

FIRE WATCH



AFTER 38 YEARS OF SERVING HIS HOMETOWN, VRFA DEPUTY CHIEF DAVE LARBERG RETIRES

Valley Regional Fire Authority’s Deputy Chief Dave Larberg’s family has lived in Auburn since the 1900s. Dave grew up in Auburn and has worked for the citizens of Algona, Auburn, and Pacific for the majority of his career. After nearly 38 years of serving his hometown as a firefighter and chief officer, he has decided to retire.

“My family owned and operated a grocery store in Auburn until 1964. My mom, grandmother, and aunt were all crowned Miss Auburn. It seemed natural to choose a career that allowed me to serve those in my hometown community,” said Larberg.

Dave graduated from Central Washington University seeking to apply his Community Health Degree in an athletic team setting. The fire service offered both the physical challenge he was looking for plus the rewards of helping others. Larberg began volunteering for King County Fire District 44 (now Mountain View Fire and Rescue) in 1984 and, within two years, was hired as a full-time firefighter. After five years at KCFD #44, he joined the City of Auburn Fire Department (now VRFA) in 1989.

As he moved up the ranks, Larberg left a trail of accomplishments in his wake. He furthered his education with an Associate of Arts degree in Fire Command and Administration, then completed the Basic Law Enforcement Academy, becoming a Commissioned Fire Investigator in 1995. He was promoted to Captain in 2001 and worked on a joint labor-management initiative to form the first Wellness Fitness program for the department. Larberg continued working as a Wellness-Fitness Coordinator for eleven years and helped the program evolve from a solely physical fitness focus to a more holistic view which now includes emotional and mental health components.

Dave worked as a captain in the Training and Safety Division and as a Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee Employer Representative. He also took on the role of the Pre-Incident Plans Manager

for the department. Larberg was promoted to Suppression Battalion Chief from 2012 – 2014, and then moved to Battalion Chief in charge of Planning and Logistics, where he worked for four years.

In 2019, Larberg was promoted to the position of Deputy Chief over Technical Services, overseeing the Fire Marshal’s Office, Support Services, Planning and Logistics, Public Information and Education, and Emergency Management.

In this role, he feels he accomplished one of the most rewarding challenges of his career: helping the VRFA achieve status as an accredited emergency service agency.

“It was an arduous process involving many of our staff and representatives from the International Commission on Fire Accreditation. It was a total team effort. I am very proud of our department for achieving this international achievement. It is a testament to the quality of our organization and the dedicated people who work here,” said Larberg.

In addition to his work commitments, Dave donated many hours to his community. He chaired the American Cancer Society Relay for Life efforts for the department for 18 years, chaired the department Adopt-a-Highway team, assisted with the Toys for Kids program, the Nick of Time Foundation, and the Burn Foundation. He helped raise funds by participating in the MS Ride and served four years as a board member and Vice President of the White River Valley Museum.

With all of these accomplishments, it is not surprising that Larberg was the recipient of many



awards. He was awarded Firefighter of the Year in 1995 and was twice named Fire Officer of the Year [2007 and 2011]. He received three Meritorious Unit Citations and was a three-time medalist in the Northwest Police and Fire Games.

“Dave has continually set the bar for the most impactful leadership trait: to lead by example. He would never ask anyone to do something he is unwilling to do himself. Generations of firefighters have benefited from Dave’s efforts to propel the VRFA forward. There is no way to adequately express how influential he was in shaping the VRFA in the past, present, and future. We will truly miss Dave, but his influence will remain. We wish him the very best,” said Fire Chief Brad Thompson.

Looking back over his career, Larberg stated, “I have enjoyed the work, the people, and giving back to the community where I grew up. I have learned that prioritizing a good life/work balance is the key to longevity in the fire service.”

His advice to those following his footsteps: “Be kind, be humble, and strive to maintain positive relationships.”

THE VRFA SCHOOL PROGRAM RETURNS

After a two-year absence due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have resumed teaching fire safety in person at elementary schools across our community. We couldn’t be more excited!

On March 25th, Firefighter Daris Conrad made the first school visit in over two years. He and the other members of our public education team will

continue teaching fire safety and injury prevention in kindergarten through second grade until the end of the 2021-2022 school year.

While we have always received a warm welcome at every school we visit, the students’ involvement in our latest classes has been incredible. Many of the students had never seen a firefighter in their

classroom, and their excitement was astounding. We start each class with a quick review of basic fire safety concepts such as why we need fire; Stop, Drop, and Roll; and what to do if they come across dangerous tools in the home such as lighters and matches.

In the kindergarten classrooms, we focus our time

Article continued on page 3...



IN THIS ISSUE >>

Pg. 2 Annual Employee Award Recipients

Pg. 2 Five new firefighters

Pg. 3 Fire Chief’s Message

Pg. 3 EMS Spotlight
Drug Overdose

Pg. 3 Promotion

Pg. 4 VRFA Gives Back

Pg. 4 Fireworks Regulations & Safety

VALLEY REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY ANNOUNCES 2021 ANNUAL EMPLOYEE AWARD RECIPIENTS

Each year the Valley Regional Fire Authority celebrates employee achievements by recognizing a Firefighter and Fire Officer of the Year, plus awarding a member who exemplifies one of the organization’s core values: selfless service, integrity, and grit. Chosen by their coworkers, the 2021 award recipients include Firefighter of the Year Mike Homan, Fire Officer of the Year Captain Anthony Rodriguez, and VRFA Integrity Award winner Fire Chief Brad Thompson.



FIREFIGHTER OF THE YEAR
MIKE HOMAN
DEPUTY FIRE MARSHAL

Firefighter of the Year Mike Homan is an 18-year veteran of the VRFA and has served as a Deputy Fire Marshal for five years. He has been involved in a wide range of programs in the Fire Marshal’s Office and displays a passion and enthusiasm for fire prevention. “His vision, dedication, and forward-leaning approach to the department and regional considerations are admirable,” says Assistant Fire Marshal Andrew

Bergford. As noted in his award nominations, Mike is compassionate, caring, and makes those around him smile, often with jokes only he can pull off.



FIRE OFFICER OF THE YEAR
ANTHONY RODRIGUEZ
CAPTAIN

Captain Anthony Rodriguez was selected as Fire Officer of the Year for his patience and leadership skills. He always takes the time to ensure his crew and patients receive the best possible care and support. “Captain Rodriguez’s attitude and elite customer service are inspiring and contagious,” says a coworker. Rodriguez, a 21-year veteran of the VRFA, has worked at every station at the VRFA. He is Wildland Fire Red Card certified and has stepped up numerous times deploying in and out of the state to assist with wildfires.

Integrity is a core value of the VRFA and is defined by choosing courage over comfort; choosing what is right over what is fun, fast, or easy; and practicing our values rather than simply professing them.



INTEGRITY AWARD
BRAD THOMPSON
FIRE CHIEF/ADMINISTRATOR

Integrity is the courage to make tough decisions and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. Fire Chief Brad Thompson is the recipient of the 2021 VRFA Integrity Award.

Thompson was appointed Fire Chief in August of 2021, during the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. Taking on this leadership role during an unprecedented time at the VRFA, Chief Thompson showed strength of character and maintained a positive attitude. Many VRFA members commented that he handled difficult times with great compassion and courage. “Chief Thompson defines integrity; in the most difficult times, he showed the true character of a public servant,” said Deputy Chief Dave Larberg.

Congratulations to the 2021 award recipients!

EMS SPOTLIGHT DRUG OVERDOSE

The call volume of the Valley Regional Fire Authority is steadily increasing each year. As Emergency Medical Services make up more than 80% of total calls for service, firefighters are responding to more injuries from falls, motor vehicle collisions, and heart attacks, just to name a few. Firefighters are also responding to more calls for a drug overdose, the topic of this newsletter’s EMS Spotlight.

In 2021 firefighters responded to 289 overdose calls, including opioid overdoses. Opioid overdoses are life-threatening. Many of these incidents result from either a synthetic opioid (Methadone, Tramadol, Fentanyl) or a semi-synthetic opioid (Heroin, Vicodin, Dilaudid, Percocet).

Patients recovering from surgery or treating a chronic ailment who accidentally overdose on prescription opioids can experience respiratory depression just like someone who overdoses on Heroin or Fentanyl. Both patients may require medical interventions.

In King County, Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) train to respond to and treat suspected opioid overdoses. Once the signs and symptoms of an opioid overdose are identified, EMTs begin the appropriate treatment:

- One minute of ventilation with a Bag Valve Mask delivering high flow pure oxygen
- Administration of a Naloxone mist into the nose by Firefighter/EMTs, or injected into the patient’s muscle or veins by King County Medic One paramedics
- In cases where the overdose has progressed far enough that the heart has stopped, CPR is performed

After treating a patient, VRFA aid units, private ambulances, or King County paramedics will transport the patient to the hospital. The medication used to counteract the overdose, Naloxone, may not outlast the opioid. For this reason, overdose patients should be monitored in a hospital after being treated by EMTs.

Overdoses that result from recreational drug use are often a combination of an opioid and another substance such as methamphetamine or



Between 2019 and March 2022, VRFA firefighters administered Naloxone to 96 patients.

Local law enforcement also trains in recognizing overdoses and administering Naloxone.

cocaine. Once the Naloxone takes care of the opioid, and if the patient has other drugs in their system, they may regain consciousness and become agitated. Local law enforcement is integral in keeping first responders and the general public safe during overdose calls. If the scene has the potential for violence, fire and EMS personnel will stage away from the scene until law enforcement declares it safe.

Learn to recognize the signs of opioid overdose:

- Abnormal or lack of breathing [respiratory depression]
 - The average adult breathes 12-20 times a minute
 - Drug overdose can slow down your breathing to zero
- Pinpoint [tiny] pupils
- Loss of consciousness
 - A person overdosing on opioids may seem unresponsive and may not respond normally to noxious stimuli
- Skin signs
 - Bluish, purple skin tone [cyanosis]
 - Damp, clammy skin

SUBSTANCE ABUSE RESOURCES

24-Hr Hotlines

WA Recovery Help Line

1-866-789-1511
www.warecoveryhelpline.org

Statewide 24-hour resource line for locating and connecting individuals to substance use and/or mental health treatment, with possibility of same-day access.

SAMHSA National Helpline

1-800-662-4357
www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

Nationwide hotline and online locator tool to connect individuals to substance use and/or mental health treatment resources.

Local resources

Medication Assisted Treatment

WE Care

www.wecaredailyclinics.com
3320 Auburn Way N.
253-999-5750

Provider of medication for opioid use disorder [Methadone, Naltrexone, and Suboxone] and dosing clinic with individual and group counseling, case management, and referrals available.

Outpatient substance use counseling services

Ideal Option

www.idealoption.com
1811 Howard Rd, Ste. #101
1-877-522-1275

Addiction medicine clinic offering counseling and medication assisted treatment.

Sound

www.sound.health
4238 Auburn Way N.
253-876-8900

Behavioral health provider offering walk-in intake appointments on M/W/F from 9:00-11:00.

FIRE CHIEF’S MESSAGE



BRAD THOMPSON

In the last edition of FireWatch, we shared that the VRFA achieved accreditation status. While we are very proud of this accomplishment, the key takeaway is we have set a culture focused on continuous improvement. This focus also means that we have plenty of work ahead of us. I want

to share some recent changes and some of our key initiatives that you will hear more about as we move forward. These changes and initiatives focus on the more immediate needs of our communities and how we plan to meet them.

Our Technical Services Division has been renamed to recognize its primary mission: Community Risk Reduction [Division]. A Community Risk Reduction program can help take what we already know and intentionally focus personnel, knowledge, and activities on lowering the hazards and risks within our community. After all, as the old proverb states: an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

The VRFA is uniquely positioned to have a deep understanding of our communities and potential hazards. Our staff sees firsthand, whether through emergency incidents, inspections, or simply driving through our community, how our people live, the current needs, and how we can help. Our Community Risk Reduction Division uses various tools to form strategies focused on reducing the occurrence and impact of these risks on a healthy community.

We truly view our Community Risk Reduction efforts as a partnership with you, focused on making this the best place to live, work, and visit.

As communities grow, emergency service demands increase. The VRFA has identified, through years of data analysis, that there is a need to enhance our capital facilities to meet the rising level of emergency service demand. Algona, Auburn, and Pacific have growth and development as policy goals. Resources – adequate in number and strategically placed – are required to maintain acceptable service levels. The VRFA Board of Governance unanimously approved a Capital Facilities Plan in 2021. This plan outlines our strategy to meet the rising need for services and can be viewed on our website at www.vrfa.org.

We recently took delivery of a new ladder truck. This ladder truck will be able to serve a special purpose, as it is designed to meet the new, narrow roads and taller buildings we see springing up in our service areas. Known as a tractor-drawn aerial, this fire apparatus has numerous advantages and performance enhancements – longer reach, higher aerial water flows, less weight, improved rescue equipment storage, and better maneuverability. It

will take some months of enhanced training [it requires two drivers when underway, one upfront and one steering the rear tiller wheels] before it is safely placed in service. It will be housed at Station 31 and serve South King County residents throughout its primary response area and via our automatic aid agreements.

We thank you for the wonderful support we receive from our community. We truly view our Community Risk Reduction efforts as a partnership with you, focused on making this the best place to live, work, and visit.

THE VRFA WELCOMES FIVE NEW FIREFIGHTERS



JAMES PERALTA

James Peralta grew up and attended school on Lopez Island. After graduating from high school in 2012, he joined the Marine Corps. Peralta

served in the Marine Corps for four years and was stationed primarily in North Carolina. After his time in the military, he worked in federal law enforcement. “I am excited to be a part of the Valley Regional Fire Authority team!” says Peralta.

Counselor, Resident Director, Academic Advisor, and Program Coordinator at various universities and community colleges. He left higher education to move to Bend, Oregon, where he completed his EMT coursework. Evans says, “I am very excited to be moving back to the Seattle area and honored to be joining VRFA.”



ROBERT FOPPIANO

Robert was born in Los Angeles and moved with his family to Olympia in 1992. He graduated from Washington State University

with a degree in criminal justice. Foppiano has a decade of work experience in juvenile corrections, five years of volunteer firefighter/ EMT experience with McLane Black Lake Fire Department, and 1.5 years of experience as a firefighter/EMT with the Boeing Fire Department. “I am very excited to find a home at VRFA!” says Foppiano.



RAQUEL TAWFIK

Raquel is from San Jose, California. She moved to Washington to get a Bachelor’s degree in Communication Studies from the University of

Puget Sound. She has coached high-intensity interval training classes at Orangetheory Fitness for the past few years. “I am so incredibly excited to have the opportunity to be a part of Valley Regional Fire Authority!” says Tawfik.



JARED BROOKE

Jared was born in Tacoma and raised in Puyallup. He graduated from Bates Technical College in their fire science program. Brooke

worked as an EMT for Tri-Med before joining the VRFA. Brooke says, “I’m very excited to get started and want to thank VRFA for this opportunity!”



BLAKELEE EVANS

Blakelee was born in West Seattle but spent most of his childhood in Phoenix before moving to the Los Angeles area for college. He received his

Bachelor’s Degree from Azusa Pacific University and began a career in higher education upon graduation. Evans worked as an Admissions

Article continued from page 1.

THE VRFA SCHOOL PROGRAM RETURNS



on the basics of fire, what fire is and how to stay safe around fire. The students learn how to stay low to avoid smoke and how to exit a building safely. The kids take turns holding a blanket that simulates smoke in the room while the others practice crawling low underneath it. At the end of the class, firefighters show the students the gear they wear in a fire. We let them touch the equipment and interact with us face to face, so they know we are still the same person, even while wearing all of our gear.

In first grade, we cover home escape planning. We discuss what needs to be included in a home escape plan and the importance of practicing it with the people living in their homes. Nearly every student has their hand raised when our team asks for volunteers to act out the proper way to exit a home in a fire.

The kids go to an imaginary summer camp called “No-OWie” in second grade. During this pretend trip, they learn how to wear a seatbelt correctly in a booster seat, fit a bicycle helmet, don a life jacket, and alert adults of any unattended fire-starting materials. They actively participate and are happy to contribute ideas throughout the class as they learn new skills.

After being away for so long, it is truly a gift to be back in classrooms connecting with the children in our community. Allowing them to have direct contact with firefighters helps them learn what to do in case of an emergency and shows them that we are real people working hard to look out for them when they need us.

PROMOTION

Congratulations to Joel Toline on his promotion to Captain.



JOEL TOLINE
CAPTAIN

THE VRFA GIVES BACK

FIREFIGHTER STAIR CLIMB

Each year, a handful of Valley Professional Firefighters participate in the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society [LLS] Firefighter Stairclimb at the Columbia Center building in Seattle to support and fundraise for blood cancer research and patient services. Blood cancers account for nearly 10% of all cancer patients in the United States. In its 31-year history, this event has raised over \$22 million.

The LLS Firefighter Stairclimb is the world’s largest on-air stair climb and is only open to career or volunteer firefighters. Each firefighter is required to raise a minimum of \$300 to participate and must complete the challenge in full structural turnout gear while on-air.

In 2022, Firefighter Ryan Simpson, the VRFA’S team captain for eight years, led 13 VRFA members up the 69 flights and 1,356 steps to the top of the Columbia Center. The following VRFA members participated, raising \$17,571.90: Jeremiah Mushen, Ryan Simpson, Travis Schade, Shawn Bowen, Cory Wallace, Justin Erickson, Jerry Montiel, Rachael Labender, Guy Smith, Blake Laidlaw, Gary Barker, Joseph Parrish, and Matthew Kinnee. The VRFA team placed 30th overall.

When asked why he participates, Firefighter Blake Laidlaw said, “The stairclimb is important to me as it offers an opportunity to raise money for a great cause, one that is personal.” Blake’s friend, Donovan, lost his father to Leukemia and was a champion of the stairclimb. Donovan himself succumbed to cancer in 2015 at a very young age. “I believe part of carrying and honoring Donovan’s legacy as a firefighter, father, son, brother, and friend is to carry and honor



those things that were important to him,” says Laidlaw. Blake and his family support and honor first responders battling critical illness or injury through Lionhardt, an organization established in honor of his friend Donovan to support first responder families.

Thank you to all VRFA members, staff, friends, family, and community members who participated in and supported this wonderful cause. For more information on the LLS Firefighter Stairclimb visit llswa.org, and to learn more about the Lionhardt Organization, go to lionhardt.org.

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. 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.



Attend a public fireworks display to stay safe this 4th of July.

- 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**

VRFA Administration

- Brad Thompson**
Fire Chief/Administrator
- Rick Olson**
Deputy Chief of Operations
- Tim Day**
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**
Vice-Chair, City of Auburn Mayor

Members

- Larry Brown**
Auburn City Council
- Kerry Garberding**
Pacific City Council
- Leanne Guier**
City of Pacific Mayor
- Troy Linnell**
Algona City Council
- Robyn Mulenga**
Auburn City Council
- Lynda Osborn**
Algona City Council
- David Storaasli**
Pacific City Council

Follow us on Nextdoor, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, & YouTube



VRFA HEADQUARTERS

Fire Station 31
1101 D Street NE, Auburn, WA 98002
253-288-5800
Business Hours 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
www.vrfa.org



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