

Calman-McMurray steps in as fire commissioner

She brings a diversity of life experience and her story of being a burn survivor

By Calvin Bratt
editor@lyndentribune.com

WHATCOM — Ten-year commissioner Larry McPhail stepped down in summer from his Position 5 with North Whatcom Fire & Rescue, and in his place Kimberly Calman-McMurray has been appointed.

The appointment of Calman-McMurray was made in September and is good through November 2021, the district says on its website, at which time an election will fill the remaining two years of the term, through December 2023.

"I wanted to retire," McPhail said simply of stepping down. Fire commissioner terms are normally six years.

Calman-McMurray "was raised in Whatcom County and brings with her a myriad of experience in both business administration and management," states the district website. She also brings an interesting back story as a burn survivor of long ago in her youth in Whatcom County — an event whose ramifications shaped her life.

The other four ongoing commissioners of North Whatcom (or county Fire District 21) are: Rich Bosman, John Crawford, Bruce Ansell and Scott Fischer.

Tell us a little about yourself.

I grew up in Whatcom County, attending K-12 in the Meridian School District and graduating in 1985. After that, I attended and graduated from Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho. I accepted a job at Seattle Pacific University in the athletic department and volunteered two nights a week



Kimberly Calman-McMurray of Whatcom County has been a strong force speaking out and filling advisory roles in regard to her experience of surviving burn injuries. She is pictured here in a YouTube video from 2015. (Courtesy photo)

at Harborview Medical Center helping burn and spinal cord injury patients. When I met my first husband, we moved to Lewiston, Idaho, and had two beautiful children. In August 1989 we moved back to Lynden, where I have worked for my father's business, I. Calman Industries, which has existed since 1966. I live near Wiser Lake and my children, Mikayla and Hunter, also attended the Meridian School District K-12.

How did this appointment with North Whatcom come about?

I have several firefighter friends. I heard about the open commissioner position. I pondered the idea for several days, then decided to submit my resume and letter of interest.

I am the kind of person who likes to give back to my community and make a difference

in this world. I am a recipient of first responders saving my life and my second husband is a retired Toronto firefighter, with 32 years of service, and was director of a children's burn camp for 17 years. We met at a World Burn Congress meeting in Galveston.

As set forth in the handbook, there were various public notices regarding the North Whatcom vacancy and an application deadline. After review of the submissions, the board scheduled interviews with the candidates. Following the interviews, they had an executive session discussion and I received the majority vote. The chair called and offered me the position, and I accepted.

How is it going?

My first meeting was Sept. 17. I have read through several documents on master plans, budgets, handbooks and more.

The board of commissioners, the fire district chief and the administrative staff are truly dedicated, knowledgeable and hard-working people. They too have been a great resource for my many questions. I have gleaned a plethora of information. I know I have much more to learn. This experienced team, which I get to work with, will continue to teach me.

I am in an interim position. We'll wait and make a decision about whether to run for a regular six-year term in commissioner Position 5 a little farther down the road.

What do you bring to this new role?

My answer is two-fold. First, in order to answer that, you need to understand my past. As a senior in high school I was involved in an explosion that left

me with third-degree burns over 65% of my body. I spent 95 days in the Burn Center at Harborview Medical Center in Seattle. My boyfriend at the time perished from his burn injuries.

The accident I was involved in happened on the liverson side of the Pole Road. I do not know which station responded that night, but I do know the paramedics and firefighters were very efficient and extended great comfort to me while evaluating my injuries and transporting me to the hospital. I did not lose consciousness at the scene or at St. Joseph, but I did upon arrival at Harborview.

Without giving a detailed explanation, severe burns have a long-term recovery process. I also discovered that there are caring/accepting people and

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Calman-McMurray

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there are mean/cruel people. The insults I received were quite hurtful and shocking. However, it ignited my compassion to speak up for burn survivors and people with disabilities.

I became involved with the American Burn Association as a member, speaker, on special-interest groups and serving on a committee. I have also been a member, speaker and certified SOAR (Survivors Offering Assistance in Recovery) volunteer through the Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors. For Harborview, I have been involved with research projects, burn survivor advisory board and school re-entry programs for children who have been burned. I have even participated in hands-on research projects in Dallas to help improve burn treatments for future survivors.

Locally, my family and I, for over ten years, have volunteered, cooked for and served the homeless of Whatcom County through Salt on the Street in conjunction with Cornwall Church, The Salvation Army and Lighthouse



Kimberly Calman-McMurray

Mission. I have held burn prevention and fire safety talks at the Meridian elementary school and discrimination/bullying assemblies at Meridian High School. I have shared my story at Lynden Christian High School and speak annually at the University of Washington to pre-med, occupational therapy/physical therapy and psychology students.

Second, this position is responsible for taxpayer money. Through my work experience I have been a property manager, collecting and depositing rent payments, with strict account-

ability to the property owners for all money spent on repairs and maintenance.

At SPU, the administrators, coaches, athletes and students brought a multitude of personalities, and when disagreements occurred we learned to work together to accomplish our department goals.

In my current job I am responsible for accounts receivable, accounts payable, payroll, equipment sales, customer service and correspondence with customers as well as monthly, quarterly and year-end payroll tax reports. I understand business, finance and accountability.

Through my work and personal experiences over the years, I have learned many lessons and what is important in life. I am a people person, a team player. I believe honesty and integrity are paramount qualities and strive to have transparency in my words and actions, and extending out to my colleagues and community.

One of my favorite quotes is "One person can make a difference, and everyone should try." —John F. Kennedy

Van der Veen chief for past year

Jason Van der Veen was named to the Fire Chief position in November 2019 after four-year chief William Pernet left at the end of 2018.

Van der Veen was born in Seattle and raised in Bellevue. He relocated to Whatcom County in 1994. Jason, his wife Meagan and their seven children reside in Lynden.

Chief Van der Veen began his fire service career by graduating from the Washington State Fire Academy in 1998. He became part of the North Whatcom Fire and Rescue family in February 2007. He progressed to the position of lieutenant in 2010 and then to operations chief in January 2019 before becoming full chief.

He says that he was raised by parents who set a wonderful example of selfless service to others, and he tries to emulate these attributes and pass them on to both his children and coworkers.

North Whatcom extends across the north county from Blaine/Birch Bay to halfway between Lynden and Everson. It also



Chief Jason Van der Veen

has a "functional consolidation" relationship to provide full fire/emergency response within Fire District 4, generally from Smith Road south to the northeast side of Bellingham.

North Whatcom Fire & Rescue's territory is 147 square miles, largest among county districts, while Fire District 4 is about 36 square miles. Van der Veen is the fire chief of all of it.

The two districts will have a joint RFA (Regional Fire Authority) Planning Committee meeting at 3 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 7, via Zoom. Members of the public can view the meeting live-streamed at www.nw.frs.com under District Meetings.

Cooking is the leading cause of home fires

OLYMPIA — The Washington State Fire Marshal's Office is teaming up with the National Fire Protection Association to promote this year's Fire Prevention Week campaign, "Serve Up Fire Safety in the Kitchen!"

According to NFPA, cooking is the leading cause of home fires and home fire injuries in the United States. Almost half (44%) of reported home fires started in the kitchen. Two-thirds (66%) of home cooking fires start with the ignition of food or other cooking materials.

In Washington State, the SIFMO has received reports of more than 650 kitchen cooking fires each year over the last five years. Cook-

ing fires can grow quickly to cause damage and injuries.

The SIFMO shares these safety tips to prevent cooking fires:

- Never leave cooking food unattended. Stay in the kitchen while you are frying, grilling or broiling. If you have to leave, even for a short time, turn off the stove.
- Keep your cooking area clutter-free. Move anything that can burn at least 3 feet away from the cooking area, including oven mitts, towels, wooden utensils and food packaging.
- Always keep a pan lid nearby when you're cooking. If a small grease fire starts, slide the lid over the pan to smother the flame. Turn off the burner, and leave the pan covered until it is completely cool.
- Have a "kid-free zone" of at least 3 feet around the stove and areas where hot food or drink is prepared or carried.

Fifty-four died in Washington residential fires last year

In 70% of those cases, a smoke detector was not functioning

OLYMPIA — Fifty-four people died in residential fires in Washington State in 2019. It's estimated that approximately 70% of those fatalities occurred in homes without working smoke alarms. Some of the fatalities occurred in rental properties.

The Revised Code of Washington clarifies requirements

for landlords and tenants when it comes to installing and maintaining smoke alarms in rental properties.

Section 3 of RCW 43.44.110 states that while landlords are required to provide working smoke alarm(s) in a rental unit, tenants are required to maintain the smoke alarm and notify the landlord of any operational defects. Failure to follow these requirements can result in a fine of up to \$200.

The Washington State Fire Marshal's Office reminds tenants of the following maintenance steps:

- Smoke alarms should be tested at least every six months to ensure proper operation.
- Batteries in smoke alarms with replaceable batteries should be changed every six months.
- Smoke alarms with 10-year batteries should also be tested at least every six months, but batteries do not have to be replaced necessarily.
- Smoke alarms that are older than 10 years and/or fail to respond to testing should be replaced by the landlord.
- Follow the manufacturer's recommendations as necessary.