

# THE MONITOR

News from West Pierce Fire & Rescue

*Proudly serving the communities of Lakewood, University Place and Steilacoom*



## IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 Letter from the Chief
- 3 Connected CARE Program
- 5 Enhancing Service Delivery
- 6 Grant-funded Apparatus & Training
- 7 First Female Paramedic Crew
- 8 Smoke Alarm Program





## Letter from the Chief

It is hard to believe it has been more than 20 years since the University Place Fire Department built their new headquarters station on Drexler Drive and the Lakewood Fire Department built their new headquarters on Pacific Highway. Both stations were a reflection of rapidly growing communities and an ever-expanding need for emergency services.

Much has changed since 2001. In 2011, the two departments merged to create West Pierce Fire & Rescue. Today, an extremely diverse set of emergency services are provided across 31 square miles from Day Island to Tillicum and serves a community of more than 100,000 people.

With all the changes to our department and the ever-growing list of services we provide, the district has begun a formal assessment of infrastructure requirements for the next 20 years and beyond. This analysis has identified four key areas of need. The first is a new fire station. Prior to the merger, neither department maintained a station near the border of the two cities. Improving response times by filling the service gap between our most northern Lakewood station and our University Place station has been an established goal since the merger.

The second priority is upgrading our training center. Our training tower was dedicated in 1972 and at that time, the department had 21 full-time firefighters. Today, we train over 165 firefighters, host an annual recruit academy, and support regional fire and technical rescue training. Unfortunately, due to its age, the tower no longer meets appropriate codes to allow for live fire training.

The third priority is a new emergency operations support center (EOSC). The EOSC will consolidate our fleet and facility maintenance divisions and our operational supply warehousing and distribution center. Our existing vehicle maintenance facility

was designed prior to the merger to support only the Lakewood Fire Department fleet. Over the past 20 years, our fleet has doubled in size and the facility is no longer large enough to support the workload. Additionally, the quantity of operational supplies, fire and medical equipment, and personal protective equipment (PPE) we are required to maintain has far exceeded our storage capacity. We now store much of it in non-climate-controlled container boxes outside of our stations.

The final key area of need is an upgrade and expansion of our Oakbrook fire station. Built in the early 1970s, this station requires updating to adequately support the additional personnel housed there, as well as an additional medic unit that now responds from the station.

These major projects cannot happen without community support. We are currently working on a capital facilities improvement and finance plan we will be sharing with the community in 2023, along with a ballot measure to support the work.

I am very proud of what the community and our department have accomplished over the past 20 years and I look forward to the great things we will achieve over the next 20. On behalf of every West Pierce Fire & Rescue employee, I would like to thank you for your ongoing support.

Jim Sharp  
Fire Chief



# Honoring Those Lost on 9/11

When a firefighter begins their career, a badge is pinned on their uniform, symbolizing their dedication to the community and its safety. This ceremony is momentous for a variety of reasons and the sequentially numbered badge each West Pierce Fire & Rescue (WPFR) employee wears represents their personal commitment to the West Pierce community.

On September 11, 2001, 343 firefighters lost their lives on that tragic day in our nation's history. WPFR has a piece of steel from the World Trade Center proudly displayed in the center of the 9/11 Reflection Park, located in front of Station 31 in University Place.

With the dedication to **NEVER FORGET** those who paid the ultimate sacrifice trying to save others, WPFR has retired badge number 343, in memory of those firefighters. This is just one way to help preserve the memory, heroism and sacrifice of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. During this year's remembrance ceremony on September 11, WPFR retired the badge and presented the display in which it will stay to honor those lost.



## Connected CARE Program

In 2022, West Pierce Fire & Rescue (WPFR) implemented a Connected Community Access, Referral and Education (CARE) program which works to identify and assist those in need of services, but not the 9-1-1 system. The goal of this program is to address commonly identified barriers to appropriate healthcare access, improve community health and reduce the utilization of emergency medical resources whenever possible.

WPFR's Connected CARE Program Manager, Karen Gilbert, has been a Registered Nurse for 26 years, where 11 were dedicated to case management. She is an integral part in helping those in the community who need it. Gilbert works with those who need assistance navigating in areas such as facility placement, transportation, food, social services, chronic disease management, healthcare access and behavioral health, to name a few. Gilbert also collaborates with the Lakewood Police Department's Behavioral Health Team (pictured above) and other agencies who provide vital services in the community.

Often times, police and firefighters will respond to 9-1-1 calls where people need help finding the appropriate community services. By having programs available within both agencies, it helps to ensure the community is being provided the highest levels of service.

Historically, firefighters have not been trained in how to access these types of resources or how to navigate and coordinate them for patients. Firefighters are being trained by Gilbert to recognize and identify patients in need of these types of resources. After referring patients directly to her, she can evaluate their medical, social and behavioral health needs and find the appropriate resource to connect them.

Implementing this program addresses an ongoing need within the community. Historically, some patients have used 9-1-1 and the emergency room as the first option to access care. Our goal is to provide patients with education on available resources, empowering them to manage their own healthcare, mental health and social needs.





# Upcoming EVENTS

## FIRE PREVENTION MONTH October 2022

This year celebrates the National Fire Protection Association's 100th year of Fire Prevention Week. The theme is "**Fire won't wait. Plan your escape.**" This campaign educates the community about the importance of having and practicing a fire escape plan, which can save your life.

## FALL SAFETY DAY October 22 from 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. Station 21; 5000 Steilacoom Blvd. SW

Join us for Fall Safety Day where there will be fun activities for families, great safety information and of course, free pumpkins for kids!

## SANTA AT THE STATION December 2022

Santa is coming to town! Please visit [westpierce.org/santa](http://westpierce.org/santa) for details.

## CERT CLASSES 2023 class schedule coming soon!

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) classes educate the community how to help themselves in the first few hours or days following a disaster, before emergency responders are able to reach them to render professional help. Visit our website for more information and the 2023 schedule as it becomes available.

## Connect with us!



FACEBOOK /westpierce



TWITTER @westpierce



INSTAGRAM @westpiercefir

## GUIDE TO SERVICES

### PRESCHOOL & DAYCARE EDUCATION



Fire safety curriculum are available for preschools and daycares to use in the classroom at no cost.

Teachers conduct several lessons of the curriculum and WPFR personnel come in to teach the final lesson so small children learn firefighters are their friends.

### CUSTOM-FIT HELMETS & LIFE JACKETS



Fittings are scheduled by appointment and the wearer must be present in order to purchase. Please call or visit our website to schedule an appointment.

Helmets are available for \$11-15 and life jackets for \$17 each.

### CAR SEAT INSTALLATIONS & CHECKS



Did you know that more than 50% of children are improperly restrained in vehicles?

Residents within West Pierce may schedule an appointment with a certified Child Passenger Safety Technician to have their car seat installed or checked for proper installation.

### BLOOD PRESSURE CHECKS



Stop by any fire station to have your blood pressure checked!

Please be advised when firefighters are out of the station on 9-1-1 calls or training, there may not be anyone available to assist. Thank you in advance for your patience and understanding.

### STATION TOURS



Station tours are available for schools and community groups. Safety lessons and tours of the station and apparatus are held, all while learning what it's like to be a firefighter.

If you would like to bring a group to the fire station for a visit, please call or visit our website to schedule.



# Enhancing Service Delivery

With 9-1-1 calls for service continuing to increase every year, West Pierce Fire & Rescue (WPFR) continues to evolve as an all-hazards response provider. Adaptive approaches in resource deployment to address the demands of increased call volume has been essential to the needs of the community.

It is important to evaluate these needs on a regular basis to ensure the highest quality services are delivered. WPFR has implemented changes to enhance both fire and Emergency Medical Service (EMS) resource delivery to better serve the community. In 2021, two major changes to service delivery were made, including a Squad and an additional medic unit. In 2020, WPFR implemented a two-person resource known as a "Squad" on a trial basis. That unit was implemented permanently in 2021, after much success during its trial period.

The Squad responds in a heavy-duty passenger-style pickup truck with a cache of tools and equipment. The primary task of this smaller resource is to provide some relief to the busier, larger, conventional apparatus, like fire engines or a ladder truck, during peak times throughout the day.

By targeting specific 9-1-1 call types, the smaller resource can adequately respond and provide the necessary services to the community. The redistribution of calls responded to by the Squad has additional benefits, such as saving on fuel usage, reducing wear and tear on large apparatus, and improving resource availability, especially that of medic units.

While focusing on a more adaptable EMS staffing model, the

number of transport-capable medic units staffed 24 hours per day was increased from four to five. This additional medic unit was placed into service in the Oakbrook neighborhood of Lakewood, responding from Station 24. This resource increases response and transport capabilities to serve the whole community while addressing growing call volume.

The first two words of West Pierce's motto are "Respond Efficiently." A timely response with the appropriate resource to each call is crucial to achieving this goal. Often times, what firefighters find when they arrive on a call is very different from what they were dispatched to. While it is impractical and unsustainable to simply send more resources to every 9-1-1 call to ensure adequate personnel and tools are available to mitigate emergencies, being flexible and adaptable is critical.

In order to provide maximum flexibility, each of the five medic units are staffed with a minimum of one paramedic and one Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). This staffing approach provides the medic units with the ability to deliver the best care possible to patients, whether they are dealing with a minor illness or suffering from a critical, life-threatening event.

These improvements will allow WPFR to continue to provide a high level of service while addressing the ever-increasing number of emergency calls. The community's support in helping WPFR make these improvements is something everyone can be proud of. WPFR will expand the Squad resource with a second unit, located in the University Place station, in the fall of 2022.







## Technical Rescue Apparatus Now In Service

West Pierce Fire & Rescue (WPFR) recently took ownership of the new Rescue 20 technical rescue apparatus and held a “push-in” ceremony. WPFR personnel washed and pushed the new vehicle into the apparatus bay at its home station, Station 20, located on Pacific Highway in Lakewood.

This ceremonial tradition dates back to the 1800s when horse-drawn equipment was used for firefighting. Since the animals were unable to back into the station, firefighters would detach the horses and push the equipment into the apparatus bay. Now, WPFR keeps this legacy alive by continuing to push in new apparatus when it is put into service.

The newest addition to WPFR's fleet, Rescue 20, is a technical rescue vehicle designed to respond to various 9-1-1 calls, such as confined space, trench collapse, high/low angle, rope, and heavy vehicle and machinery rescues. WPFR is a part of a regional technical rescue team called the Pierce County Special Operations Response Team (PCSORT), which is a group of specially trained firefighters within multiple fire departments throughout the county. When a technical rescue call comes in, this team can respond anywhere in the county to assist and safely mitigate the situation.



Rescue 20 was grant-funded and was in production for more than a year and a half. Once WPFR took ownership, it was outfitted with equipment, supplies and gear needed to respond efficiently to these types of complex, high-risk calls. This piece of equipment will replace the current technical rescue vehicle, which was donated to the Lakewood Fire Department more than 20 years ago. It will now be repurposed and used elsewhere within the fire department.



## Grant Funding Obtained for Wildland Urban Interface Training

The 2020 Sumner Grade Fire in Bonney Lake was a stark reminder of the increasing threat of brush fires in western Washington. Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) is considered the area of transition from unoccupied land and human development.

In a concerted effort to better prepare for the growing challenges of brush fires that continue to threaten the community, WPFR has focused on training being a critical element. Coupled with training is a plan to have smaller, equipped vehicles available to complement traditional fire engines during these emergencies.

Traditional structural firefighting is very different from wildland urban interface firefighting. It takes specialized training and equipment to better prepare firefighters to operate safely and effectively in these hazardous environments. WUI training is designed to decrease the loss of human life and homes resulting from the increasing risk of wildfire ignitions.

WPFR was successfully awarded over \$350,000 through a federal grant to train every firefighter for this specialized type of risk. This grant funding will provide firefighters with the critical skills necessary to operate effectively in the WUI environment.

Another essential element to fight WUI incidents is the use of passenger truck-sized vehicles. Outfitted to deliver water through hose lines, these “brush-style” vehicles are smaller and provide an off-road capable platform far more maneuverable than traditional fire engines. The combination of appropriate training and specialized vehicles are significant forward strides in addressing the realities of longer, warmer, dryer fire seasons.



## First Female Paramedic Crew

When Firefighter/Paramedics Haley Harn (left) and Solveig Waterfall (right) started their careers with West Pierce Fire & Rescue (WPFR), little did they know they would be a part of the department's history. Harn and Waterfall make WPFR's very first all-female paramedic crew.

The duo has worked together for nearly one year on Medic 20, one of the busiest units in the district. Located at Station 20 on Pacific Highway in Lakewood, the pair each come to WPFR with diverse backgrounds. Harn, who held her Paramedic certification prior to being hired in 2018, knew from a young age she wanted to be a part of the fire service. Waterfall was hired in 2017 and attended Paramedic school in 2020. Regardless of the hurdles she faced going to school during the pandemic, Waterfall graduated as the Valedictorian of her class.

All firefighters within WPFR are trained to the level of Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) and approximately a quarter of them are trained to the level of Paramedic. While WPFR recruits lateral and entry-level Paramedics during its testing processes, the district strives to send internal candidates to Paramedic school, a nine-month endeavor, and actively seeks grant funding to support that practice.

Harn and Waterfall are both very active within the department and its community programs. WPFR is proud of the work they do every day and value them as role models for future female firefighters.



# Working Smoke Alarms SAVE LIVES

West Pierce Fire & Rescue's free smoke alarm program is available to all residents in Lakewood, University Place and Steilacoom. Appointments take approximately 15 minutes and WPFR personnel will install or replace any alarms your home may need to ensure they are working properly.



***Do you have smoke alarms in and outside every sleeping area?***



***Are your smoke alarms working properly?***



***Have you replaced your smoke alarms within the last ten years?***

If you answered 'no' to any of the questions above, please call (253) 983-4583 today to schedule an appointment!

**WEST PIERCE FIRE & RESCUE**  
3631 Drexler Drive West  
University Place, WA 98466

PRSR STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
SEATTLE, WA  
PERMIT NO. 1  
ECRWSS

## Community Expectations SURVEY

West Pierce Fire & Rescue is conducting a survey to assist in meeting the expectations of the community in regards to emergency response and other community services.

If you live or work in Lakewood, University Place or Steilacoom, please scan the QR code to give your thoughts. Community input is essential in building the future of YOUR fire department.



## Thank you, Employees!

Since our last publication, nine members, with 200 years of combined service and valuable experience, have moved on to the next chapter in their lives.

While it is difficult to see anyone leave the organization, WPFR strongly endorses succession. We encourage good leaders to share their knowledge and strive to develop others into future leaders. We know that each and every one was a leader, either by rank or experience in their craft, and they helped to prepare our future leaders for excellence.

Congratulations and thank you, West Pierce employees, on a job well done!



**Tim LaRue**  
Battalion Chief  
1983 - 2022



**Jeff Axtell**  
Battalion Chief  
1991 - 2022



**Todd Atkins**  
Captain  
1992 - 2022



**Jeff Tatom**  
Captain  
1992 - 2022



**Denny Woxen**  
Firefighter/Paramedic  
2000 - 2022



**Stephen Corey**  
Firefighter/Engineer  
2001 - 2022



**Herb Cabe**  
Facilities Maintenance  
2007 - 2022



**Christina Webb**  
Firefighter/Paramedic  
2014 - 2022



**Andrew Douglas**  
Firefighter/Paramedic  
2017 - 2022