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SERVICE,  
TRUST

#### IN THIS EDITION:

- Message from the Chief
- COVID-19 Update and Safety Tips
- Fire Academy Overcomes Challenges

#### South Whidbey Fire/EMS

5579 Bayview Road  
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 SWFireEMS

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# FLASH POINT

Newsletter

Summer 2020

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF

By H.L. "Rusty" Palmer, Fire Chief

Despite COVID-19, our emergency responders are doing a great job of protecting our community and themselves when they go on calls. Their professionalism means that we've had no exposures, but it's still difficult to respond to calls and then be isolated in our home lives. We miss the daily interaction with you for non-emergency events, like Open Houses.

The pandemic, however, has shown all of us just how important emergency services are to the well-being of our community. It also has highlighted our need for full-time emergency personnel. We currently rely on part-time and volunteer firefighter/EMTs to respond to calls. COVID-19 has reduced the availability of our volunteers because of work commitments, or concerns about potentially exposing family members with underlying health conditions.

At our best, we can respond Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. with part-time and volunteer staffing. Evenings and weekends, we primarily rely on volunteers and that number (even with our most recent graduates) is not enough to meet the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standard more than half the time. As a result, we often have to call on mutual aid from neighboring agencies, which takes longer to reach you in an emergency.

For this reason, South Whidbey Fire/EMS is asking voters to approve a Fire Levy lid lift of 30 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value (approximately \$10 per month for the owner of a \$400,000 home) on the August ballot. Funding would allow us to hire up to eight full-time firefighters and replace emergency apparatus that is becoming unreliable. It would allow us to meet the NFPA standard, and improve our community insurance rating, which could reduce what home and business owners pay in premium costs.

We appreciate your consideration of this request. Please visit our website to learn more, or contact me at 360-321-1533 or [chief@swfe.org](mailto:chief@swfe.org) with questions.

## COVID-19 UPDATE

As of this writing, Island County has entered Phase 3 of reopening under COVID-19. The Washington State Department of Health cautions that high risk populations, such as the elderly and those with underlying health conditions, or those who live with someone who could be vulnerable, should still stay at home as a safety precaution.

Whidbey Island has a lot to offer, and there are still a variety of safe and fun activities you can do. Take a walk, or hike one of the island's beautiful trails. Fish off a beach, and enjoy the company of others while social distancing. (See back page for safety tips)







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## COVID-19 SAFETY TIPS

For all phases of reopening, the Department of Health encourages individuals to:

- Engage in physical distancing, staying at least six feet away from other people
- Wear required cloth face coverings (as of 6/26/20) - if physically able to—in all public places when not eating or drinking, or safely recreating with social distancing of at least 6 ft.
- Stay home if you are unwell, avoid others who are sick, always cover cough/sneezes
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water (or use hand sanitizer if soap and water is unavailable)
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- Disinfect surfaces and objects regularly

## FIRE ACADEMY OVERCOMES CHALLENGES

South Whidbey Fire/EMS welcomes four graduates of the fire academy this month: Heather Zuzel and Clay O'Brien, (Maxwelton), Nicole Hagen (Saratoga) and Blake Benenati (Out of District). This was a combined academy with North Whidbey Island Fire and Rescue.

Classroom instruction began in January. Due to COVID-19, the academy moved online and utilized a platform called "Resource One" to deliver much of the curriculum. The virus created challenges, and modifications were made to safely merge online instruction with critical, in-person experience.

"COVID-19 brought the academy to a screeching halt for a few weeks while we attempted to figure out what it really was," said Deputy Chief Wendy Moffatt. "It's been a long road for these recruits. It just shows how dedicated and focused they are to have the fortitude to keep going despite all the chaos and fear surrounding the unknown virus."

Committed volunteers and strong instructors, like

Captain Jerry Helm with Central Whidbey Fire and Rescue, contributed to this year's success. Also, Special Agent Tanna Langu from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) taught the recruits about fire behavior and scene investigations.

"The academy lays the foundation of being a firefighter," said Moffatt. "As members of their respective departments, they'll participate in training opportunities and weekly drills to keep their skills sharp."

South Whidbey Fire/EMS is recruiting for the Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) Academy, to run from mid-August to early December. The next fire academy starts January 2021.

