



Fall 2024



New Program Prepares High School Seniors for EMT Careers

The emergency medical services workforce is currently facing a significant shortage nationwide. This issue is particularly pronounced in rural communities, including those in Washington state, where our region is experiencing similar challenges. In response to this pressing need, a new program has been established at North Mason High School. This initiative aims to provide graduating seniors with a clear pathway to a career as an emergency medical technician (EMT), thereby addressing workforce gaps and enhancing emergency response capabilities in our community.

“There’s a huge need for EMTs in this area, and we’re constantly trying to build career and technical education programs that serve our students and our community,” explains Alexia Hadfield, North Mason High CTE director.

Hadfield teamed up with NMRFA Fire Chief Beau Bakken and Central Mason Fire’s Mark Frazier to create a new EMT class as part of the high school’s health sciences program. Central Mason Fire developed the curriculum and will provide adjunct instructors along with the Fire Authority. The class will become the culmination for the medical career pathway sequence.

Capped at 20 high school seniors, the first class will begin in the spring. The class is nearly full, Hadfield says, which indicates that there’s strong interest.

“Those who are registered are very excited,” she says. “Once the course is officially set up as part of the program’s sequence, the demand will be pretty high.”

Students will learn the same EMT curriculum as career medics. Passing the course prepares them for the state certification exam, which some may choose to pursue after graduation.



The EMT class is unique to our region. Hadfield says it reflects the North Mason School District’s efforts to build new career pathways with the help of community partners.

“The outcome is that graduating seniors are ready to serve in their community, and they also gain skills they can use immediately in their future and beyond,” she says.

Chief Bakken notes that emergency services are a competitive field and getting high school students trained gives those interested in this career “a leg up.” The EMT class also complements the firefighting training program available to high schoolers through West Sound Technical Skills Center. The center offers a variety of CTE programs to students in the West Sound region, preparing them for entry-level jobs.

“Students could graduate as firefighters/EMTs ready to hit the ground working at age 18. And this path integrates seamlessly into our community volunteer or student firefighter program,” Bakken says. “We want to hire individuals who grew up and live in our community as much as we can — and this is a neat partnership that offers them career development.”

Community Dispatch

Contents

Team additions p. 2

State audit p.2

Child seats p. 3

FEMA grant p. 3

Tahuya remodel ... p. 3

Child seats p. 3

MIHP update p. 4

Risk reduction p. 5

Solar projectp. 5

RAP update p. 6

Tri-Lakes regs p. 6

Safety tips p. 7

Safety supplies ... p.7

Santa schedule ... p. 8

North Mason High Alums Join the Team



Caden North was hired as a professional firefighter/EMT in June, following more than a year of serving as a resident volunteer. A 2021 graduate of North Mason High, he initially planned to pursue a career in the Marines when he discovered an opening for a firefighter/EMT at the Fire Authority.

“I didn’t have enough experience at first, but I performed well on the test and interview, which led to an offer for a residence spot,” he shares. “And since then, I’ve fallen in love with the job.”

North has been active in the local community since elementary school, and he sees his new career as an extension of that community service. Responding to emergency calls in his hometown of Belfair feels especially rewarding.

“Almost every person I see on a call is someone I’ve met before or have a rapport with,” he says. “I’m glad to be able to provide some sort of relief, in times of need, to people I’ve grown up around or have seen around town.”

Besides the ability to help people, North enjoys the camaraderie aspect of the job. “I’ve made great friends here, and everyone supports each other,” he says.

North also appreciates the great reputation the Fire Authority has in the community.

“I think they’re probably one of the most involved fire departments that I’ve seen,” he says. “Everyone holds the Fire Authority in high esteem, and I’m glad to be contributing to that,” he says. “I’ve always loved the North Mason community, and I think it’s a great place to live — and I want to help make it an even better one.”



Ridge Pellow was hired as a professional firefighter/EMT in May. The 2015 North Mason High graduate first joined the Fire Authority as a student firefighter in 2022, following a seven-year career in the U.S. Navy.

During his high school senior project, he identified firefighting as a top career choice after the military. Although he initially pursued a computer-related role in the Navy, Ridge discovered his passion for active, hands-on work in firefighting.

“I did a ride-along and realized that my favorite part of the job was something I never expected. Many people who call 911 and need an EMT just want someone who will listen,” he explains. “When someone is going through alcohol withdrawals, struggling with suicidal thoughts or anxiety, or simply needs a break from their home life, you can often help them by just listening and having a conversation. I’ve always enjoyed connecting with people, and I fell in love with that aspect of the work. I felt this was my calling.”

Pellow, who moved to Belfair in fifth grade, worked briefly for another fire agency but embraced the opportunity to come back to North Mason when a career firefighter/EMT position opened. He says one of the best aspects of the fire service is his fellow responders because they all “want to be better every day.”

“In the fire service, there’s a new standard every day, and it’s motivating to want to be better every time you come to work,” he says. “This work also gives me a new appreciation of life’s challenges because we get to help people on their worst days — and that’s made me a better person.”

Other training options

Individuals interested in fire services can also receive training through NMRFA’s student firefighter program. The Fire Authority offers 12 student firefighter positions on a competitive basis. Students are assigned to a shift and work alongside career personnel while learning the skills they need to obtain a paid job. The Fire Authority provides all the necessary training and equipment, along with a monthly stipend.

State Audit Results

This past summer, the North Mason Regional Fire Authority underwent a financial and federal funds compliance audit from the Washington State Auditor’s office. The Fire Authority’s finances are regularly audited by the Auditor’s office, but the audit completed this year was outside of the regular two-year audit cycle. The financial and federal fund compliance audit was automatically triggered by our ability to obtain over \$1 million in federal funding to support the Fire Authority’s operations.

State and federal laws require all public agencies that obtain over \$750,000 of federal funding within a calendar year to undergo a state financial and compliance audit the following year. The Fire Authority is happy to share that following the audit, the state issued a clean financial and federal funds compliance report.

The Fire Authority thanks Executive Assistant Angie McCormick for her exceptional and detailed work, oversight, and reporting on our financial resources.

Tahuya Fire Station Phase 2



FEMA Grant Funds New Equipment

The NMRFA recently partnered with Mason County Fire District #6 (Union) for a U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant to purchase fire hose and nozzles. The \$201,000 grant will cover the majority of the expenses to equip six fire engines with hoses and nozzles.

While much of the hose in service is between 10 and 30 years old, all hoses undergo rigorous annual testing and certification. With new design technology available, it's a good time to update the hose supply.

"The old hoses are not built using modern fire-fighting design and technologies, therefore are not as rugged," explains Capt. Anthony Rhead. "The newer hose has better abrasion resistance and can use higher water pressure."

Nozzle design has changed in recent years, allowing firefighters to use a much higher volume of water at lower pressure. The new design was necessitated by the growing trend in home construction, as well as furnishings that use synthetic materials.

"Plastics and synthetic fabrics burn a lot hotter and release more heat," Rhead says. "To combat and put out that type of fire, we need to be able to absorb that heat using water — and we need enough water flow to cool down the area so we can carry the hose through the structure and get that water directly on the fire."

The new, lower-pressure nozzles are designed to optimize the flow using higher volume of water while still being manageable. But they often cause the outdated, high-pressure hoses to twist and kink. A single kink can cause the flow to be limited by 50-75%.

"That's a really big issue in a house fire," Rhead says. "So, we'd like to acquire this newer type of hose that's optimized for lower pressure and allows firefighters to maintain a good water flow."

Collaborating with Mason 6 offers significant advantages, particularly in enhancing the compatibility of our equipment.

As Rhead explains, "Doing this in cooperation with Mason 6 provides an additional benefit because it standardizes the two agencies' equipment. When we respond jointly to a fire, we will have increased interoperability."



Assistant Fire Chief Scott Cooper in the new community room

The NMRFA has successfully completed the second renovation phase of Station 81 in Tahuya, featuring a brand-new community room. This space will host events for the Tahuya community, including Tahuya Day and various club meetings, making it a valuable resource for the community.

The building, which is the oldest facility owned by the Fire Authority, was built in 1965 and hadn't been upgraded in about three decades. As part of a complete remodel, the community room received all new paint and trim, cabinetry, flooring, lighting, appliances, glass storefront with double doors, and a new flat-screen TV. Additionally, repairs were made to the sheetrock and roof panels.

The first phase of the project, completed in 2021, was the construction of a new 3,800-square-foot apparatus bay. To complete the renovation, phase 3 will transform the old apparatus bay into a new office, administrative, and personnel space.

Child Passenger Safety Services

In 2022, over 156,000 children across the country were injured in car accidents, and approximately 500 lost their lives. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that "correctly used child restraints reduce fatalities by 71% for infants younger than 1 year old and by 54% for children 1 to 4 years old in passenger cars." To help ensure the safety of our local kids, the Fire Authority is offering child passenger safety services, including car seat installations, free of charge.

Four NMRFA personnel recently became certified child passenger safety technicians. This certification enables them to install car seats and boosters, inspect the vehicle's safety measures, and verify the safety of the car seats. The technicians are also knowledgeable about state laws and product recalls.

"It often surprises people to learn that they may be using car seats incorrectly, even after years of experience and with multiple children," says Safety Prevention Specialist Abe Gardner. "While installing a car or booster seat may seem intuitive, there are many important details that can easily be overlooked."

For more information and to sign up for the services, go to northmasonrfa.com/safety-information.

Mobile Integrated Health Program Reaches New Milestones



From left to right: Mobile Integrated Health Program Physician Assistant Adam Boyd, Registered Nurse Beth Brown, Resource Access Program Coordinator Abe Gardner, Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner Kristi Eilers, Chief Beau Bakken, and Executive Assistant Katie Musgrave in front of the MIHP response vehicle.

The NMRFA Mobile Integrated Health Program (MIHP), now in its second year, continues to expand with more medical staff and community partnerships. The groundbreaking program provides short-term assistance for medical and mental health needs, with the goal of reducing 911 calls for nonemergent situations. For community members, MIHP offers an alternative to expensive emergency room visits when they are not truly necessary.

The latest addition to MIHP is Registered Nurse Beth Brown, who serves patients with lower acuity needs and works alongside Physician Assistant Adam Boyd on more complex cases. Brown's experience includes working at the Department of Corrections, primarily with substance abuse patients. A grant from the Co-Responder Outreach Alliance funds her position. This statewide organization supports co-response programs (partnerships between first responders and human service professionals like community health workers).

"Beth's husband is a captain with Central Kitsap Fire and Rescue, so she's no stranger to the emergency services world," says Chief Beau Bakken. "Her transition to our clinical setting has been almost seamless."

MIHP patients can access a wide range of care, including medication prescriptions, advanced imaging, behavioral health treatment, and resources to help them transition to more permanent support through a primary care provider. Services are offered either in patients' homes or by appointment at Fire Station 21. Many patients are also referred to the Resource Access Program for additional assistance. Together, these two programs have supported over 750 individual patients since they began.

Last year, the NMRFA expanded its services by adding grant-funded emergency psychiatric and behavioral health support, now offered by Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner Kristi Eilers. In her role, Eilers provides direct care to individuals and collaborates closely with Boyd, Brown, and Resource Access Program Coordinator Abe Gardner to ensure a more holistic approach to case management. This integrated effort enhances the quality of support available to those in need.

Inspiring Future Healthcare Professionals

MIHP's commitment to comprehensive care extends beyond immediate patient services and plays a vital role in nurturing the

next generation of healthcare professionals. The MIHP providers are creating opportunities for medical and nursing students to engage in community-based care outside of traditional clinical environments.

Currently, Eilers is hosting a Seattle University fellowship student, while nursing students from Olympic College are shadowing Boyd and Brown as part of their mental health clinical rotation. This hands-on experience not only enriches the students' education but also enhances the care provided to the community.

"These students get to see a different model of healthcare, and they become ambassadors for alternative ways to deliver medicine," Bakken says.

Chris Tersigni, nursing professor and mental health course coordinator at Olympic College, says factors like rural geography are among the social determinants of health. By observing the way patients are treated in their own environments rather than in acute settings, nursing students get a glimpse of how those factors can impact health outcomes.

"Students get to see that not every form of nursing is done in a hospital," he says. "One of our overarching goals for the ride-along is for them to see first-hand the circumstances people are dealing with."

Although the North Mason's Mobile Integrated Health Program is unique, many emergency response agencies are implementing smaller-scale community paramedicine programs. These programs are growing because they are demonstrating positive outcomes, says Brittany Marrero, clinical placement liaison for the healthcare programs at Olympic College.

In addition to the NMRFA, Olympic College partners include multiple fire agencies across Kitsap and Jefferson counties. About 120 students participate in the one-day community experience throughout the year, with about half of them assigned to the NMRFA. Student feedback shows that the ride-along is one of their favorite aspects of the nursing program.

Tersigni says the communities that participate benefit as well because many of the students become inspired to work in underserved rural areas.

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Agencies Partner for Community Risk Reduction

A variety of agencies serving the local community are working together to better coordinate safety education and prevention activities and resources. Working under the umbrella of the Mason County Fire Chiefs Association, the Mason County Community Risk Reduction Group aims to unify safety messaging across the county, share resources and materials among participating agencies, and increase participation in public events.

“Historically, many of the fire departments have coordinated activities individually, and I felt we could minimize duplicated efforts and resources,” says Mason County Fire Marshal Randy Collins, who spearheaded the effort and is group president.

The group’s focus has grown beyond fire safety. Represented agencies include most of the county fire departments, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Public Utilities District 3, Squaxin Island Tribe, and Mason County Public Health.

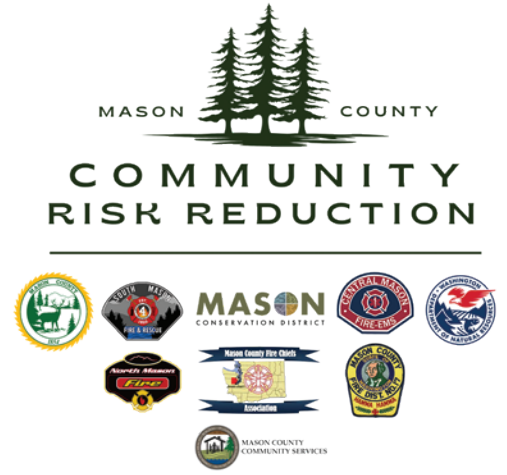
“It’s encouraging to see that there’s that level of interest from such a group of diverse and broad stakeholders,” Collins says.

The group has been meeting for about a year, and initial activities include the creation of a shared online repository for educational and informational materials and a shared online calendar of public education activities across the county. Once the organizational logistics are finalized, Collins says more information will start flowing to the public about the resources.

“We’ll release the calendar and repository for public consumption once they’re ready and everything is in place internally,” he says.

Collins adds that one of his goals was to see the group working cohesively together toward safety and risk prevention. He hopes the group will eventually sponsor public education events and draw joint participation from the agencies.

NMRFA Emergency Prevention Specialist Abe Gardener, who is the group secretary, says this formal partnership



speaks to the collaborative mindset of local organizations.

“The Fire Authority has been looking for more ways to collaborate and partner with other agencies for a better Mason County,” he says. “We’ve been emphasizing risk reduction at the Fire Authority for years, and this initiative enables us to expand that further.”

MOBILE INTEGRATED HEALTH, cont.

“It’s hard for rural communities to retain healthcare workers,” he says. “Our hope is that by exposing them to this model early, they may be more compelled to go into areas like public health nursing. And at the same time, we can help keep hospital readmissions down.”

Marrero notes that these kinds of partnerships are valuable for all stakeholders involved. “As a college, we’re not only doing this so students can gain from these experiences,” she says. “We want the communities to know that we’re thinking of them, and our programs are here to serve them.”

More Expansion on the Horizon

Building off the tremendous success of the Mobile Integrated Health Program in North Mason, the Fire Authority will expand services to other areas of Mason County. The NMRFA will duplicate its model and hire and manage a new provider team serving Central and South Mason.

“One of our stated goals for this program is to see it in every rural community in Washington,” Bakken says. “We may not run them all, but we would love to help other communities scale this model.”

Learn more

The success of the Mobile Integrated Health Program was captured in a documentary, “Beyond 911: Transforming Rural Healthcare,” which premiered in September. The documentary is available to stream on the home page at northmasonrfa.com.

Station 21 Solar Project Moves Forward

The Fire Authority was awarded funding from the Washington State Department of Commerce Energy Division Solar Plus Storage for Resilient Communities program. The grant will fund solar panels and battery storage equipment at Station 21, along with design and permitting.

The Solar Plus Storage for Resilient Communities program provides funding for solar energy and battery backup systems, enabling community buildings to deliver essential services during power outages. With this support, NMRFA will be equipped to offer critical services during major emergencies, including a warming station, refrigeration for medications, and access to charging stations.

The project has gone out for bid, and the contract is expected to be awarded by the end of the year.

Chief Bakken states, “Station 21 was designed and built with the intention of incorporating solar panels. However, securing grant funding was a crucial step before we could move forward with this important project.”

The solar panels are estimated to generate 113,265 kWh per year, or about a third of Station 21’s energy consumption. Installation is expected to be complete by the end of 2025, followed by a one-year evaluation of the program’s impact, which includes solar usage and cost savings.

Resource Access Program Offers Assistance for Acute Needs

The Resource Access Program (RAP), launched in 2022, has been growing every year — thanks, in part, to a cadre of dedicated volunteers. RAP helps local individuals who are struggling with complex physical, behavioral health, or social needs. The program provides proactive interventions and community resource navigation with the goal of decreasing 911 calls for nonemergency response.

Individuals are typically referred to the program by first responders on the scene when a need for navigation services or resources is identified. Many community members seek emergency services when they are unsure of where to begin. The Fire Authority has observed a significant reduction in 911 calls for those who are referred to the program. Without the support of the RAP program, it is estimated that 60% of these referrals would have led to continued 911 activation.

NMRFA Emergency Prevention Specialist Abe Gardner coordinates RAP, conducts risk assessments, and connects

individuals with state and community services, housing resources, transportation assistance, health insurance, and more. Gardner also works closely with the Fire Authority's Mobile Integrated Health Program, which offers acute, medical, and behavioral health care.

Volunteers offer a range of services designed to support in-home well-being, including home safety inspections, the installation of safety equipment, and the organization of living spaces to improve mobility.

"Many individuals require assistance with challenges that arise within their homes, such as difficulties in maintaining cleanliness or organization due to medical conditions," Gardner says. "Having a dedicated team of volunteers to reorganize spaces, clean properties, and enhance accessibility is invaluable. This support allows community members to address acute, immediate needs without having to seek help from outside agencies."



Join the RAP team

RAP has an excellent team of volunteers, but they can always use more help. Community members of all skill sets and backgrounds are encouraged to join the team and help their neighbors in need. Contact Abe Gardner at 360-275-6711 for details.

Tri-Lakes Burning Enforced Under Mason County Regulations

The Tri-Lakes area of Kitsap County (Mission, Tiger, and Panther Lakes) merged into the North Mason Regional Fire Authority's service area for emergency response more than a decade ago. However, some confusion has remained about burning regulations due to the geographical intra-county boundaries and inconsistent burning programs between Kitsap and Mason counties.

The NMRFA, Mason County, and Kitsap County recently executed a Memorandum of Understanding that officially makes the Tri-Lakes area subject to the Mason County Code in Chapter 9.48, which governs residential outdoor burning activities. The agreement allows the NMRFA to enforce consistent requirements across its entire service area.

"For many years, we had Tri-Lakes residents burning fires under Kitsap County burn regulations, and when neighbors called

911 for enforcement, we couldn't enforce Mason County rules on Kitsap residents properly," says Assistant Fire Chief Scott Cooper. "This mutually beneficial agreement streamlines the regulations and potential permitting process."

The great news for Tri-Lakes residents is that Mason County doesn't require permits for noncommercial burning, says Mason County Fire Marshal Randy Collins. These include recreational fires (e.g., outdoor fire pits, ambiance fires, and cooking) and residential burning (e.g., vegetation materials and gardening refuse).

"But you still need to follow the guidelines — which include required clearances and attendance — as well as following any burn restrictions in effect," Collins adds.

Burn ban notices and regulations are posted on the Mason County website at masoncountywa.gov.

Brief Overview of Mason County Burn Regulations

🔥 Recreational fires must be contained in a metal or concrete fire pit (maximum of 3 feet for fire size) and located at least 25 feet away from structures and combustible materials.

🔥 Pile size for residential burning may not be larger than 4 feet in diameter; the fire must be at least 50 feet from structures and combustible materials.

🔥 Both recreational and residential fires must have a minimum 10-foot firebreak around each fire and a 20-foot vertical clearing from overhanging branches.

🔥 Fires must not create a nuisance from smoke, obscure public road or highway visibility, or endanger life or property.

🔥 Fires must be attended to at all times.

🔥 Extinguishing equipment must be available at the site.

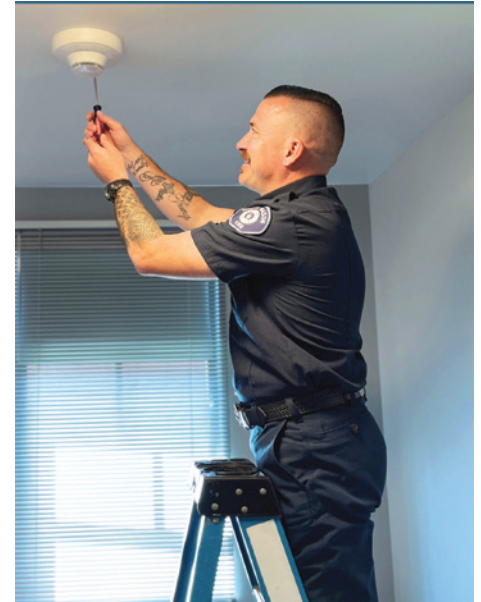
🔥 Permits are required for all land clearing burning (available at masoncountywa.org).

For details, download the outdoor burning guidelines from the Mason County Fire Marshal's website, masoncountywa.gov/community-services/fire-marshall/index.php.



The Importance of Smoke Alarms and Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms are essential safety devices that can save lives by providing early warnings in the event of fires or dangerous gas leaks. Fires and CO poisoning are silent threats to households, but with the proper detection devices, risks can be significantly reduced. National and local agencies like the North Mason Regional Fire Authority emphasize the importance of having both smoke and CO alarms installed correctly in every home.



Why Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms Are Crucial

1 Smoke alarms save lives.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), nearly three out of five home fire deaths occur in homes without working smoke alarms or without any smoke alarms at all. In homes with smoke alarms that failed to operate, over 40% had missing or disconnected batteries. Working smoke alarms can cut the risk of dying in a fire by more than half.

2 Carbon monoxide is a silent killer.

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that can build up in enclosed spaces, usually due to faulty heating appliances, stoves, or vehicles left running in garages. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that over 400 people in the United States die from unintentional CO poisoning annually, with over 20,000 visiting emergency rooms due to exposure. A carbon monoxide alarm is the only way to detect this dangerous gas.

3 Early detection saves lives.

The combination of both smoke and CO alarms provides comprehensive protection. These alarms offer critical minutes for families to escape a life-threatening fire or poisoning situation.

Installation Tips

Smoke Alarms

☑ Install smoke alarms inside every bedroom, outside each sleeping area, and on every level of the home, including the basement.

☑ For the best protection, interconnect all smoke alarms, so that when one alarm sounds, they all do. This is especially important in larger homes.

☑ Mount alarms high on walls or ceilings, as smoke rises. Place alarms at least 10 feet away from cooking appliances to reduce false alarms.

☑ Test the devices monthly and change the batteries at least once a year or whenever the alarm begins to chirp.

Carbon Monoxide Alarms

☑ Install CO alarms outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home. This includes areas close to attached garages, as CO from vehicles can seep into the house.

☑ For best results, place CO alarms at knee height (the level at which CO typically accumulates) or according to manufacturer guidelines.

☑ Like smoke alarms, CO alarms should be tested monthly, and batteries should be replaced regularly. Many modern devices come with sealed, long-life batteries that last for up to 10 years.

Safety and Prevention Supplies Available

The NMRFSA continues to offer community members free smoke alarms, carbon monoxide alarms, reflective address signs, and grab bars. Our personnel are actively distributing these supplies by going door-to-door in neighborhoods. Residents served by the Fire Authority can also request supplies by contacting Station 21 directly at 360-275-6711, ext. 0.

The supplies are available thanks to federal and state grants, which provided for a total of 4,000 smoke alarms with a 10-year battery life, 500 carbon monoxide alarms, 2,500 aluminum reflective signs, and 100 grab bars.



North Mason Regional Fire Authority
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A Heartfelt Thank You

North Mason Community, in August, you made your voices heard, and thanks to your overwhelming support, the fire levy passed! On behalf of everyone at North Mason Fire, I want to extend my sincere gratitude for your continued trust and commitment. This levy ensures that we can keep safeguarding our community and providing the highest level of service to North Mason. This success is a true reflection of the strength and unity that define our community, and we are honored to serve you.

Thank you for partnering with us to create a safer, stronger North Mason.

– Chief Bakken

Visit us online for 24/7 information: northmasonrfa.com



A Christmas Reunion

Lieutenant Mickey Cotter had a special encounter during last year’s Santa run after a family looked familiar. When the mom said her son, Kyle, loves the fire authority because he was born in the back of an ambulance, Cotter knew exactly who that was. He had delivered the baby, together with firefighter Drew Johnson, while transporting the mom to the hospital in October 2020.

“That was my first delivery and a very rewarding call that I’ll never forget,” he recalls. “As EMS workers, we often witness life end. So when a call is to help bring life to the world,

it restores the balance, and you never forget it.”

The Fisher family had stopped by the station days after Kyle was born and presented Cotter with the baby’s picture, which has been hanging in Cotter’s locker since. “It’s a reminder each day I grab my gear that what we do makes a difference,” Cotter says. “The Fishers are forever a part of the NMRFA family.”

**Santa’s 2024
 North Mason Schedule**

- Dec. 10 Twanoh Falls & Cedar
5-7 p.m. Street**
- Dec. 12 Tahuya River Valley,
5-7 p.m. Collins Lake, Maggie Lake**
- Dec. 14 Trails End Lake
3-5 p.m.**
- Dec. 17 Lynch Cove and
5-7 p.m. Beards Cove**
- Dec. 18 Newkirk & Riverhill,
5-7 p.m. Belfair Fire Station 21**