# Selfless Service. Integrity. Grit.



# ANNUAL REPORT

**VALLEY REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY** 

2023





# **OUR MISSION**

We serve the whole community.

The VRFA saves lives and protects property through reliable emergency services, preparedness and prevention.

# **OUR VISION**

Creating the safest community to live, work and visit.

# **OUR GUIDING VALUES**

Selfless Service. Integrity. Grit.

# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

#### IN THIS REPORT >>>

1	-			,			-		н
Pc	1	<b>.</b>	ief	•	W	-131	S-1	( e I	
ıu				•	ч	<u> </u>	•		-

- Pg. 2 **Board of Governance**
- Pg. 3 Strategic & Capital Facilities Plans
- Pq. 4 Our Service Area
- Pg. 5-6 **Employee Recognition**
- Pq. 7 **Promotions/Retirements**
- Pq. 8 Years of Service
- Pq. 9-10 Fire Operations
- Pq. 11 Specialized Response
- Pg. 12 **Emergency Medical Services**
- Pg. 13 Community Risk Reduction
- Pg. 14 **Fire Investigation**
- Pg. 15 **Community Outreach**
- Pg. 16 **Public Information**
- Pg. 17 **Finance & Administration**
- Pg. 18 **Support Services**
- Pg. 19 Thank You

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@vrfa



# FIRE CHIEF/ADMINISTRATOR'S MESSAGE



**BRAD THOMPSON** 

As I reflect on the past year at The Valley Regional Fire Authority, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the unwavering support we have received from our community and the steadfast commitment of our Board of Governance. Your support has enabled us to continue our mission of serving the whole community with selfless service, integrity, and grit.

This year has been marked by significant milestones and achievements for VRFA. With immense pride, I am pleased to announce that VRFA maintains its status as an internationally accredited fire agency through the Commission on Fire

Accreditation International. This accreditation is a testament to our commitment to continuous improvement and our dedication to providing our community with the highest quality of service.

One of the most notable accomplishments of this year is the addition of a new fire engine, E336, to our response fleet. Adding an engine company enhances our capabilities to respond to emergencies swiftly and effectively, ensuring the safety and well-being of our

community members. This achievement would not have been possible without our community's generous support and our staff's tireless efforts.

Furthermore, I am excited to announce that our capital facility plan is well underway. We are currently in the design and permitting phase for constructing two new fire stations. These fire stations will be strategically located in the north end of Auburn and on the border of Algona and Pacific, allowing us to serve areas with growing needs better. These new facilities will improve response times and strengthen our community presence, providing residents with peace of mind, knowing that help is always nearby.

I am incredibly proud of the dedication and professionalism demonstrated by all VRFA staff. Their unwavering commitment to our mission and values is commendable, and their hard work and perseverance drive our success as an agency. Whether it's responding to emergencies, conducting training exercises, or engaging with the community, our staff consistently goes

above and beyond to ensure the safety and well-being of our residents.

As we look towards the future, I am confident that VRFA will continue to thrive and uphold its reputation as your trusted partner in public safety. With the continued support of our community and the guidance of our Board of Governance, we will remain steadfast in our commitment to serving the whole community with selfless service, integrity, and grit.

In closing, I sincerely thank every member of our

community for your ongoing support and trust in VRFA. It is truly an honor to serve you, and we remain dedicated to keeping our community safe, resilient, and strong.

I am incredibly proud of the dedication and professionalism demonstrated by all VRFA staff. Their unwavering commitment to our mission and values is commendable, and their hard work and perseverance drive our success as an agency.





# **BOARD OF GOVERNANCE**

#### **2023 REVIEW**

As Chair of the Board of Governance, I am honored to present the Valley Regional Fire Authority's 2023 Annual Report. This report serves both as an overview of the VRFA's activities over the past year and a celebration of the men and women serving our communities. It is also my honor to thank the members who recently departed the Board and to welcome the new members who recently joined. From Pacific, Mayor and former Chair, Leanne Guier stepped down at the end of the year after ten years of faithful service. In addition to Chair Guier, Auburn Councilmember Robyn Mulenga, who served for 2 years left the board at the end of 2023. I thank both for their selfless service and exemplary leadership. Joining us on the Board in 2024 are Auburn Councilmember Tracy Taylor and Pacific Councilmember Eric Petersen.

I hope that you find this report informative and inspiring. Thank you for your continued support!

Nancy Backus 2024 Board of Governance Chair Mayor of Auburn





\*All pictured were Board Members at the end of 2023.

## STRATEGIC PLAN

The VRFA continued to make progress on the strategic initiatives outlined in the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan. We have begun planning an update to our Community Risk Assessment and Standard of Cover documents (Initiative 1) and we passed at \$96.5 million dollar bond in November 2023 to build a new station in the north part of our service area, relocate Station 38 in Pacific, replace Station 31, and find a permanent location for Support Services and Training (Initiative 2). Progress in 2023 on the remaining three initiatives is outlined below.

# INITIATIVE **1**ACCREDITATION COMPLETE



- VRFA's 24/7/365 staffing increased from 20 to 23 in January 2024.
- Increased staffing resulted in the staffing of Engine 336 at Station 31. Engine 336 will move to Station 36 when it is complete.
- Fourteen new firefighters were hired in 2023 and are now working at fire stations.
- Two new administrative FTEs were approved, one in Human Resources and one in Support Services. A Facilities Maintenace Technician was onboarded in May 2023.
- VRFA continued to be an active partner in WAFireCareers.com and the King County Fire Chiefs' Association DEI Committee.





• Succession Planning: discussions are ongoing regarding succession planning at a variety of levels.



- VRFA CARES met with all personnel to discuss mutual needs and various processes.
- Content within Station Information Kiosks has been refined.
- The first "Chief's Chat," a 60-minute virtual all staff meeting, was completed and will be continue at regular intervals.

# **CAPITAL FACILITIES PLAN**

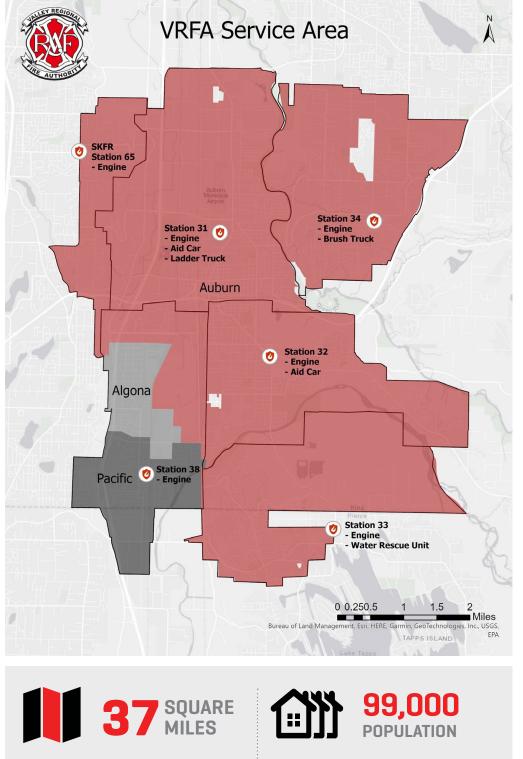
The VRFA's Capital Facilities Plan (CFP), which was adopted by the Board of Governance in 2021, made four recommendations:

- Priority 1: build an additional station in the northern part of VRFA's service area
- Priority 2: relocate and rebuild Station 38 in Pacific
- Priority 3: remodel or replace Station 31
- Priority 4: find a permanent location for Support Services

In 2023, the VRFA took several significant steps to implement the CFP, including:

- Purchasing property on the Ellingson corridor in Pacific to relocate Station 38.
- Placed on the ballot in the general election and passed a \$96.5 million dollar bond to fund Capital Facilities projects.
- Preliminary site designs began in late 2023 and will continue in 2024.

# **OUR SERVICE AREA**









5 FIRE STATIONS

#### **2023 HONORS**



FIREFIGHTER OF THE YEAR STEWART ALWAY **FIREFIGHTER** 



FIRE OFFICER OF THE YEAR **RYAN CHADWICK CAPTAIN** 



**PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARD RICK OLSON DEPUTY CHIEF** 



**PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARD CARRIE TALAMAIVAO** LEAD SOCIAL WORKER



**PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARD** STEPHANIE LOPES SOCIAL WORKER



**PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARD NICOLE EBY** ACCOUNTING SPECIALIST

#### THE BILL MACK AWARD

Bill Mack was a firefighter who served with the legacy Auburn Fire Department and the VRFA for many years. He was known for his dedication to his colleagues and continued to show this attitude throughout his career. He retired as a deputy chief last year from East Pierce Fire &

The 2023 Bill Mack Award Winners are:

Station 31 - BATTALION CHIEF GARY BARKER

Station 32 - FIREFIGHTER CORY WALLACE

Station 33 - FIREFIGHTER STEVE RIERSON

Station 35 - DEPUTY FIRE MARSHAL MATT HARRINGTON

Station 38 - FIREFIGHTER STEPHEN SPARKS

Rescue. He demonstrated camaraderie, respect, kindness, inclusivity, and humor throughout his career. The 2023 Bill Mack Award recipients come to work with a positive attitude, work hard, make their colleagues laugh, and leave everyone with respect and inclusivity.



#### LETTER OF COMMENDATION

Awarded for contributions to the training process for the new Tractor Drawn Aerial.

**GUY SMITH CAPTAIN** 



#### **MERITORIOUS UNIT CITATIONS**

On February 27, 2023, Captain Daris Conrad and his crew assisted in the rescue of an adult trapped on the second floor at a residential fire in Algona.

**DARIS CONRAD CAPTAIN** 

**JUSTIN RUSLER FIREFIGHTER** 

**JAMES PERALTA FIREFIGHTER** 



MERITORIOUS UNIT CITATIONS **DARIS CONRAD** CAPITAN



MERITORIOUS UNIT CITATIONS **JUSTIN RUSLER FIREFIGHTER** 



MERITORIOUS UNIT CITATIONS **JAMES PERALTA FIREFIGHTER** 

#### **MEDAL OF MERIT**

On February 27, 2023, Firefighter Darrel Normandy rescued a trapped adult at a residential fire in Algona.

DARREL NORMANDY **FIREFIGHTER** 



MEDAL OF MERIT DARREL NORMANDY **FIREFIGHTER** 

#### LETTER OF COMMENDATION

Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority Mechanic Wayne Yotsuuye was awarded a Letter of Commendation for his dedication, expertise, and unwavering commitment to excellence. Wayne works at Station 31's maintenance facility as part of the VRFA's contract with Puget Sound Fire for vehicle maintenance.



LETTER OF COMMENDATION WAYNE YOTSUUYE FIRE MECHANIC

#### **VALOROUS UNIT CITATIONS**

On September 22, 2023, awarded for rescuing two unconscious patients from a vehicle fire that was initially been reported as a brush fire along West Valley Highway in Algona.

**JERRY MONTIEL** 

CAPTAIN

**JARED BROOKE** FIREFIGHTER

**AARON MARTIN CAPTAIN** 

**AARON WALKER FIREFIGHTER** 

**MEGHAN LOUDON FIREFIGHTER** 

**JACOB HOWARD FIREFIGHTER** 



#### **PROMOTIONS**



**ANDREW BERGFORD** FIRE MARSHAL



MIKE HOMAN ASSISTANT FIRE MARSHAL



ANDREW O'DONNELL
CAPTAIN

### **RETIREMENTS**



JULIE SLEVIN
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
16 YEARS



DAVID CASSELMAN FIRE MARSHAL 29 YEARS



KYLE FISHER
FIREFIGHTER
25 YEARS



BILL AUSTIN
CAPTAIN
30 YEARS





YEARS OF SERVICE

### 25 YEARS

JOEL STRANGE, CAPTAIN

JASON HERMAN, BATTALION CHIEF

KELLY SCHARF, FIREFIGHTER

MICHAEL PATTERSON, CAPTAIN

### 20 YEARS

GERVASE HENSON, CAPTAIN

AARON LEWIS, FIREFIGHTER

## 15 YEARS

JIM ALLENBAUGH, CAPTAIN
GUY SMITH, CAPTAIN
JIM SMITH, IT MANAGER
RYAN CHADWICK, CAPTAIN
STEWART ALWAY, FIREFIGHTER

## 10 YEARS

STEVE RIERSON, FIREFIGHTER
COLTON FOGELBERG, CAPTAIN
ANDREW MATTHEIS, FIREFIGHTER
AARON WALKER, FIREFIGHTER

### 5 YEARS

SCOTT AUSTIN, FIREFIGHTER
VINCENT BROWN, FIREFIGHTER
DYLAN NYSTUL, FIREFIGHTER
CHASE GALVIN, FIREFIGHTER
RYAN NAUER, FIREFIGHTER









## **FIRE OPERATIONS**

The Valley Regional Fire Authority provides all-hazards emergency response to the Algona, Auburn, and Pacific communities, with automatic and mutual aid from neighboring jurisdictions.

#### **TIERED RESPONSE SYSTEM**

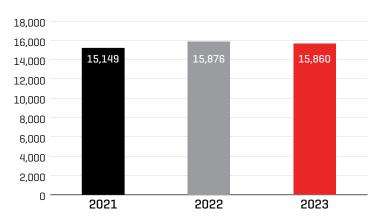
The VRFA provides emergency response through a single battalion consisting of five fire stations located strategically throughout our service area. Twenty-three personnel respond from five fire stations. These stations are staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by four shifts. A battalion chief oversees each shift, and a deputy chief manages the entire division. In 2023, the VRFA had 125 uniformed personnel [including chiefs] and 18 civilian personnel.

The type and severity of an emergency determine the resources dispatched to provide fire suppression, basic life support (BLS), advanced life support (ALS), or technical rescue operations. All VRFA firefighters are certified medical technicians. One of seven South King County Medic One units is dispatched for ALS incidents. For example, a BLS call may only require an aid car and an engine, whereas an ALS call may require up to four responding units. Dispatchers will assign appropriate resources for all other calls, including fires, to protect life and property.

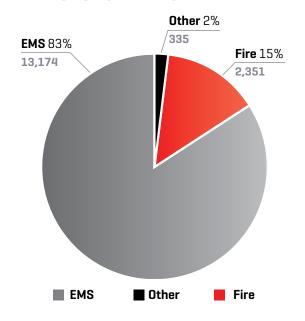
#### MINIMUM STAFFING INCREASE IN 2023

In 2023, two additional personnel were added to staff a temporary aid car at Station 31, increasing minimum staffing from 20 to 22. In addition, 14 additional firefighters were hired and trained to replace the temporary aid car with an engine company in early 2024.

#### **EMERGENCY RESPONSE TOTALS**



#### RESPONSE BY INCIDENT TYPE .....







## **FIRE OPERATIONS**

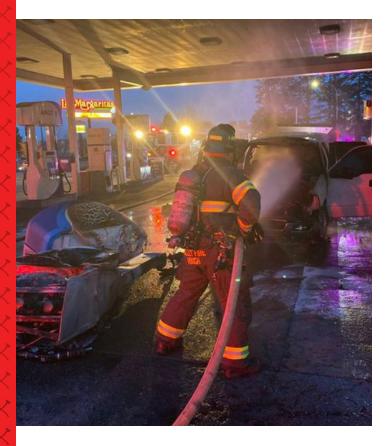
#### **RESPONSE TIME OUTCOMES**

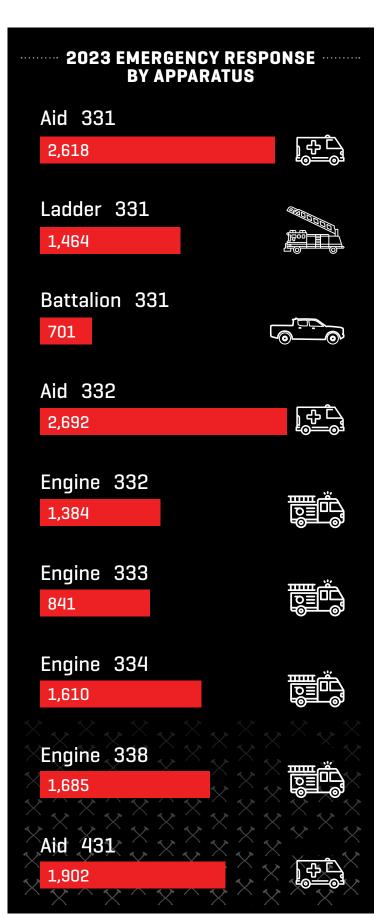
In an emergency, every second counts. The VRFA has established a Total Response Time (TRT) benchmark of seven minutes and 34 seconds (7:34) for EMS Calls and seven minutes and 49 seconds (7:49) for fire calls. TRT is the time it takes a unit to arrive at a scene once the call is received at the Fire Alarm Center. In 2023, we achieved those benchmarks 51% of the time for fire response and 56% for EMS response.

#### TOTAL RESPONSE TIME (TRT)









## SPECIALIZED RESPONSE

The VRFA maintains a Technical Rescue Team who responds to high-risk, low-frequency incidents requiring specialized rescue capabilities. These include rope rescue, swift water rescue, and high-angle rescue. This 16-member team also provides expertise and assistance to partner agencies within King County.

The VRFA also maintains a 20-person "Red Card" Wildland Fire program. They respond within our jurisdiction and throughout Zone 3, the State, and out of state through special deployment. In 2023, VRFA red card firefighters deployed 19 times to assist with wildland fires in Eastern Washington and out of state.

All operations personnel are trained in Hazardous Materials response, with two trained to the technician level. For larger-scale hazardous materials incidents, the VRFA utilizes Zone 3 resources.

#### **TRAINING**

The VRFA partners with the South King County Fire Training Consortium (SKCFTC) to provide fire academy training for new firefighters and ongoing training for current members.

> VRFA first responders logged 44,010 hours of training in 2023, a 32% increase from 2022.

#### PEER SUPPORT

The VRFA's Peer Support team provides mental health benefits related to education, resource sharing, and peer-level assistance to mitigate cognitive and behavioral health hazards inherent to the fire service. Since its inception in 2018, the Peer Support team has seen contacts increase from 90 to 460. These contacts included anything from a simple conversation to more intensive intervention.

In 2023, the VRFA committed to supporting a new Behavioral Health Unit (BHU) program through the South King County Fire Training Consortium (SKCFTC). The unit's mission was to provide mental health education and support existing networks of medical health professionals, chaplains, social workers, and Peer Support teams. The BHU has since disbanded. The VRFA program manager sits on the Zone 3 Behavioral Health Committee and the Washington State Council of Firefighters Behavioral Health Committee and is working with both to collectively organize and identify best practices utilizing subject matter experts.





163 Haz Mat RESPONSES





Five new Peer **Support Team** members added in 2023



Each team member received 20 hours of training

## **EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES**

#### **CARES**

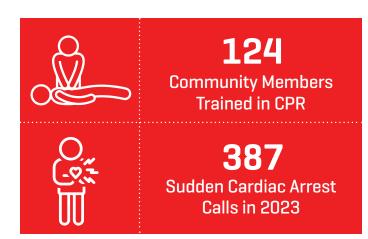
The CARES program aims to reduce community risk and build healthy communities by meeting underlying healthcare, human, and social service needs for CARES-enrolled patients of the VRFA and contracted areas.

603 REFERRALS 377

**ENROLLMENTS** 

Two social workers take those referrals and work with patients to enroll them in the CARES program. In 2023, we contracted with the University of Washington to establish VRFA CARES as an internship site for social work students. In October, three interns joined the program.

The CARES program received 603 referrals in 2023 including 377 new enrollments, 266 unique patients referred once, and 90 patients referred more then once. Six months post intervention there was a 50% decrease in 911 calls and a 44.75% decrease in emergency department visits for those patients enrolled in the cares program.





#### **CARES PATIENTS**



**50%** decrease in 911 calls

44.75% decrease in emergency department visits



#### **CPR**

King County has one of the highest survival rates for witnessed sudden cardiac arrest. The increased survival rate is due to the number of CPR-trained community members in King County willing to provide CPR to their fellow community members.

The VRFA has joined forces with Puget Sound and Renton Regional Fire Authorities to create an enhanced CPR and First Aid Program for our community members. Certified firefighter/EMTs teach classes using a nationally recognized curriculum. The sessions are on Saturdays, with locations varying between Auburn, Kent, and Renton.



# **COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION (CRR)**

The VRFA evaluates and provides risk reduction with a comprehensive approach combining prevention, planning, and ongoing active mitigation. The Fire Marshal coordinates personnel in risk management through building and fire plan review to ensure compliance with national and locally adopted codes and standards, inspections of building life safety systems, target hazard inspections, code compliance inspections, and investigation of qualifying fire incidents to identify hazard trends throughout the response area.

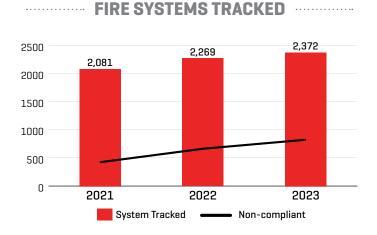
#### **COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION INSPECTIONS**

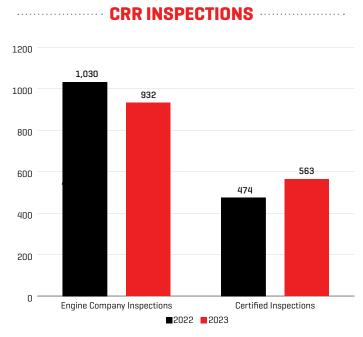
Community risk inspections focus on commercial, industrial, and multi-family buildings. In 2023, certified inspections increased by 16 percent, and companylevel inspections decreased by 10 percent with a 99 percent completion rate.

#### **DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

The Fire Marshal's Office collaborates with our member cities to provide various development services. CRR personnel provide analysis and guidance to new businesses through pre-construction application, construction plan review, construction inspections, and comprehensive land use analysis.

#### FIRE SYSTEM MAINTENANCE & TESTING





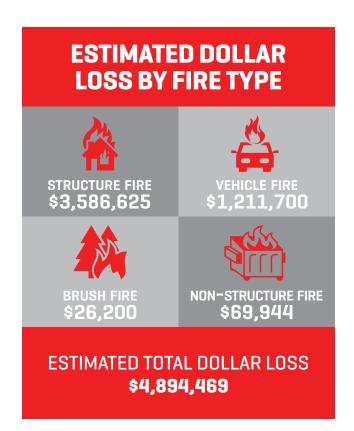
Certified inspections are conducted by CRR staff who have completed the Fire Inspector 1 certification. Company-level inspections are completed by on-duty crews in their response area.



## **FIRE INVESTIGATION**

The Fire Investigation Unit (FIU) aims to determine the origin and cause of all non-company level fire investigations. The Investigation unit operates with the intent of documenting and ultimately reducing the occurrence of incendiary and preventable accidental fires through the identification of unsafe/recalled products by utilizing local, state, and national resources.

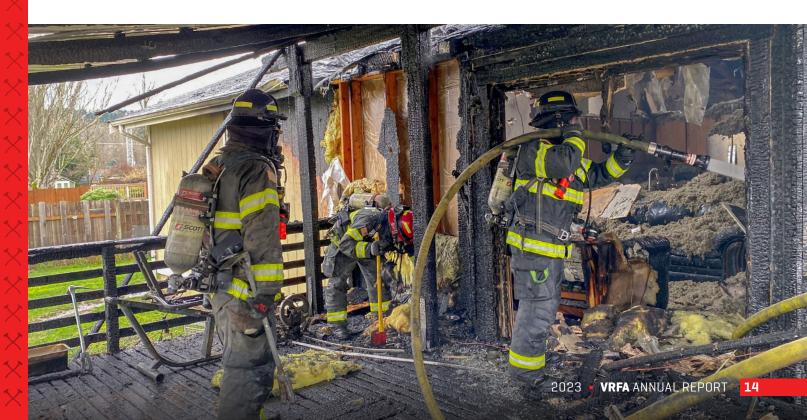
In 2023, the FIU completed 83 scene investigations.





#### 2023 FIRES BY CITY





# **COMMUNITY OUTREACH - PUBLIC** INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

The Public Information and Education Division provides fire and life safety information and education to schools, businesses, and the community through in-person training, classroom visits, printed publications, social media, and traditional media. The division is comprised of two public information and education officers and four firefighter specialists.

#### **PUBLIC EDUCATION**

The Public Education team completed many classroom visits, including two new schools, through the diligent work of existing and former education team members. Station tour requests also increased, prompting the VRFA to implement designated "tour days" to enhance the experience for visitors. In the spring, we visited 163 classrooms, reaching 4,900 students. In November, we held Scout Night at the Fire Station, and partnered with Puget Sound Fire Authority again to provide two opportunities for scouts to visit a fire station.

## **2023 COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

**SMOKE ALARMS** 





#### CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS

were given or installed for seniors and Low-Income Homeowners.

#### WERE GIVEN OR INSTALLED FOR SENIORS AND LOW-INCOME HOMEOWNERS.

COSTCO

World Vision

The Costco Corporation and World Vision provided the smoke & carbon monoxide alarms through a grant.

**Energizer** 

The Energizer Company supplied the batteries through a grant award.





We provided 83 bicycle helmets to children and adults in need. The Auburn Area Fire Medic Campaign awarded the

VRFA a grant to purchase the helmets.







**24** BUSINESSES received fire extinguisher

and/or evacuation training



Classroom Visits







# **PUBLIC INFORMATION**

Public Information and Education Officers manage the website and social media content almost daily and continue to monitor and research new social media sites and trends. They also work with the VRFA Analytics Manager to identify fire and injury trends for targeted messaging.



**20,995** users visited the VRFA website



99,651 newsletters mailed



**741,467** post views on Facebook



**76,929** post views on Instagram



**280,309** number of times tweets appeared in newsfeeds



**92,959** number of times posts appeared in NextDoor newsfeeds



**9,983** number of times posts appeared in LinkedIn newsfeeds



**12,673** number of times videos appeared in YouTube newsfeeds





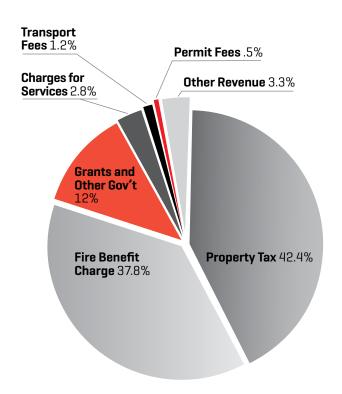


# FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION

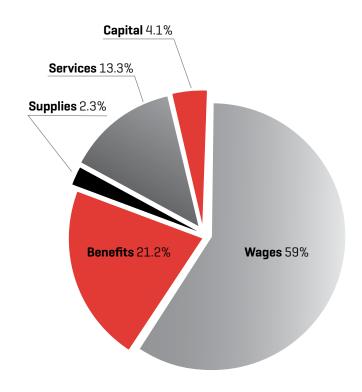
#### **FINANCE**

The VRFA Finance team is committed to our core responsibilities including budget development, financial audits, and resource availability.

#### 2023 REVENUE



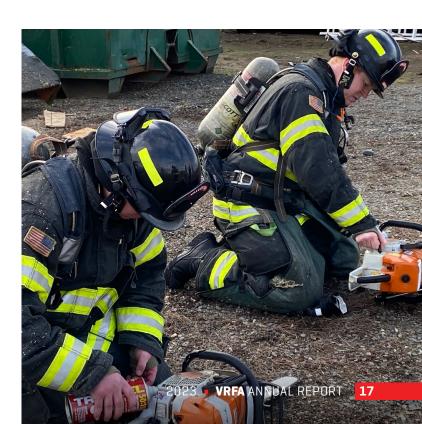
#### 2023 EXPENDITURES



#### **HUMAN RESOURCES**

The Human Resources Division supports employees by providing access to benefits, programs, and resources while maintaining policies and best practices that serve to limit organizational risk. In 2023, the Human Resources Division achieved the following:

- Recruited and hired 18 employees, including 14 entry-level firefighters, Logistics Assistant, Facilities Maintenance Technician, Administrative Assistant Community Risk Reduction, IT Services Technician, Emergency Management Coordinator, and Application Engineer.
- Facilitated eight (8) civil service tests and established eligibility lists for Ladder Specialist, Fire Marshal, Battalion Chief, Deputy Fire Marshal, Medical Program Specialist, Hazardous Materials Specialist, and two Entry Level Firefighter tests.



## SUPPORT SERVICES

#### **FACILITIES**

The facilities maintenance program provides all employees with safe and appropriate working environments and conditions. In 2023, Facilities completed the following:

- Interviewed and filled Facilities Maintenance Technician position.
- Purchase of real estate at 36th & I Street NE in Auburn for future Fire Station 36.
- Purchase of real estate in Pacific for future Fire Station 38.
- Updated Stations 31 and 35 to accommodate additional personnel in 2024.

#### FLEET

The fleet program exists to increase the longevity of the fleet to maintain a high level of reliability and in-service time. In 2023, Fleet completed the following:

- Received 2023 Aid Car and placed into service.
- Placed order for Brush Truck after bid process.
- Placed order for three Pierce fire engines via Sourcewell purchasing co-op.
- Placed order for one Pierce tender via Sourcewell purchasing co-op.
- Placed order for a 2023 Chevy Silverado (Command Vehicle) via WA State contract.
- Surplus of three staff vehicles.

#### **LOGISTICS (TOOLS & EQUIPMENT)**

The logistics program provides operations crews with the necessary tools and equipment to accomplish their mission. This includes the budget and selection of new tools, repair, and maintenance of existing tools, and the surplus of tools that have reached the end of their lifecycle. In 2023, Logistics accomplished the following:

- Purchased tools to be placed on the aid car.
- Tested all hose and ladders.
- Inspected and cleaned 265 sets of bunker gear.



# **THANK YOU**



Thank you, Pacific Mayor Leanne Guier for serving on the Board of Governance for over 10 years.



Thank you, Auburn Council Member Robyn Mulenga for two years of service on the Board of Governance.



## **VALLEY REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY**

Headquarters Fire Station 31 1101 D Street NE, Auburn, WA 98002 [253] 288-5800