

# Fire & Life Safety News

## October 2023

Photo provided by The Chronicle



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## Chief Michael Kytta Retires

The end of 2023 marks the end of an era for this department as our long-time leader Chief Michael Kytta enters retirement in the new year. Chief Kytta began volunteering with the department, then known as Lewis County Fire District #12, when he was just 15. He continued volunteering into his adult life and while furthering his career and experience working his way to Chief Dispatcher with Lewis County Dispatch and then spending seven years as Director of Operations for Care Ambulance. He began his fulltime career with Lewis County Fire District #12 (LCFD #12) in 1996 when he was hired as Fire Chief.

In 2008 Chief Kytta was a major player in facilitating a merge with the City of Centralia Fire Department and LCFD #12, creating efficiencies for citizen of Centralia and LCFD #12 and forming what is now the Riverside Fire Authority. He has since guided the RFA and its citizens through a recession, a pandemic, several floods, storms, and daily emergencies. When asked of his time spent serving Centralia Kytta responded, "One word describes how I feel and that word is grateful. I am grateful for the opportunities provided to me as a 15 year old boy to become a part of something far bigger and greater than ever thought possible. I am grateful for the



mentoring that so many real heroes

have chosen to invest in me. I am grateful for the quality of life this career has afforded my family. I am grateful for the relationships earned and preserved over many years both personally and for our Department. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to help the next generations of responders and prevention staff to fulfill our mission. Last but not least I am grateful to have the high honor to be of service to the people that call us for help. Whether the need is big or small is not relevant, what matters is someone needs help which is why we exist."

**"This vocation is about the team and far less about any one individual. Little can be done alone while anything is possible if we do it together."**

—Ch. Kytta

2023 will be his last year as Fire Chief for the RFA but Kytta doesn't plan to stop serving. A big proponent of volunteerism, he has helped maintain a thriving core of volunteer firefighters for the RFA and plans to continue giving back to his community and supporting this program in retirement.



Erik Olson was promoted to Assistant Chief of Operations and Training on June 21, 2023. He has been a Captain and the Training Officer with the RFA for 15 years and has a total 36 years as a firefighter.

Kevin Anderson will be promoted to Chief / Fire Marshal on 1/1/2024. He has worked as Asst. Chief/ Fire Marshal with the RFA since 2020 and came to us from the position of Asst. Chief of LCFD #15 having served there for a total of 17 years.



# MEET THE COMMISSIONERS: A LOOK AT THE RFA MEMBERS WHO SERVE YOUR COMMUNITY



Riverside Fire Authority's board of governance has had some changes in membership over the last couple years. We would like to take this opportunity to introduce, or in some cases reintroduce, the individuals that represent the interest of the citizens when it comes to governing your RFA. From left to right:

**Rick Mack (2021)** was Asst. Chief/Fire Marshal of the RFA before his retirement in 2020 and provides a wealth of knowledge on fire prevention & operations, labor relations, and our fire department as a whole. He has served this community, in one form or another, for 35 years.

**Mike Tomasheck (1996)** has served as a board member for over 27 years, starting with Lewis County Fire District 12 and volunteered as a firefighter for 48 years. He brings a fundamental knowledge of the RFA, its volunteers and emergency services.

**Joe Dolezal (2020)** is an active and well-known member of the community. He is always willing to reach out as a liaison /representative to improve connections with local agencies, organizations and citizens.

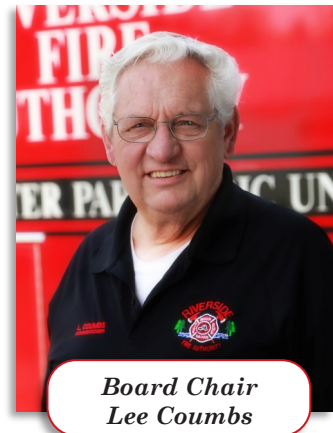
**Buddy Lowrey (2021)** is the newer member to the board and is always eager to learn. He is active in the community and his perspective provides an outsider's insight on how staff and commissioners alike can better communicate goals and needs with the citizens it serves.

**Lee Coumbs (reelected 2018)** (also pictured below) started his time here as a representative of the City of Centralia when the departments first began talks of forming a regional fire authority and was an elemental part of the merging process to form the RFA. He has been a leader on our Board since its inception in 2008 and that's just one of the ways he has served Centralia. Coumbs spent his last year here as Board Chair and is retiring from the position at year-end when Mike Rossow will take over holding Position No. 5 on the Board. We are grateful for Commissioner Coumbs' dedication and service over the years not just to our department but to the community as a whole.

## A GROWING COMMUNITY = A CHANGING RFA

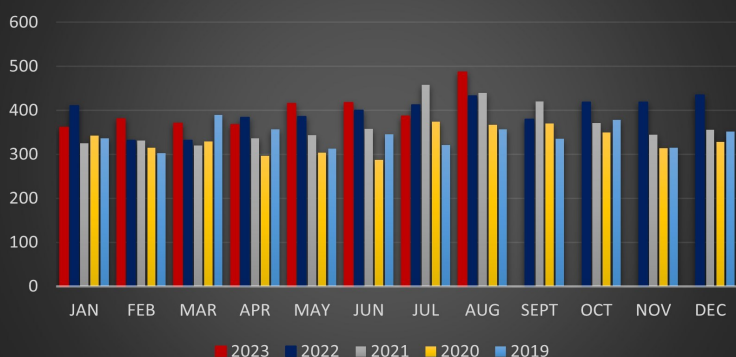
It's probably no surprise to you, our citizens, that our community is changing. You may have noticed it while driving down a busier street or when it takes longer to find a parking spot at the local grocery store. It's hard to miss the many examples of new building construction. There are good things coming to Centralia! Regardless of how you feel about this growth, you likely understand that these changes impact what the RFA is tasked with responding to.

As commissioners, we work with administrative staff regularly to ensure that services provided by the RFA can keep up with the needs of our community and provide the best service possible for the citizens we represent. A big part of this process involves looking at the resources currently possessed – from responders, to equipment, to fire stations and funding – and comparing those resources against the projected growth and changing needs of the community. The solutions and ideas brought before us are not just limited to more firefighters and fire engines, but also include new or expanded programs to meet specific community needs. We are currently working to expand prevention and education opportunities and to initiate a program that would assign a designated Paramedic/EMT to answer non-emergent medical calls that are currently only responded to by 911 response teams. The goal of both programs would be to improve the quality of life for our citizens and reduce the impact to our emergency response system. 2023 is currently on pace to surpass the record setting response total set just last year of over 4700 incident responses, a near 15% increase over the pre-COVID incident volume of 2019. The remainder of this year and into 2024, your Board of Fire Commissioners will continue this evaluation as we consider the necessity of requesting funding via a lid lift proposition in the fall of 2024 — a proposition that has not previously been asked in the 15-year history of the RFA.



Board Chair  
Lee Coumbs

### Response Data by Month



Lastly, as I complete my final term as Fire Commissioner for the RFA, I would like to say that it has been a pleasure to know and work with RFA staff, commissioners, and the retiring Chief. I was a Vo-Ag instructor who supported Chief Kytta and Commissioner Tomasheck as young explorers in the fire service. Little did I know that they would become leaders of the RFA or that I would become a commissioner. It has been a rewarding journey and I would like to encourage other members of our public to get involved.

**To participate first-hand in the ongoing discussions, your elected Fire Commissioners invite you to attend the RFA public meetings held on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month, 5pm at our Headquarters Station: 1818 Harrison Avenue.**

# RFA Continues Pursuit of Strategic Planning Goals

Within the RFA Strategic Plan, staff have been working to meet a number of identified objectives for 2023. This includes the scheduled replacement of two fire apparatus to preserve reliability and longevity in our fleet, as well as repairs, updates and maintenance on aging facilities that are necessary to protect public investment.

Advances in our training program for career and volunteer personnel are also part of the strategic plan goals. Erik Olson is the Training & Operations Chief and has been working to make hands-on training & simulation more available to staff. "One challenge that the RFA has always had," says Olson, "is access to training structures within our jurisdiction." Previous training required travel outside of our service area using training facilities in Olympia or other departments. "To meet this challenge, we implemented a plan to develop our own training props and buildings on RFA grounds. The first such structure has been built at Station Headquarters on Harrison Ave (pictured left). Once this prop is completed, a second structure will be built at our Independence Station. Both structures allow crews to train while on shift or at drill and gain valuable experience in search and rescue, ground ladders, firefighter survival and numerous other hands-on skills. This also allows

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## 911 SALES / USE TAX

Appearing on November's General Election ballot will be a proposition



to increase the sales and use tax within Lewis County by two-tenths of one percent. This opportunity will allow the citizens to determine how their 911 communications should be financially supported.

The tax proposed would apply to the sales/use tax on purchases made within Lewis County, by residents or visitors, excluding groceries and most fuel purchases. As an example, on a \$1,000 purchase, \$2 of sales tax would go towards the critical infrastructure and operations of the 911 emergency communications systems and facilities.

We would like to encourage our citizens to make their voices heard by voting on this important decision.

## "COOKING SAFETY STARTS WITH YOU!"

## PAY ATTENTION TO FIRE PREVENTION."



Learn more about cooking safety at [fpw.org](http://fpw.org)

FIRE PREVENTION WEEK IS OCT. 8th-14th!! Watch for our annual poster contest display at the Centralia Outlets.

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Firefighter 1 certification testing to be done on-site, increasing the training and certification available to career and volunteer firefighters while decreasing the cost to the RFA.

A significant challenge identified in the strategic plan and apparent at fire departments across the nation is the sustainability of volunteer support. Laura Hanson was hired at the end of 2021 as a Recruitment & Retention Officer. Funded with federal grant dollars, her position tackles this trending challenge.

Hanson has initiated a successful program and reports: "Under the SAFER grant we added a total of 27 new volunteers in the past two years. They are an accomplished group of individuals dedicated to helping serve this community. We are proud of their commitment, dedication, and determination to train, respond, and support their neighbors. Most of these volunteers work and live in this community and **choose** to serve as Volunteer Firefighters and EMS providers. "

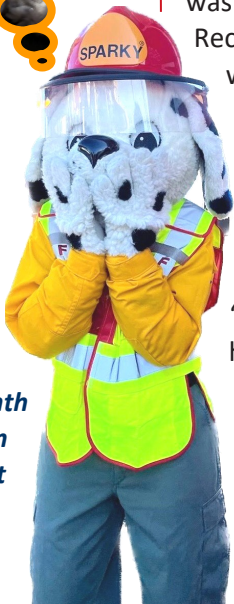
"Our volunteers benefit the community in many ways," says Hanson. "During the SW WA Fair we had additional personnel to provide assistance for injuries, heat exhaustion, and medical issues, in addition to fire standby for the duration of the event. In an emergency, they are friendly faces to neighbors, coworkers, or former classmates. During school presentations they are former students and alumni. Additionally, we have an exceptional group of seasoned veteran volunteers at Riverside Fire Authority. They provide experience, knowledge, and amazing support to our newest recruits; while still responding to calls for service when needed. The RFA is thankful for this group of selfless, hardworking, and dedicated volunteers. "



## FIREHOUSE ROCKS!



Sparky is at it again, hiding our firehouse rocks around local playgrounds! Remind your kids to keep a lookout throughout October for Fire Prevention Month and return them to our station at 1818 Harrison Ave. for a prize.





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**Headquarters Station**  
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Centralia, WA 98531  
Phone: 360-736-3975  
Fax: 360-330-5573

## ECRWSS Residential Customer

Visit us on the Web,  
[www.riversidefire.net](http://www.riversidefire.net)  
&  
follow us on Facebook  
and Twitter!

*Committed to creating safer communities through prevention, preparedness, and effective emergency response.*

**Help us get  
the word out!**

*Community Connect gives our first responders access to valuable information about the location &/ patient they may be responding to. Do you have a special needs individual in your household? Lockbox key available? Let us know via Community Connect!*



## Riverside Community Connect

Together, Building a Safer Community Through  
Prevention, Preparedness & Response



**CREATE OR UPDATE YOUR PROFILE TODAY**

[www.communityconnect.io/info/wa-riverside](http://www.communityconnect.io/info/wa-riverside)

### 1 Create an account

Sign in for free and get started doing your part. It just takes your email, phone number and address.

### 2 Enter the info that matters most

Enter valuable information that can help us assist more effectively during an emergency.

### 3 Help your Fire Department when seconds count

That's it. Just keep us updated when things change overtime so we can always be prepared.