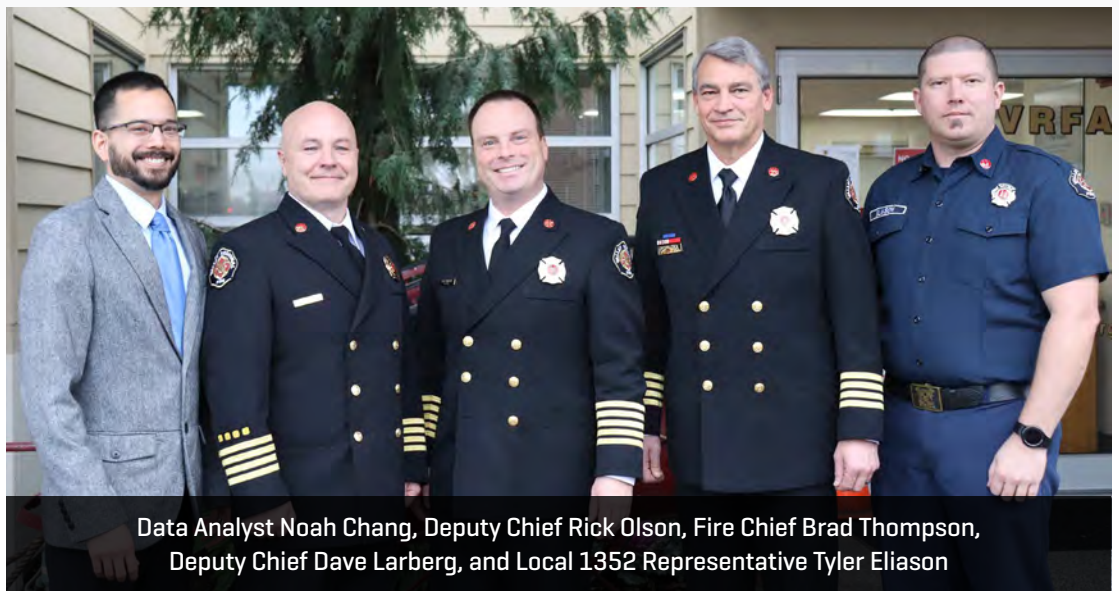
THE VALLEY REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY ACHIEVES ACCREDITATION STATUS

After 3.5 years of focused work and thoughtful evaluation, the Valley Regional Fire Authority (VRFA) is proud to announce it has achieved accreditation status.

Accreditation is an international recognition of achievement. There are approximately 300 accredited agencies in the world. Seven of those agencies are in Washington State. Achieving accreditation shows communities that these agencies continually self-assess, look for opportunities for improvement, and are transparent and accountable through third-party verification and validation. "It is a testament to our dedicated professionals for the quality of work and customer service that is demonstrated daily at the VRFA," says Deputy Chief/Accreditation Manager Dave Larberg.

In October, assessors from the Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) spent four days at the VRFA reviewing, interviewing, and touring fire stations and facilities. At the end of their visit, the group recommended accredited status to the Commission on Fire Accreditation International Board (CFAI). On December 15, Fire Chief Brad Thompson and selected staff appeared before the CFAI Commission Hearing Board, where the VRFA received final approval for accreditation.

Accreditation is a voluntary process through which agencies demonstrate adherence to best practice standards and are held



Data Analyst Noah Chang, Deputy Chief Rick Olson, Fire Chief Brad Thompson, Deputy Chief Dave Larberg, and Local 1352 Representative Tyler Eliason

accountable through an external peer review. In 2018, the VRFA began this process which required a close look into every aspect of the agency. The VRFA enlisted community and staff members to determine and prioritize areas that needed improvement, creating a five-year Strategic Plan. Other valuable documents developed during the accreditation process included; Standards of Cover, Community Risk Assessment, Capital Facilities Plan, and a comprehensive Self-Assessment Manual. After this self-assessment phase, assessors from CPSE visited for a thorough review of these documents, a tour of our

facilities, and interviews with VRFA staff. After their visit, they recommended accredited status for the VRFA.

"Accreditation provides a roadmap for continual improvement and a culture of professional excellence. This culture will guide us as we look to serve our growing community while fulfilling our mission, vision, and values," said Fire Chief Brad Thompson.

CPSE assessors provided a list of suggested improvements. Accredited agencies must evaluate recommendations annually and are considered for re-accreditation every five years.

CARES SOCIAL WORKERS ACHIEVE LICSW CERTIFICATION



Brittany Padjen and Carrie Talamaivao

Congratulations to two members of our Community Assistance, Referrals, and Education Services (CARES) Team who recently achieved the title of "Licensed Independent Clinical Social

Worker (LICSW)" from the Washington State Department of Health.

To reach this milestone, Brittany Padjen and Carrie Talamaivao have completed over 4,000 post-graduate hours of supervised clinical social work, met regularly with a supervisor to ensure their compliance with National Association of Social Work ethics and standards, and passed the national boards.

"I have been striving for this licensure since I began my career in social work. It means a lot to me," said Talamaivao.

Possessing the LICSW allows the two to practice independently, as often required in

their CARES positions. "The fieldwork involved in CARES requires a lot of independent practice. We need to administer tests, make clinical decisions and create treatment plans. The LICSW ensures that we are qualified to provide these services," said Padjen.

CARES is the joint effort of the VRFA and South King Fire and Rescue. The team consists of two firefighter/EMT's and three social workers who address less emergent calls in non-transport capable vehicles. CARES provides referrals and resources for aging issues and chronic disease situations. The CARES team also provides service to Enumclaw Fire Department and Mountain View Fire and Rescue.



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AUTUMN 2021

SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS

While summer is often our busiest season at the VRFA, the fall and early winter bring their own challenges. The arrival of cold weather brings wind storms, wet and icy roads, and high water flows on the White and Green Rivers. From September 1, to the end of 2021, we responded to 5,277 total calls, an increase of nearly 16% over the same time frame last year. Here are some of the significant incidents we responded to in the last few months of 2021:

High-Impact Motor Vehicle Accident

Shortly after midnight in mid-September, a ladder truck, an aid car and King County Medics were dispatched from our headquarters station to a high-impact motor vehicle collision. The crash involved two cars at the 15th St NW onramp to SR 167. Upon arrival, firefighters quickly worked to stabilize the incident and provide medical care. Because of the severity of the crash and number of patients, they requested additional units for assistance. The firefighters and paramedics on scene split into two groups: one providing medical care, and the other working on rapid extrication of patients trapped inside the vehicles. Firefighters successfully extricated all patients and King County Medic One paramedics transported those requiring further aid to Harborview Medical Center.

River Rescue

In early November, our Technical Rescue Team, along with two engine crews, an aid car, a battalion chief, King County Medics, and rescue units from across south King County, responded to reports that an individual had fallen off the R Street Bridge into the river below. Bystanders reported seeing the individual being carried downstream. The Technical Rescue Team rapidly deployed a rescue technician into the water with a single-person kayak. Fighting a heavy current and chilly water, the technician located the victim stuck in the water near the northern bank of the river. With help from an aid car unit, crews successfully rescued and brought the patient back to shore. The patient was transported to Harborview Medical Center for further treatment.



Riverfront Village Fire

On November 7, at approximately 9:30 pm, a single engine crew responded to a report of a vehicle fire. On arrival, the crew discovered that it was not a single vehicle fire but an entire three-vehicle carport fully engulfed in flames. The fire was rapidly spreading through the adjacent three-story apartment building. The engine captain immediately upgraded the incident to a commercial fire and called for additional alarms and resources. While crews from across the VRFA, South King County Fire, and Puget Sound Fire were in route to help, the crew on scene began suppressing the fire with heavy streams of water. Evacuated residents reported people possibly trapped on the third floor. Firefighters began deploying ladders to search units rapidly. After securing a water supply, additional units extinguished flames in the stairwell leading up to the fire, which

was now spreading through the attic. The skillful actions of all units on scene contained the fire to one section of the building. The fire displaced approximately sixty residents.



Storm Operations

On November 15, a significant windstorm hit the entire Puget Sound area. It lasted through the night and into the following day. In addition to falling trees and dangerous driving conditions, storms like these wreak havoc on fire alarm systems throughout our response area. Due to the heavy influx of calls that these storms create, our units switch to a self-dispatching system that allows us to prioritize calls and respond more efficiently to emergencies. During this storm, VRFA units responded to 68 calls for service during a single shift. Two separate incidents involved trees that fell into nearby homes, causing significant damage. Fortunately, no one was injured.



Snow and Below Freezing Temperatures

The last six days of 2021 brought snow and below-freezing temperatures. We responded to 308 calls those six days, including nine for frozen or burst pipes and 17 motor vehicle crashes.



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FALL PREVENTION

Valley Regional Fire Authority Firefighter/EMT's responded to over 1,850 fall incidents in 2021. Age, physical fitness, health, and medications can all contribute to an increased risk for falls. Being proactive and making a plan is key to successfully reducing falls. Although there are many ways to help people with fall prevention, we hope that the five tips covered in this article will help you stay on your feet.

1 Speak with your doctor

Schedule an appointment with your primary care physician to discuss developing a fall prevention plan. Be prepared to discuss your fall concerns and how your



medical illnesses, medications, and mobility limitations could contribute to an increase in falls. Understanding the side effects of medications can help decrease the potential for falls. Additionally, your doctor may want to change, alter or remove any medications contributing to an increase in falls.

2 Maintain clear pathways in your home

Maintaining clear walkways in your home is critical in preventing trip hazards. Debris, rugs, boxes, and clutter can all contribute to hazardous areas.

3 Stay active

After speaking with your doctor, set goals to increase or maintain your physical fitness. Staying active, increasing your strength, and increasing your



mobility can significantly reduce your chances of falling. Strength, balance, and mobility can lower your chances of injury if a fall does occur. If you have concerns or feel like you need assistance, speak with your doctor about physical therapy.

4 Install grab bars and handrails

Set yourself up for success by installing grab bars and handrails in areas where falls are frequent. Having handrails on both sides of stairs and ramps will assist with changes in elevation or slopes. Grab bars near the toilet or bed can assist with standing from the sitting position. Grab bars are also helpful in and around showers to help with balance and stability.



5 Utilize assistive equipment

Equipment such as walkers or canes can help increase your stability inside and outside the home. These tools can significantly reduce your chance of falling when your body is recovering from injury or illness.



FIRE CHIEF'S MESSAGE | LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD



BRAD THOMPSON

encourages us to push forward constantly and never look back. Seemingly, looking back results in a loss of momentum or risks taking our focus off what lies ahead. However, if we don't pause to glance in the rearview mirror, we risk losing a historical perspective that will help us navigate the road ahead. Winston Churchill summed this up by saying, "the longer you can look back, the further you can look forward."

I believe it also helps to see how far we can go, to recall how far we have come. Algona, Auburn, and Pacific communities have changed dramatically over time. The skyline of downtown Auburn alone would look astoundingly unfamiliar to those who haven't visited in the last five years. The VRFA is saying "goodbye" to two long-term staff who grew up in Auburn when it was a one-traffic-light town. Each remarked

In today's fast-paced world, it can feel like life is moving too fast for our comfort. We often race ahead to address the next challenge before the dust settles on the previous one. It sometimes feels like our modern culture

that our sense of community firmly remains despite this growth. We may not know every family in town anymore, but we have found new ways to stay connected. We have adapted and changed alongside our communities, serving a more diverse and transient population. The VRFA's Mission reminds us to serve the whole community, and we endeavor to provide life safety for all that live, work, and visit here. We persevere to meet the challenges of a rapidly growing community, taking strength from our past collective successes.

The VRFA's Mission reminds us to serve the whole community, and we endeavor to provide life safety for all that live, work, and visit here.

We commit to our future direction by honoring those who set our current vision through strategic planning. Previous VRFA leadership established a culture of excellence through outstanding service delivery. We accomplished this by constantly evaluating and analyzing current practices, seeking opportunities to get better, and creating new, best practices. We commit to using all of our available resources in a constant effort to meet the needs of our community through listening and connecting with all community stakeholders.

The VRFA truly values those that laid the foundation for us to build upon going forward.

We celebrate our accomplishment of becoming an internationally accredited agency, knowing that this would not have been possible without previous leadership. Our team fully embraces their vision and is committed to honoring these efforts while looking forward to new and innovative ways to serve.

Accreditation was a considerable undertaking, demanding a large volume of work by many individuals within the VRFA while also relying on the help of our strategic community partnerships. The outcome of this work is that

we have established a verifiable road map to follow, holding us accountable to our Mission, Vision, and Values. During this process, we encountered numerous obstacles and infrequent hard truths. But through creative problem solving and the efforts of too many to list, we became a better fire department. Unknown obstacles undoubtedly remain before us, but we have the foundation, strength, and direction to keep moving forward by looking in the rearview mirror.

In service,
Chief Thompson

EMS SPOTLIGHT

LIFT ASSISTS AND INJURIES FROM A FALL

Gravity is the force that pulls everything toward the center of the earth. When perfectly healthy, we don't think about how our bodies resist this invisible force. As we age or experience health impacts, routine activities can become increasingly challenging, and gravity plays a more significant role.

Over the past two years, VRFA firefighters responded to over 2,300 calls for service involving an injury from falling or someone needing assistance getting up after a fall (lift assist). Most of these calls occurred in private residences, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities. There are falls from a standing position or while walking, falls out of bed, falls from step stools/ladders, and more.

When you call 911 for a fall injury or lift assist, the Valley Communications Center (VCC) call receiver will ask several questions to assess your



situation and your level of need. Based on the information provided, a VRFA medical aid unit, fire engine, ladder truck, the Community Assistance, Referrals and Education

Services (CARES) unit, or King County, Medic One paramedics may respond. Rest assured, all firefighters in King County maintain certification as Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and can administer aid as required.

As we respond to your location, the VCC 911 dispatcher provides vital information to help once we arrive on the scene. Dispatchers tell us about your fall, if you are injured, whether your door is locked/unlocked and if there is a

key on-site. In the case of some pendant alarm activations, we are advised if someone has responded to a call back from 911 dispatch. If you cannot open the door but are conscious and not seriously injured, firefighters will take the time to check for an unlocked door or window to make entry. If that is not possible, firefighters will exhaust all other avenues before forcibly gaining access to a residence or business.

Once we are inside and contact you, we will perform a patient exam. We monitor vital signs, check for injuries, and ask for your medical history. After we complete the exam and present our findings to you, we will advise on the most appropriate course of action and, if necessary, arrange for transportation to a medical facility. CARES team members may follow up to connect you with community resources and information on preventing future falls.

RECORDS SPECIALIST GWEN STREETER RETIRES



GWEN STREETER

1989, working for the state of Washington, the cities of Tukwila and Enumclaw. She

If you have visited our headquarters, Station 31, you likely had the pleasure of meeting Gwen Streeter. She greeted everyone with her magnetic personality and infectious sense of humor. Gwen began a long career in public service in

returned to her hometown in 2011 to join the VRFA. Gwen has excelled in serving members of the VRFA community. One supervisor even referred to her as "Director of Customer Service." In addition to her regular duties, Gwen has been called upon to calm citizens who walk in with medical emergencies and simultaneously alert firefighter/EMT's of the situation. In 2018, Streeter received the "VRFA Professional Excellence Award" in recognition of her significant professional response and extraordinary compassion to a citizen in crisis. Utilizing the "Safe Place for Newborns" Act, that citizen placed an hours-old baby into

Gwen's arms. Streeter and on-duty firefighter/EMT's cared for the child until social services could respond.

"It takes a special person to bring positive energy and humor to the workplace and to help others genuinely enjoy coming to work. Gwen brings such a light to the VRFA and those she interacts with daily. She is also the person most turn to when they need help with just about anything. We will all very much miss Gwen's smile, laughter, and all that she does for each of us. I am personally very grateful for having had the opportunity to work alongside Gwen," said Fire Chief Brad Thompson.

THE VRFA GIVES BACK

Operation Warm

During December, firefighters were hard at work helping families in the Algona, Auburn, and Pacific communities. On December 17, Station 32 firefighters participated in Operation Warm and distributed 50 coats to children at Gildo Rey Elementary. Operation Warm donates coats to Valley Professional Firefighters Local 1352, who in turn distributes them to children in need. Local radio station KISW 99.9 "The Rock" raises money for Operation Warm every year. Over the past 23 years, Operation Warm has distributed four million coats to over 1,900 communities. Local 1352 has participated in this program for over a decade.

 **4,000,000+**
coats provided to children



Toys for Kids

For more than 30 years, the VRFA, Local 1352, and the Auburn Food Bank have sponsored Toys for Kids, a Christmas toy drive for local children. Due to COVID concerns, in-person collections were scaled back significantly. Most of the fundraising efforts were from online donations.

The VRFA greatly appreciates the help of our local businesses and community members. Auburn Fred Meyer allows us to purchase toys at a discount from their store. Emerald Downs loans us their facility for toy distribution. The Auburn Food Bank registers participating families. Other local partners who donate time, money, or both include: Way Scarff Ford, Seoul Trading Inc., Haggen Foods, Safeway Distributing, Subway, Starbucks, Washington State Council of Firefighters (WSCFF), Firefighters Credit Union, Auburn Golf Course, Hops N Drops, Athens, CK Worldwide, and the Auburn School District.

With the generous donations received from our community this year, we were able to help nearly 1,000 kids from 300 families have a happy and merry Christmas.



 donations received helped nearly **1,000 kids**

WWW.VRFA.ORG

Black and white photos by Andrew Huth Photography



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

- Brad Thompson**
Fire Chief/Administrator
- Rick Olson**
Deputy Chief of Operations
- Dave Larberg**
Deputy Chief of Community Risk Reduction
- Mark Horaski**
Chief Financial Officer
- Sarah Borden**
Human Resources Director

Board of Governance

- Dave Hill**
Chair, City of Algona Mayor
- Nancy Backus**
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Pacific City Council
- Leanne Guier**
City of Pacific Mayor
- Troy Linnell**
Algona City Council
- Lynda Osborn**
Algona City Council
- David Storaasli**
Pacific City Council



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