



FIRE WATCH

STATION 36 OFFICIALLY OPENS!

We are excited to announce that Station 36 is now officially open and ready to serve the community! Construction was completed in mid-August, after which our support services teams quickly moved furniture and essential supplies into the station to prepare it. By mid-September, Engine 336 crews, who had been temporarily stationed at Station 31 since early 2024, completed their move and began responding to emergency calls from their new home at Station 36.

Located at 810 30th Street NE, Station 36 is strategically positioned to serve north Auburn. This new station is expected to significantly improve emergency response times and resource deployment in the area. In 2025 alone, Engine 336 responded to 1,802 calls, making it the busiest engine company in the VRFA.

We invite you to stay tuned for information about our upcoming public open house! This event will offer a behind-the-scenes tour of Station 36, a chance to see our advanced equipment, and an opportunity to meet the dedicated firefighters who serve you every day.



GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY FOR STATION 38 KICKS OFF NEXT CHAPTER OF SERVICE



On Thursday, July 30, VRFA staff, firefighters, members of the Board of Governance, and local residents gathered at 418 Tacoma Blvd. N. in Pacific to officially break ground on the much-anticipated Station 38.

When completed, Station 38 will house an engine crew of one captain and two firefighters, dedicated to serving the Algona and Pacific communities. Construction is now underway, with completion expected in Fall 2027. We'll keep you updated as this exciting project progresses!

CELEBRATING THE CAREER AND RETIREMENT OF FIRE CHIEF BRAD THOMPSON



BRAD THOMPSON

The Valley Regional Fire Authority (VRFA) announced the retirement of Fire Chief Brad Thompson on June 1, marking the end of a distinguished 27-year career dedicated to serving the communities of Algona, Auburn, and Pacific. Rising through the ranks since joining the Auburn Fire Department in 1999, Chief Thompson became known for his exemplary leadership, earning multiple honors, including two Meritorious Unit Citations and the VRFA Integrity Award. Colleagues and city leaders alike praised his unwavering commitment to public service, the

strong relationships he built, and his focus on strengthening the organization's culture and mission.

During his tenure as Fire Chief, Thompson led the VRFA to new heights, including achieving international accreditation, expanding emergency services, and securing vital funding for future growth. Reflecting on his career, Thompson emphasized the importance of trust, collaboration, and human-centered leadership, encouraging the next generation of firefighters to stay mission-focused and nurture the organization's core values. As he embarks on his well-earned retirement, Chief Thompson looks forward to new adventures with his family, leaving behind a legacy that will continue to inspire the VRFA and the communities it serves.

TIM DAY APPOINTED AS VALLEY REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY'S NEW FIRE CHIEF



TIM DAY

Deputy Chief Tim Day has been appointed the next Fire Chief of the Valley Regional Fire Authority (VRFA). He began his tenure on July 1st following the retirement of Chief Brad Thompson. With a career spanning nearly three decades, Day has served the Auburn, Algona, and Pacific communities in various roles, including Captain, Battalion Chief, and Deputy Chief. He briefly worked with the Kirkland Fire Department before returning to the VRFA, most recently leading the Community Risk Reduction division and playing a pivotal role in the successful 2023 Prop 1 ballot initiative. Day's leadership is widely

praised for his calm presence, deep understanding of public safety, and commitment to the communities VRFA serves.

As Fire Chief, Day plans to lead with transparency, data-driven decision-making, and a strong focus on supporting VRFA personnel. He is dedicated to maintaining close connections with the community, investing in staff development, and ensuring the organization meets growing service needs with fiscal responsibility. Day aims to build on VRFA's tradition of excellence by empowering employees, strengthening community partnerships, and upholding a high standard of emergency response. The VRFA looks forward to Day's leadership and the positive direction he will bring to the department.



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FIRE PREVENTION WEEK 2026

FIRE PREVENTION WEEK™
SAFE CHARGING IS A SUPERPOWER!

The Valley Regional Fire Authority is committed to your safety, which is why this Fire Prevention Week™ highlights Safe Charging. With more households using electric devices and vehicles, understanding proper charging practices for electronics, bikes, scooters, and cars is essential. Safe charging empowers you to protect your home.

Follow these tips when **charging personal items:**

Cheap Charger? Don't chance it. Use the cord and charger that came with your device or one approved by the manufacturer.

Soft Surface? Hard Pass. Charge on a hard, flat surface like a table, desk, or bare floor.

Fully charged? Time to Unplug. Unplug your device when it is fully charged.

For tools and rides, charge outside. Charge large items like e-bikes, scooters, and power tools outside when possible. Do not block exits when charging.

Feels Hot? Stop using it. Stop using your device if it feels very hot, starts to swell, smells strange, leaks, smokes, or makes popping or hissing sounds.

On a Flight? Keep it in Sight. When on a plane, keep devices visible while charging. Do not charge e-cigarettes or vapes on the plane. Tell a flight attendant if you notice a problem with your device.

Follow these tips when **charging your electric vehicle:**

- Use devices that are listed by a qualified testing laboratory.
- Read and follow all manufacturer directions.

- Check chargers and cords for damage before using. Never use if damaged.
- Do not use extension cords with the charger.
- Install charging equipment in safe locations. Keep away from busy areas and things that could catch fire.
- Keep charging items out of reach of children and animals when not in use.
- Cover the charging station outlet to keep water out.
- Before charging an electric vehicle at home, have a qualified electrician:
 - Check your electrical system to see if it can handle charging.
 - Install a new circuit just for your charging device.



Firefighters at Valley Regional Fire Authority are always here to help.

Lend them a hand with these tips for charging safely, and remember to: Plug in! Power up! Stay safe!



Scan for more information about Fire Prevention Week™.

ELECTRIC VEHICLE FIRES—WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Electric vehicles are becoming more common in our community. With that comes questions about electric-vehicle fires. To start off, there is no evidence that electric vehicles catch fire more frequently than gasoline or diesel-powered vehicles. Outside of very rare cases, most vehicle fires, regardless of type, are caused by collisions. While our firefighters approach every vehicle fire with the same priority, protecting people and keeping the scene safe, electric vehicles can present some unique challenges.

If Your Vehicle Catches Fire

Whether your vehicle is electric, hybrid, or gasoline-powered, the most important thing is simple: Get out. Get away. Call 911. If you see smoke or flames coming from your vehicle, safely pull over if possible, turn the vehicle off (or, in some cases, for EVs, put it in park), and get everyone out. Move a safe distance away and do not return for personal belongings.

Don't attempt to fight the fire yourself. A vehicle fire can spread quickly, and an electric vehicle may contain high-voltage electrical components and a large battery pack. Stay a safe distance away and wait for firefighters to arrive.

Why Are EV Fires Different?

Electric vehicles use large lithium-ion battery packs. If the battery is damaged or exposed to extreme heat, individual battery cells can enter a process called thermal runaway. This can produce significant heat and cause the problem to spread from one cell to another.

One of the biggest challenges for firefighters is that a battery can remain hot even after visible flames have been extinguished. In some cases, this can lead to reignition hours later.

EVs also contain high-voltage components. Firefighters must be cautious and treat damaged electrical components as potential hazards.



How Do Firefighters Handle EV Fires?

When firefighters arrive, they begin with a size-up: What type of vehicle is involved? Where is the fire? Are all occupants out safely? Are there nearby exposures, such as vehicles or buildings?

VRFA Firefighters have an EV plug tool designed to connect to electric vehicles and force them into park to help stabilize them. This device indicates to firefighters whether the vehicle is safely immobilized. We also have tools to help fight specific electric-vehicle fires, including a unique nozzle placed under the vehicle to cool the battery compartment and a large blanket to try to suffocate the fire.

Due to the possibility of battery involvement, electric vehicle fires often require more time and resources than a typical vehicle fire. These fires also trigger a hazmat response, bringing in specialized resources to handle them.



Electric vehicles are a new challenge for firefighters, but using new resources and training, the VRFA is prepared to handle them and keep our community safe.

Scan for more information about electric vehicle safety.



SCOUT NIGHT

at the
Fire Station

Wednesday, November 18

5:30 - 8 PM

VRFA Station 33
500 182nd Ave E
Auburn, WA 98092

Meet Badge Requirements

First Aid

Knot Tying

Emergency Preparedness

Cooking Safety

Smoke Alarms

Fire Escape Planning

Register Now
253.288.5881
Public.Info@vrfa.org

FIRE CHIEF’S MESSAGE



TIM DAY

On April 15, 2026, I was honored to be named the VRFA’s next Fire Chief by our Board of Governance, replacing retiring Fire Chief Brad Thompson. As you’ll read in this issue of Fire Watch, Chief Thompson’s leadership of the VRFA illuminated a path that will guide the organization into the future.

You’ll also read about the opening of Station 36 in north Auburn and the groundbreaking at the future home of Station 38 in Pacific. These two projects, along with the in-progress remodel of a commercial building in downtown Auburn that will be our Administrative Headquarters, were funded by Proposition 1 in 2023. Although there’s still much work to be done to complete these and future projects, we cannot thank you enough for your trust and support.

In addition to new facilities, we’ve welcomed five new team members to the VRFA over the past few months, including three firefighters and two social

workers. Along with these new folks, six members have earned promotions within the VRFA. We’ve also said goodbye to two long-serving members with the retirements of Battalion Chief Gary Barker and Captain Gervase Henson. With 67 years of service between them, Gary and Gervase will be missed; we wish them well in retirement.

These new team members and newly appointed leaders will have the opportunity to serve our communities in many ways. Twenty VRFA members on IAFF Local 1352’s Stair Climb Team, for example, gave their time in March to raise money and climb the Columbia Tower in full gear and while breathing bottled air. Not only is this an impressive physical feat, but their participation embodies our values of selfless service, integrity, and grit.

Our department is also honored to aid our neighboring communities threatened by wildfires. As you’ll read, this summer’s wildfire season was unprecedented. Working collaboratively with Washington and other state agencies, the VRFA deployed equipment and personnel throughout the summer to help fight these devastating fires. Our ability to do this work, and to help beyond our

organization’s borders, is made possible through the commitment of our entire organization, including the firefighters and officers who deploy, the personnel who work extra shifts here at VRFA, and the administrative professionals who ensure that the VRFA is fully reimbursed for the costs associated with these deployments. I’m in awe of their commitment and grateful for their service.

Finally, the theme of this year’s Fire Prevention Week, Safe Charging, is a reminder that community safety is a shared responsibility. While the VRFA stands ready to respond, there is no substitute for thoughtful fire prevention activities, including the charging of electronic devices. In fact, fulfilling the VRFA’s vision – Working together to build a safe and healthy community – depends on the collective efforts of our community members, firefighters, and staff.

Thank you for your continued support, trust, and partnership. We are here for you.

Tim Day
Fire Chief, Valley Regional Fire Authority

PROMOTIONS



JASON HERMAN
PROMOTED TO DEPUTY CHIEF OF COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION



JORDAN GUSTAFSON
PROMOTED TO BATTALION CHIEF



GUY SMITH
PROMOTED TO BATTALION CHIEF



STEWART ALWAY
PROMOTED TO CAPTAIN



BLAKE LAIDLAW
PROMOTED TO CAPTAIN



CORY WALLACE
PROMOTED TO CAPTAIN

RETIREMENTS



GARY BARKER
BATTALION CHIEF

After 34 years of dedicated service, Battalion Chief Gary Barker retired from the Valley Regional Fire Authority [VRFA]. Beginning his career with the Auburn Fire Department in 1992, after four years in the U.S. Navy and time as a volunteer, Barker rose through the ranks thanks to his leadership

and commitment, serving as Captain and then Battalion Chief. Known for his expertise in technical rescue and his role as Medical Program Specialist, Barker earned numerous accolades, including Firefighter of the Year and multiple unit citations. Colleagues praised his mentorship, professionalism, and dry humor, while Barker himself reflects fondly on the camaraderie and challenging calls he experienced with his team. As he embarks on a well-earned retirement, Chief Barker looks forward to new adventures and cherishes the lasting friendships forged over an exemplary career.

THE VRFA WELCOMES NEW TEAM MEMBERS



BRUCE STUART | FIREFIGHTER

Bruce Stuart was raised in Fall City, WA, and earned a bachelor’s degree in communications from Western Washington University. Before joining the VRFA, he worked in ecological restoration and spent six seasons in wildland fire on engine, helitack, and rappel crews. Outside of work, he enjoys traveling, live music, baking, and kitesurfing.



CAMERON JARVIS | FIREFIGHTER

Cameron Jarvis, a Black Diamond native and Enumclaw High School graduate, studied mathematics and physics at Odessa College in Texas, where he also played collegiate baseball. Before joining the VRFA, he worked as a semi-trailer mechanic, tree service professional, and foreman with InfraSource. Outside of work, he enjoys hunting, fishing, Jeep adventures, dirt biking, bowling, and softball.



CARSON BROWN | FIREFIGHTER

Carson Brown, an Auburn native and Auburn Riverside High School graduate, studied psychology at Grand Canyon University. Before joining the VRFA, he worked as an EMT in the mental health Unit at the Maricopa County Jail. Outside of work, he enjoys running, snowboarding, and camping.



CHRIS BARRANS | SOCIAL WORKER

Chris Barrans comes to the VRFA with prior experience in HIV Medical Case Management and Social Work, all here in the South Sound. Chris earned his Master of Social Work degree at the University of Washington. He is a lifelong Washingtonian and enjoys the PNW outdoors, including hiking, swimming, and biking with family.



CATHY COOPER | SOCIAL WORKER

Cathy Cooper comes to the VRFA as a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker with expertise in medical social work, dementia care, and person-centered practices. She is committed to building trust, offering support, and ensuring patients feel heard.



GERVASE HENSON
CAPTAIN

After 23 years of exemplary service with the Valley Regional Fire Authority, Captain Gervase Henson has retired, leaving behind a remarkable legacy of compassion, leadership, and dedication. Beginning his career in 2003 after serving as a U.S. Army medic and nurse, Henson

brought a deep commitment to helping others, which was evident throughout his tenure as a firefighter, instructor, and committee member. Recognized with numerous awards and praised by colleagues for his caring nature and professionalism, Henson reflects fondly on the relationships built during his career and looks forward to new adventures in retirement. His impact on the department and the community will be felt for years to come.

THE VRFA GIVES BACK

The Local 1352 - Valley Professional Firefighters Stair Climb team was back again this year for the annual Blood Cancer United's Firefighter Big Climb at the Columbia Center in downtown Seattle.

The event is highlighted as the world's largest on-air stair-climbing competition. This year, over 2,300 firefighters from three countries and 28 states participated. It is open to all professional, volunteer, and retired firefighters. The competition is simple: put on your 60 lbs. of gear, climb 69 flights [1,356 steps], gain 788 vertical feet, and reach the top floor of the Columbia Center as fast as possible. The goal, however, is to raise funds and awareness to combat the ever-increasing rates of blood cancers, as well as the higher likelihood of blood cancer in the fire service. This year, the event raised over \$2.5 million. The Valley Professional Firefighters team, led by Team Captain Ryan Simpson, ranked in the top 30 for fundraising, raising over \$19,000. This is an extremely difficult task and event to complete, but it is a small fraction of the heavy, grueling journey that blood cancer patients endure during treatment. Thank you for your support.

Finally, you can't put a bunch of firefighters together without expecting a little friendly competition. The Valley Professional Firefighters team of 20 members took the opportunity to test itself against



other departments nationwide. In the end, the team placed 31st overall out of 317 teams. The team members agree that the event is difficult but enjoy the challenge, camaraderie, fitness, and support. See you next year!



SUPPORTING OUR STATE THROUGH AN UNPRECEDENTED WILDFIRE SEASON

This year's wildfire season has tested the resilience of communities across Washington State, and VRFA crews have been on the front lines from the start. As of mid-August, VRFA personnel had already been deployed to 24 incidents across the state and region, with many members moving directly from one wildfire to the next. Deployments can last up to 14 days, and several of our personnel have spent much of the summer protecting homes and critical infrastructure.

The Spokane Complex Fires were detrimental to the Spokane communities and to the State of Washington. On August 1st, a VRFA Strike team, overseen by Battalion Chief Jordan Gustafson, was mobilized to the Spokane region. Arriving around midnight that evening, they immediately began work on the Old Trails Fire. The VRFA team arrived on a Type 1 engine. A Type 1 engine is a structural fire engine commonly used in urban and suburban areas. Our engine was staffed with a dedicated crew of four firefighters as part of a coordinated strike team. When able, crews also responded to structure fires. All this work was conducted alongside fellow firefighters from across the state, nation, and as far as Australia.

Days before the Spokane Complex Fires ignited, VRFA Captain Ryan Chadwick, a Strike 1 Team Leader, was deployed at the Railroad Fire in

Vantage before being reassigned to the Ransier Fire in Yakima, and later the Bradeen Hills Fire north of Spokane. On August 3, Chadwick's Strike Team was released from their previous assignment and sent directly to the Autumn Lane Fire in Spokane. There, they worked on defensible space, containment, structure fires, extinguishing spot fires, reinforcing fire lines from further spread, and mop-up efforts.

Finding Humanity in Hard Moments

Amid long and exhausting days, VRFA crews still found moments of compassion and connection. When families returned to areas affected by fire, firefighters helped search for irreplaceable items such as rings, small keepsakes, cherished memorabilia, and anything that might have survived the destruction. Crews encountered a small but memorable moment of hope when they discovered that a family's pond with koi fish had survived the fire. Our VRFA Strike Team recovered 19 koi fish and returned them to the family, a gesture that brought a bit of relief during overwhelming loss. Incidents like this reminded our crews that humanity was present even in the hardest days.

While VRFA's primary mission remains to serve and protect our local community, we take pride in extending our resources and expertise to large-scale incidents when communities need them most.



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

- Tim Day**
Fire Chief/Administrator
- Steve Zehnder**
Deputy Chief of Operations
- Jason Herman**
Deputy Chief of Community Risk Reduction
- Mark Horaski**
Chief Financial Officer
- Sarah Borden**
Human Resources Director

Board of Governance

- Nancy Backus**
Chair, City of Auburn Mayor
- Troy Linnell**
Vice-Chair, City of Algona Mayor

Members

- Hanan Amer**
Auburn City Council
- Tim Fairley**
Algona City Council
- Kerry Garberding**
Pacific City Council
- Vic Kave**
City of Pacific Mayor
- Eric Petersen**
Pacific City Council
- Tracy Taylor-Turner**
Auburn City Council
- Bill Thomas**
Algona City Council

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VRFA HEADQUARTERS

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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