



# The Responder

Volume 14, Issue 11  
November, 2021

## Feature Stories

- Levy Lid Lift
- Retirement



## 2021 STATISTICS

*Oct. 1 — Oct. 31*

### District Average Response Time:

min. 9 sec. 44

### Responses by Type:

Fire: 9

EMS: 351

Other: 132

**Total: 492**



*Proudly serving the communities of Blaine, Birch Bay, Custer, Laurel and the unincorporated areas of Lynden & Bellingham*

*“Providing Quality Service for a Safe Community”*

## Vote on Proposition 2021-9, Fire Levy Lid Lift

There is still time to vote in the November General Election through 8:00 pm on Tuesday, November 2.

Here is a link to Whatcom County ballot drop boxes:

<https://www.whatcomcounty.us/1863/Ballot-Drop-Box-Locations>

or you can mail your ballot (no stamp needed!), just please make sure the postmark is November 1 or 2.

Proposition 2021-9 asks voters to raise the fire levy to \$1.45 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation beginning in 2022.

### Why are we proposing this change?

NWFR is efficient, debt free, and we’ve reduced administrative staffing by 30% since 2011. But with our annual 911 calls rising 71% since 2011 in the combined NWFR-District 4 service territory, and most of our fleet of fire trucks long past due for replacement, we simply can’t maintain service levels into the future without additional revenues.

The data below provides a sense of what “doing more with less” looks like, over the last ten years.

Cumulative growth in property tax revenue 2011-2021	18.99%
Cumulative inflation rate, 2011-2021	21.6%
Growth in 911 calls, NWFR and Dist. 4 2011-2021	71%

The 1% increase per year cap in tax revenue we can collect under state law means our primary revenue source hasn’t even kept up with inflation, much less the 71% growth in calls for service.

- We have the same number of firefighters on shift to respond to this 71% growth in calls as we did in 2011.
- Our firefighters’ wages haven’t kept up with inflation either: wages have grown 16.8% in this period. Employees have given back wage increases in order to avoid layoffs.
- As in 2011, we have four staffed stations covering our 182-mile service area. Each station has one crew of three firefighters on staff 24/7, the same as 2011.
- The fire engines our crews respond with are the same fire vehicles we had in 2011.

If you have questions about Proposition 2021-9, please reach out to us, or take a look at our website. <https://www.nwfrs.net/>, and 360-318-9933 or [info@nwfrs.com](mailto:info@nwfrs.com)

**Please vote! Your vote counts, and your vote matters.**

# Lieutenant Leslee Smith Retires from NWFR

Please remember to keep the district up to date with any changes including your contact information.

All changes should be directed to Kelly. These changes may include:

Phone

Address

Email

Banking

Family Additions

Name changes



I was born in in Penticton, British Columbia, Canada. (located in the Okanagan) When I was five years old, we moved to the coast living in Coquitlam, then to Port Moody. This area is currently known as the Tri-Cities (Port Coquitlam, Port Moody, Coquitlam). My family settled in Port Moody in an area known as Glenayre, located at the foot of Burnaby Mountain, home to Simon Fraser University at the top of the mountain and the east end of Burrard Inlet.

I started my schooling at Austin Heights Elementary School and graduated from Centennial High School in 1972. I attended Douglas College, graduating in 1974 with an AA degree in Child and Youth Care. I wanted to work with at-risk children, youth, and their families. I was hired immediately after graduation by the Children's Foundation as a Child Care Counsellor and family worker. I was promoted to Supervisor and worked there for a total of fifteen years. It was there I met my husband, Stephen. We were married in 1979 and lived in downtown Vancouver BC, Richmond BC, and then finally moving to Blaine Washington.

As a young girl, I loved to dance and took lessons from five until I was nineteen. I took ballet (toe/pointe shoes), tap, Hawaiian, Polynesian, and jazz/modern dance. I also loved to jive and waltz! I had a passion for and loved horses. Since they do not fit in a suburban backyard, I was lucky to have a god-mother who raised and trained horses. I engaged in mainly English riding and hunting which later changed to the western saddle as I loved to go to the interior of BC to a ranch to ride in the sagebrush hills in the Caribou.



Moving to Blaine had me commuting to Vancouver got my job (for eight years) while Steve worked building boats in Bellingham.

He grew up on Lummi Island on a farm where his family lived for three generations. They were fishers and farmers, so it seemed reasonable to live in the county surrounded by acreage. This city girl started a whole new life!

Upon our arrival in Blaine in 1982, I discovered I was pregnant. Our son Josh was born in Canada in December of 1982! He was a welcome addition to Steve's girls- Angie and Jennifer (from his previous marriage).

We began by raising goats, then added chickens, pigs, horses, and had a nice herd of black

Angus beef cattle. We raised hay in the summer and had great, bountiful gardens to which I learned how to can anything that did not move thanks to my very knowledgeable neighbor Dottie!

I got tired of the commute to Vancouver, and my neighbor, the principal at the elementary school in Blaine, asked if I would be interested in working with at-risk students. I applied and got a position in the Pre-school program (new) for special needs kids. Over time I found my niche as the Behavior Specialist - setting up programs for teachers for behavior management and support for families with special needs or at-risk students.

It was while in this position that I became involved with the Blaine Fire Department. I was in charge of setting up a new system for fire drills to track if everyone was out of the building. I consulted with and worked with the fire department on a regular basis. They encouraged me to look into becoming a volunteer firefighter, which I did!!

In 1995 I applied for and was accepted into the department and a year later became an EMT. After a few years of being a FF/EMT, I was given the responsibility of being a Duty Officer. The first week I was in the position, there was a significant accident at the *continued on pg. 3*



## Retirement cont.



*continued from pg. 2*

Blaine Harbor when a crane dredging the marina at gate 1 collapsed into a professional building housing a hair salon, dentist office, and other small businesses. Thankfully no one was injured. I was so grateful when WCFD #13 Chief David England arrived on the scene and took command!!



In 1999 the City of Blaine Fire Department "merged" with WCFD #13 under contract, and WCFD #13 hired a group of career firefighters. I was the first career female firefighter hired by the department at the "young" age of 46! In 2006 the department grew again when we merged with WCFD#3 to the east, and a group of twenty new firefighters were hired. During this time of growth there was a testing process for captain and lieutenants positions. I was promoted to lieutenant along with sever-



al others. In 2010 the department expanded again when we consolidated with WCFD #4 to the south and east, adding their firefighters and officers to our complement of staff.

Of the many things that have happened, the many tragic calls that I have been on, the lives lost and houses/buildings burned, there are many things that I have fond and proud memories of:

- The Scholarship Foundation I helped set up in 1998 to provide students an opportunity to go to college.
- The Columbia Tower Firefighter Stair Climb that I participated in twice and completed in under 30 minutes.
- The seven babies that I helped deliver in the "field".
- Helping with the Community Thanksgiving Baskets Program.
- Teaching students about fire safety in our schools.
- Being a proud union member supporting our communities by giving back.
- Being the coordinator for our fire department participating in the Community Meals Program.
- Helping each year with our fire department Holiday Brunch.
- Encouraging young women and girls to become firefighters by steering them to toward the Girls Fire Camp training and mentoring them.
- And so much more!



Sharing the most personal, best, and most tragic times in people's lives is humbling. It makes me appreciate what I have been so blessed with:

- Three wonderful children
- A great husband and friend/companion
- Son in law and daughter in law
- Grandchildren
- Grand dogs
- Friends and family



Life throws curves at you sometimes! In 2012 I was diagnosed with lung cancer (carcinoid tumor) found during our annual firefighter physical. I had surgery in June of 2012 and returned to work on October of 2012. I remained cancer-free for eight years and was celebrating in July 2020. One month later, in August of 2020, I became ill. A large mass/tumor was found in my liver on a CT scan and was subsequently diagnosed as

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### *Events to Celebrate*

#### *November Birthdays*

- 7 — *Scott Wood*
- 9 — *Jon Ahrenholz*
- 10 — *Gary Quintrall*
- 14 — *Jennie Sand*
- 18 — *Russ Briskin*
- 21 — *Lane Renskers*
- 22 — *Wayne Sanders*
- 22 — *Adam Smith*
- 27 — *Robert King*



#### *NWFR Board Meetings may be conducted via Zoom Meeting/Webinar*

*Thurs. November 18  
9408 Odell St 61  
Blaine — 11:00 a.m.*





PO Box 286  
1507 E. Smith Rd  
Lynden, WA 98264

Providing quality service for  
a safe community

### CPR / AED Classes 2021

Class will be held at various fire stations around the district. Check out <https://www.nwfrs.net/resources/classes/> for more information and to reserve your spot.

*Donations of nonperishable food items are encouraged but not mandatory. All food donations will be forwarded to local area food banks.*



FOR THE SAFETY OF  
EVERYONE IN OUR  
COMMUNITY, ALL CPR  
CLASSES HAVE BEEN  
CANCELLED UNTIL  
FURTHER NOTICE.

WE APOLOGIZE FOR  
ANY INCONVENIENCE

## Retirement cont.

*continued from pg. 3*

HCC (Hepatocellular Carcinoma).

This past year, I have been unable to work while undergoing a type of Chemotherapy known as Immunotherapy. After ten months of this therapy, the tumor board at the University of Washington determined I was a candidate for surgery to remove the tumor. I am happy to announce that the surgery on September 9, 2021, was successful, and I am recuperating nicely.

This illness has, however, shortened what has been a wonderful and amazing career. I have worked with some of the best people who care about this community and the people they serve. I know they will carry on the traditions and continue to provide excellent care to this community and fire district.

I am retiring due to my medical condition effective on October 1, 2021.

I thank the Board of Fire Commissioners and the Fire Chief for their support during this past year!

I am blessed to have been part of this incredible fire family! Now off to enjoy retirement and hope to remain "cancer-free" for as long as possible!

