



Community Dispatch

NEWS FROM NORTH MASON REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY | FALL 2021



Left, the new NMRFA headquarters under construction next to the current Station 21 building. Right, a closeup of construction progress in early fall.

Emergency Management Campus Nears Completion

The North Mason Regional Fire Authority (NMRFA) is nearing the completion of its North Mason Emergency Management Campus in Belfair. In November, the new 21,000-square-foot fire station was about 80 percent completed, on target for the NMRFA to take ownership of the keys in February.

"The project is on time and on budget despite significant changes in supply availability, product pricing and industry staffing shortages due to the pandemic," says Fire Chief Beau Bakken. "We've been monitoring progress closely and communicating regularly with the team to make sure everything's on point. There are a lot of checks and balances, and inspections are going extremely well."

The new fire station is one of the largest construction projects

in Mason County, as well as the county's largest public safety capital project ever.

The NMRFA was only the third fire service organization in the state to implement a new, innovative approach called progressive design build. This model resulted in both better design and overall cost savings for NMRFA through the partnering with an architect and a builder concurrently.

The new facility will more than double the size of the current Station 21, which is over 50 years old and no longer provides adequate space for the station personnel. The modernized campus has been designed to serve the community needs in our growing region for the next five decades.

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NMRFA Launches Pioneering Mental Health Program

The need for an emphasis on mental health and wellness in the emergency services industry has been well documented over the past several years. The extreme working conditions that emergency responders experience can lead to issues ranging from post-traumatic stress disorder to depression. Unfortunately, there hasn't been a concerted effort in the sector to provide a comprehensive mental health program — until now.

Earlier this year, NMRFA broke new ground by launching an innovative, comprehensive program focused on first responders' mental health and wellness. The first of its kind in the nation, the program will help to build resilience, providing emergency responders and their family members with the tools and tactics necessary to cope with their experiences and address them proactively.

"Many other agencies are covering pieces of mental health but no one is doing the full gamut in-house, so we don't have a roadmap for building this program," says Fire Chief Beau Bakken. "We have a lot of eyes on us as we build it."

A three-year, \$140,000 Assistance to Firefighters (AFG) federal grant funded the program, making NMRFA the first in the nation to receive this level of support for mental health care.

"This speaks to the tremendous need," Bakken says.

The Fire Authority hired Lea Sullivan, LMHC, NCC, PhD, as the mental health program coordinator. Sullivan, a former Central Pierce Fire District chaplain, operates a private practice specializing in work with emergency service professionals.

"My passion is first responders and building resilience," Sullivan says.

What attracted her to this opportunity was the commitment by NMRFA leaders to build resilience across the entire staff — responders, students, probationary personnel and administrative support employees.

"Most other agencies keep rigid fire service and training traditions because it has served them well for decades, so they try to slice mental health into it but that doesn't work," Sullivan says. "Instead, NMRFA puts mental health at the forefront and then questions how can we develop fire service components and format them in a way that is productive to mental health."

Trauma in this profession is inevitable, but building resilience reduces its impact, Sullivan notes. "Most mental health services are geared to post-traumatic experiences, but I'm a big believer that you can help avoid some of the collateral damage of trauma," she says. "Responders build resilience in every other way, so why don't we do that for mental health?"

Components of the program include individual therapy and counseling interventions, with more services to be added as needed. Sullivan also is developing a workshop for couples to help both partners cope with the pressures of the fire service, to improve communication and to build mutual support.

Sullivan believes the community will eventually see tangible impacts of this program.

"The payoff is not only in-house for first responders and administrators.



Lea Sullivan, NMRFA mental health program coordinator

We expect to see firefighters not needing as much time off and having fewer accidents on the job," she says. "And when people get along better and feel emotionally safer as a team, they work better together and can fully focus on a patient and give their best work to the community."

Over time, she adds, this effort will help reduce staff turnover and ensure career longevity.

Although the grant is only for three years, Chief Bakken envisions embedding mental health and wellness into the Fire Authority's culture.

"We see it as becoming essential to our work and ingrained in everything we do," he says.

After piloting the program across Mason County, NMRFA hopes to expand it and make it available to partner fire districts and law enforcement agencies.

Responding to Changes in Law Enforcement Legislation

During the 2021 legislative session, Washington State lawmakers passed a new bill governing how and when law enforcement officers can use force. The intention of House Bill 1310 was to de-escalate a crisis and limit officers' actions in situations not deemed as criminal acts. However, the new law has raised questions about when and how officers around the state can respond when a person is in mental health distress.

In the past, when called to a scene where someone was experiencing a crisis that could lead to self-harm (such as committing an act of suicide), Fire Authority responders relied on law enforce-

ment officers to clear the scene and ensure it was safe for medical personnel. HB-1310 created new challenges related to scene protection during mental health or wellness check response.

At the Fire Authority, we are working with our colleagues at Mason County Sheriff's Office to better understand how we can work together in light of the new legislation. Our focus remains on the safety of our staff and the welfare of our community members. We're committed to keeping the lines of communication open with law enforcement to ensure we can serve our community safely.

Addition of New Shift Improves Services, Personnel Safety



D Shift personnel, left to right: Captain Jess Fulkerson, firefighter/paramedic Travis Wilson, student firefighter/EMT Lucas Roessel, firefighter/EMT Ryan Jones, firefighter/paramedic Kyle Severance and Lieutenant Anthony Rhead.

In recent years, the growing call volume has created challenges for Fire Authority staffing, adversely affecting first responders' safety and mental health. In September, the Fire Authority added a fourth platoon to the shift rotation, which will alleviate those challenges while providing more consistent and safer services to the community.

Until September, three platoons rotated every 48 hours, with each responder working 48 hours then taking 96 hours off. The new rotation will follow a 24 on/48 off, 24 on/96 off schedule.

"It's been 10 years since we implemented the 48/96 model and the call volume has doubled since then, which has made staffing cumbersome and challenging," says Captain Ryan Cleveland. "With our focus on firefighter mental health and safety, there's been a big push to move away from the 48-hour work shifts."

Typically, this kind of change requires the hiring of an entire platoon. By optimizing the scheduling, however, the Fire Authority only needed to hire two new paramedics. As a result, the daily staffing has been increased from a minimum of four to five on most days. Additionally, almost every shift will now have two paramedics instead of one.

"We now have almost 100 percent coverage of two paramedics per shift where before it was only 40-50 percent, and we'll rely less on mutual aid," Cleveland says. "The change also allows us to have more consistent staffing, including more coverage for vacation days."

The addition of D Shift is part of the Fire Authority's focus on personnel mental health, which is one of the current goals in the strategic plan (see related story, page 5).

"When the call volume grows, so does the fatigue factor, and you don't want a first responder coming to you while working 48 hours with no sleep," Cleveland says. "With this new model, fatigue will not be as much of a concern, and with the additional rest now between the shifts, it's a huge change — it will be a game changer for the Fire Authority. It's not only a big step toward mental health but it also means better service to the community without adding major cost."

CPR Program Resumes with More Options

The CPR training program has been on hold for more than a year due to the pandemic. Recently, NMRFA resumed the training with three class options geared to different community needs.

CPR Now

Minutes, even seconds count when someone goes into cardiac arrest — a disruption of the heart beat that causes loss of blood flow to the brain, lungs and other critical organs. The majority of cardiac arrests outside of a hospital happen at home, and CPR could double or triple the victim's chance of survival.

Sudden cardiac arrest is the leading cause of adult deaths, claiming nearly half a million lives every year, according to the American Heart Association (AHA). While 90 percent of people who experience sudden cardiac arrest outside of the hospital die, about 45 percent of those who receive CPR from a bystander outside of the hospital survive.

New guidelines indicate that chest compressions — hands-only CPR — are just as effective on their own. This one-hour class prepares bystanders to perform compression-only CPR and is suitable for anyone (no certification).

When: Quarterly on Saturdays

Cost: \$5/person; \$75 for a group of 15 or more participants

Adult, Child and Infant First Aid/CPR/AED

This class meets the requirements for individuals who need L&I and OSHA-approved first aid, CPR and AED training. Participants receive a completion card (no certification).

The eight-hour program is more affordable than the certified CPR classes, and meets the needs for most employees outside of healthcare and daycare centers.

When: January 15, March 19, May 21, July 16, September 17, November 19 (2022)

Cost: \$35 per person; contact NMRFA if you have a group of 10 or more

Heartsaver or BLS Provider

NMRFA offers AHA Heartsaver and Basic Life Support Provider classes. If you need AHA certification, call for availability.

Training in Spanish

In October, NMRFA provided the first CPR training class translated live in Spanish, thanks to community member Ingrid Lopez who arranged for translation services. Community Response Team members Brad Byerly, Robin Inch and John Inch assisted Emergency Prevention Specialist Lacey Newman in instructing the course, while Lopez and three other community members translated.

The class was a great success, with 30 individuals learning life-saving CPR and first-aid skills. An additional 24 individuals signed up for a Spanish CPR class in December.

To register for a CPR class or learn about the program, call (360) 275-6711. To learn more about bystander CPR, watch a brief video on NMRFA's Facebook page (@NorthMasonRFA) or at northmasonrfa.com/for-residents/cpr-classes.

Community Response Team Supports Massive Vaccination Effort

When the Department of Health needed help this past winter with vaccination clinics, the North Mason Community Response Team sprang into action. It wasn't a small thing — the popup vaccination clinics needed to be up and running within three days and gear up for an influx of thousands of visitors.

From January through June, CRT volunteers showed up every week to assist with traffic and crowd control for mostly eight-hour shifts. The demand was so high initially, that the flow of cars on the first day of the clinic — staged at the North Mason High School gym — blocked traffic on Highway 3 both ways for a while.

"We had over 1,000 people on some days, and we haven't managed big crowds of people before, so we had to figure things out as we went along," says CRT member Brad Byerly. "We were working with a lot of different agencies and that was a really good experience for our team."

In addition to CRT volunteers, the agencies involved ranged from NMRFA and Mason County Sheriff's Office to Peninsula Community Health Services, North Mason School District and Mason County Department of Emergency Management.

"We never knew what to expect and how many people would show up," Byerly says. Despite those unknowns, the agencies, working together, adapted dynamically to the situation.

"We were assisting people with mobility problems but didn't have enough equipment, so Rick Hansen of Mason Fire District 17 (Hoodsport) showed up with a truckload of walkers and wheelchairs," recalls CRT member Brian Holt, who volunteered at the clinic for 19 weeks.

The popup clinic opened on a frigid January day, with temperatures dipping into the 30s. The clinic served primarily elderly people on that day and CRT volunteer Kristi Jacobsen noticed that many weren't wearing warm clothes. For the next 17 weeks, she brought in freshly laundered, single-use blankets for those waiting outside.

"Sometimes the line was 40 to over 100 yards long, and we did everything we could to make people comfortable, even giving



North Mason Community Response Team volunteers are ready for their duties during one of the vaccination clinics hosted at North Mason High School.

them chairs to sit down," Holt says.

The volunteers had to work around challenges like social distancing, traffic jams, lack of wheelchair ramps, parking shortages and weather. "One time during rain, we all got soaked to the skin even in our gear," Jacobsen recalls. "Luckily we had some umbrellas that we could offer people standing in the rain."

Byerly feels the highlight of the experience was learning how to respond to a major event alongside other local organizations.

"We're trained with the incident command system and this showed us how that system works. We found we were able to work cohesively as a group and now they know who we are," he says. "The ability to work with all these different agencies was a big outcome, and that alone made this effort a success."

Byerly adds that being able to serve the public — 1,000 people at a time — was a great opportunity for the CRT, even more so because the team's work has been limited during the pandemic for safety reasons.

"Watching how we all adapted to make it all work and working with the other organizations was an amazing experience," he says. "There were a lot of fine volunteers there and all did a great job responding to the needs of the community."

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that 54 percent of the Mason County population was fully vaccinated as of October 30, or 62 percent of residents age 12 and older.

This fall, the rate of transmission was high in the county (returning to levels not seen since December '20-January '21), with daily counts going up. Mason County Public Health data showed 444 new cases in just a two-week period at the end of October.

We urge our community to remain vigilant. Protect yourself and your loved ones by following recommended public health guidelines and safety protocols.

Fire Chief Beau Bakken says the 11 CRT members who stepped up to the plate demonstrated an outstanding performance.

"There was a lot of fear and concerns and CRT members worked nonstop through the duration of the effort," he says. "We're very proud of our community responders and we want to thank them, along with the other volunteers, for their role."

NMRFA is in full compliance with the vaccination requirements for healthcare workers. All personnel are vaccinated, with the exception of two members who received exemptions and accommodations.

These members are following additional protocols that include being regularly tested and wearing a KN95 mask any time they're off-premises.

2022-2026 Strategic Plan Focuses on Emergency Preparedness and Employee Health

Every five years, the NMRFA Board of Commissioners adopt a new strategic plan that provides a roadmap for the Fire Authority's next five years. The plan gives the Fire Authority guidance on how to best meet the growing and evolving needs of its 22 unique communities.

Last year, this planning was postponed due to the pandemic. In November, the commissioners were in the process of approving the 2022-2026 plan, following feedback from Fire Authority stakeholders and the Citizen's Advisory Committee.

"We solicited input from all of our members, from volunteers to fire commissioners, and a strategic planning steering committee prioritized the input and formulated it into a plan draft, which was then reviewed by the Citizen's Advisory Committee," says Fire Chief Beau Bakken. "The Board of Commissioners then looked at the recommendations to make sure they're consistent with the objectives of the Fire Authority."

The NMRFA mission and vision guide each strategic plan, which includes several core goals.

"A strategic plan helps us identify who we are and what we want to achieve in serving this community," says Commissioner Brooke Quigley. "I think the current strategic plan is very strong because it states ambitious service goals, lays out a detailed course for meeting those goals and describes how we will evaluate our progress along the way. The plan helps us think about the big picture yet remember the details as well."

For 2022-2026, focus areas include emergency preparedness and prevention, along with personnel health and professional development. The plan includes a yearly implementation matrix with details such as projects, timelines, project owners and resources.

NMRFA Mission:
We safeguard North Mason communities.



Our Vision:

We are an essential, trusted and valued community partner. We continuously improve and evolve with the communities we serve.

"There have been countywide discussions about the need to enhance physical and mental wellness programs for first responders for several years," Quigley says. "With the pandemic, those issues were increasingly important to the fire districts in our region as well as in other areas."

She notes that recently, through federal AFG funds, NMRFA expanded its existing wellness program by adding a comprehensive mental health component designed specifically for first responders (see related article, page 2). "We are now sharing information and resources from our mental health program with other districts in Mason County," she says.

Some of the outcomes of past strategic plans include the creation of NMRFA, the new Tahuya Fire Station, the new NMRFA headquarters and the fire marshal program, among others.

To review the recently approved strategic plan for 2022-2026, go to northmasonrfa.com.

NEW CAMPUS, from p. 1



Construction of the new building is in full swing in October.

The existing facility, which is adjacent to the new one, will be leased to Mason County, serving as the North Mason satellite locations for the Mason County Sheriff's Office and Mason County Division of Emergency Management. The two

buildings will create a unified North Mason Emergency Management Campus, significantly enhancing interagency planning and disaster response to the entire North Mason community. Additionally, it will allow for rapid resource sharing and reduction of

future operating and capital costs.

"This project is a well-deserved investment into public safety and the future of our community," Bakken says. "We're looking forward to hosting a community open house before we move in next year."

Countywide Stakeholder Group Continues Focus on Substance Abuse

For nearly six years, a group of health and service providers have been working together to address substance abuse across Mason County. Meeting bi-monthly, the stakeholder group has made great strides, but there's still much work to do on mental health in the county.

"The pandemic has stolen the attention in any conversation about public health," says NMRFA Chief Beau Bakken. "But we don't want to forget the opioid problems and we need to double down on our efforts in addressing mental health."

Christina Muller-Shinn, health specialist with Substance Use Response at Mason County Community Services-Public Health, says the biggest trends relate to fatal overdoses from fentanyl.

"We're seeing a significant increase in illicit fentanyl flooding Western Washington. That's the main driver for our overdose increase statewide and in Mason County," she says. "Over the last couple of years, overdoses from fentanyl have increased substantially, and that's a trend we expect to continue. It has a big impact on our community."

Originally focused on opioid response, the stakeholder group has broadened its focus to substance abuse overall. Muller-Shinn notes that substance use and overdose continue to have deep impacts in our community, which is why substance abuse is one of the highest priorities for the county.

"Mason County has prioritized substance use and substance abuse as an issue of focus and is being recognized in state

for our progress in our response, especially thanks to the cross-sector collaboration," she says. "Through our stakeholder group, we're working with many partners in the community instead of working in silos."

Pandemic Poses Challenges

Statewide, symptoms of depression, anxiety and other behavioral health conditions have increased throughout the pandemic, according to monthly bulletins from the Washington State Department of Health (DOH).

The DOH expects the behavioral health risks related to isolation, stress and fears to persist (worsening during some phases). Additionally, DOH expected a potential increase in substance abuse and stated that substance abuse "will likely continue to be a problematic coping choice for many."

"We were seeing increases in mental health and substance use challenges before the pandemic, so it's not just the pandemic driving these increases in our community, but COVID hasn't helped folks with these challenges," Muller-Shinn says. "Anecdotally, we know isolation, anxiety and depression during the pandemic have exasperated mental health and substance abuse. Isolation does lead to an increase in risky drug use, which significantly increases the risk of fatal overdose."

Statewide Recognition

As a result of the stakeholder collaboration and focus on substance abuse, the

Resources Available

Recently, Mason County Community Services has updated its behavioral health resource guide. The guide is available throughout North Mason at locations such as Peninsula Community Health Services, North Mason Resources, Harrison Urgent Care and NMRFA headquarters in Belfair.

Other resources include:

- healthymasoncounty.com — links to recovery support sources for county residents
- stopoverdose.org — opioid overdose education and resources for Washingtonians
- warecoveryhelpline.org — Washington Recovery Help Line (866-789-1511), anonymous, confidential 24-hour emotional support and help for individuals experiencing substance use disorder, problem gambling or mental health challenges

county has brought in millions of dollars to expand resources for substance treatment and recovery services.

"For being a rural community, we have so many resources now," Muller-Shinn says. "The community has done an amazing job coming together to troubleshoot the problems and working toward a cohesive substance use response —and that's why we're recognized at the state level for how diligent we are."

NMRFA Members Celebrate Service Milestones

Career:

- Deric Klahr, 5 years on June 1, 2020
- Jeff Yates, 15 years on Oct. 18, 2019
- Anthony Rhead, 15 years on Sept. 1, 2020
- Ryan Jones, 10 years on Feb. 12, 2020
- Jess Fulkerson, 15 years on Feb. 17, 2021
- Beau Bakken, 25 years on June 28, 2021
- Scott Cooper, 20 years on July 1, 2021

Volunteers:

- Sid Cackette, 20 years on Jan. 1, 2020
- Dave Haugen, 20 years on May 1, 2020
- Todd Cramer, 10 years on Oct. 1, 2019
- Eric Nelson, 5 years on Jan. 13, 2020
- Jane Quirk, 5 years on June 16, 2020
- Zada Goucher, 15 years on Feb. 1, 2021
- James Nichols, 5 years on Feb. 16, 2021
- Valerie McLeod, 20 years on March 1, 2021
- Woody Flynn, 5 years on March 19, 2021
- Daulton Crabtree, 5 years on April 1, 2021
- Frank Molina 10 years on May 10, 2021

Fire Commissioners:

- Paul Severson, 5 years on April 8, 2019
- Bob Miller, 5 years on Jan. 1, 2021
- Brooke Quigley, 15 years on Feb. 21, 2021
- Kelly McIntosh, 20 years on March 20, 2021

Congratulations!

Fire Prevention: Smoking-Related Fires

Smoking material cause 5 percent of home structure fires, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

In 2012-2016, one out of every 31 smoking-related fires resulted in death, making it the leading cause of home fire deaths. Most smoking-related fire deaths result from fires that started in living rooms, family rooms, dens or bedrooms. If you or a loved one smoke, it's paramount that you do so outside.

Follow these precautions to keep you and your loved ones safe:

- When you are finished smoking, use a deep, sturdy ashtray that is a safe distance from any flammable materials.
- Extinguish cigarette butts and ashes completely by dousing them in water.
- Never discard cigarettes in vegetation such as mulch, potted plants or landscap-

ing, peat moss, dried grasses, leaves or other things that could ignite easily.

- Only purchase fire-safe cigarettes and keep cigarettes, lighters, matches and other smoking materials up high out of the reach of children or in a locked cabinet.

E-cigarette Safety

If you or someone you love uses electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) or vape pens, be aware that fires or explosions can happen while you're using, charging or transporting them. Battery failures can lead to small explosions.

In 2014, the U.S. Fire Administration published an alert that identified 25 separate e-cigarette fires and explosions. Of those, 12 incidents resulted in injuries requiring emergency medical treatment.

Although these explosions are not very frequent, the injuries can be life altering, as

they cause burns to the hands and face.

If you use e-cigarettes:

- Do not charge e-cigarettes with a phone or tablet charger.
- Replace the batteries if they get wet or damaged.
- Do not charge your e-cigarette overnight.
- Protect your e-cigarette from extreme temperatures.
- Store loose batteries for your e-cigarette in a case. Keep them away from metal objects.

All smoking materials pose a risk when it comes to fire safety. If you smoke or vape, please follow these safety tips to protect yourself and your loved ones from accidental fires and injuries.

Tahuya Reader Sign a Gift from Community Club

This past summer, a new landmark was added to Tahuya — an electronic reader board, installed at the Tahuya Fire Station. The reader board was a gift from the Tahuya Community Club, which paid for the project with donation funds received from the estate of the late William “Bill” Maxson.

Maxson, a 1939 Bremerton High School graduate, had a distinguished engineering career, working for the City of Seattle before transitioning to The Boeing Co. He built his “retirement cabin” on Hood Canal in '59, adding a new pier for his boat 20 years later.

He was known for taking daily walks along Northshore Road to the Tahuya River Bridge and for supporting local organizations such as the Kitsap and Mason Humane Societies. Maxson also supported the Tahuya Community Club and was one of the first people to buy a memorial brick for the Memory Garden behind the old Station 81 building.

When he died, in 2017, Maxson left a large donation from his estate to the club for community improvement projects. After the club received the funds last year, the Board

of Directors discussed various ideas that could serve as Maxson's legacy. They decided an electronic reader board would be a welcomed replacement for the old, manual one, which obstructed views to the new station doors and would also be a hazard.

“The fire station is the linchpin of the community — that's where we go to find out what's happening and where we have community events,” says Eric Nelson, past president and a trustee of the Tahuya Community Club, which also meets at the fire station. “Since the fire station is the only place that serves the whole community, we felt the sign was an appropriate way to allocate those funds.”

Maxson's legacy will live on in Tahuya as the new electronic sign welcomes residents and visitors alike with announcements that are vital for community information. Updating the sign is simple — the Fire Authority can change the text from any computer. Since the sign became operational, it has been displaying information about



Tahuya Community Club members and Chief Beau Bakken get ready to place the commemorative plaque on the reader board in September.

COVID-19 vaccination clinics, classes, burn bans and more.

In September, the Tahuya Community Club added a plaque to the base of the sign, commemorating Maxson. As future needs are identified, the organization will implement additional projects to benefit the NMRA and the local community.

Santa Is Back in Town!



Santa will travel a modified route this year, adhering to COVID protocols (handing out candy canes without leaving the fire truck). For the up-to-date schedule, visit northmasonrfa.com or our Facebook page, @NorthMasonRFA.



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Safety Days Return to Local Schools



Two of the four lucky winners of the grand prize, third-grader Ella Schaffer and her sister Tara, a fourth-grader, catch a ride to first day of school at Sand Hill Elementary in a fire truck.

Safety Days were back on campus at Belfair Elementary School and Sand Hill Elementary School this past June. The long-standing educational program was virtual in 2020 due to the pandemic. This year's Safety Days marked the return of NMRFA in-person community events.

To accommodate for social distancing and other COVID-19 precautions, the event took place over two days at each school. Although students weren't able to participate in as many hands-on activities as they were in the past, they were immersed in a variety of safety topics, such as summer safety, burn and fire prevention, cooking safety and more.

"The best part of Safety Days this year was getting to interact with and teach the kids in our community in-person. Many events have been cancelled over the past year and a half, so we haven't been able to get into the schools and talk to the kids in-person for a long time," says Emergency

Prevention Specialist Lacey Newman. "Getting to interact face to face, even socially distanced and with masks on, was exciting and much more effective."

Over the course of four days, 19 NMRFA first responders and six administrative staff participated in the event, filling the need for higher team involvement due to additional COVID-19 protocols.

"Our community partners couldn't participate this year because of the COVID limitations, but we're hoping to see them back next year," Newman says.

Students had an optional homework assignment prior to the event: planning their family's evacuation route from their home and designating a meeting place. Those who completed the assignment were entered into a raffle for the chance to win a bike, scooter, summer basket and other prizes. Two lucky grand-prize winners even had the opportunity to ride to school on a fire engine.