



THE DISPATCH

RETIRED FIREFIGHTERS OF WASHINGTON

JUNE/JULY 2026

President's Message



When Little Things Change Big Plans

A year ago, in July 2025, I set a goal for myself. I decided that, before I turned 70, I was going to complete a marathon.

It was an ambitious goal, and I knew that. But I also believed it was possible.

Part of my motivation came

from the stories I write about in my "You're Never Too Old" articles. Month after month, I have written about people—often in their late 70s, 80s, and even 90s—who continue to do remarkable things. They climb mountains, run races, start new careers, create art, travel the world, and refuse to accept the idea that growing older means giving up on goals and dreams.

I thought completing a marathon would be my own small contribution to that message: that we are never too old to set a difficult goal and work toward it.

For many months, I trained. I ran races, gradually increased my distances, and completed a half-marathon on March 7. My marathon goal still seemed within reach.

Then a couple of relatively small things happened.

First, I injured the adductor muscle in my left leg. It wasn't a catastrophic injury, and it didn't require surgery or hospitalization, but it kept me from training normally for more than a month. Eventually, I recovered and began working my way back.

Then I injured the big toe on my right foot.

A big toe. It seems almost ridiculous that something so small could interfere with something as big as a marathon. But anyone who has tried to walk or run with an injured foot knows that small things can have large consequences. That injury disrupted my training for approximately another month and a half.

Those two relatively minor injuries took away a significant part of the time I needed to prepare. Now, as I write this on the Fourth of July, I have had to face the reality that completing the full marathon I planned a year ago is probably no longer realistic.

That has been difficult for me to accept.

But I have decided that changing a goal is not necessarily the same thing as giving up on one.

I have reset my goal. Instead of attempting the full marathon, I am training to complete another half-marathon. It is still 13.1 miles. It will still require effort, discipline, and perseverance. And because of the setbacks in my training, I know it will still be a challenge.

I share this story not because running a marathon or half-marathon is especially important in the larger scheme of life. In fact, compared with what many of our members have faced, my running injuries are very small things.

Many of us have experienced setbacks far greater than an injured muscle or a sore toe. We have faced serious illness, the loss of people we love, financial worries, family difficulties, physical limitations, loneliness, and unexpected changes in the future we thought we had planned.

Sometimes the setback is large and obvious. Other times, it is a series of little things that slowly change our plans, our expectations, or even the way we see our future.

The lesson I am learning is that perseverance does not always mean continuing toward exactly the same goal in exactly the same way.

Sometimes perseverance means adjusting.

Sometimes courage means accepting that circumstances have changed and setting a new goal that is challenging but achievable.

And sometimes the hardest part is overcoming the feeling that, by changing our plans, we have somehow disappointed ourselves or let someone else down.

We haven't.

Life rarely follows the exact path we planned for it. We

can do everything right, prepare carefully, work hard, and still encounter something unexpected that changes the road ahead. When that happens, we have a choice. We can focus only on the goal we can no longer reach, or we can look ahead and ask ourselves, "What can I do from here?"

For me, right now, the answer is 13.1 miles instead of 26.2.

For someone else, it may mean changing a travel plan, finding a new way to stay connected with family and friends, adapting to a physical limitation, asking for help, learning something new, or simply getting up tomorrow and trying again.

Whatever your setback—big or small—I hope you will hang in there.

Reset the goal if you need to. Change the plan. Take a different road. Be courageous enough to accept where you are today without losing hope for where you can still go tomorrow.

Our plans may change. Our expectations may need to change with them.

But that doesn't mean we stop moving forward. Simply – just hang in there!



Join Us for the August RFFOW General Membership Meeting!

Mark your calendar and join us for the next RFFOW General Membership Meeting on Wednesday, August 12, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. Pacific Time. The meeting will be held on Zoom only.

For your convenience, the Zoom invitation and meeting link will be emailed to members two days before the meeting and again on the morning of the meeting, making it easy to find right at the top of your email inbox.

We are pleased to announce that our Special Speaker will be Kim Duncan Martin, Executive Director of the Medic One Foundation. Kim will provide a presentation on the fascinating history of the Medic One program and its current status today.

Washington State's Medic One program has long been recognized as a premier paramedic and emergency medical response system, with a remarkable history of innovation, lifesaving care, and service to our communities. Kim is an outstanding speaker who brings

a wealth of knowledge and insight into the program, its history, and the important role it continues to play today.

This promises to be an informative and engaging presentation, particularly for our members who have firsthand experience with the evolution of emergency medical services and paramedicine in Washington State.

We hope you will join us on Zoom on August 12 for another informative and enjoyable RFFOW General Membership Meeting—and what promises to be a fascinating presentation on one of Washington's great public safety success stories.



Zona Wyatt, wife of Seattle retired firefighter Bill Wyatt passed away on May 23, 2026.

Darlene Lund, wife of Seattle retired firefighter Dale Lund passed away May 23, 2026.

Robert (Bobby) Van Dyke, Yakima Fire, passed away May 25, 2026. Bobby joined the Yakima Fire Department in February of 1970 and retired in July 2000 after 30+ years of service.

William (Bill) Kingston, Everett Firefighter, passed away on May 5, 2026.

Arlene Morrison, widow of Firefighter Robert Morrison, passed away June 15, 2026.



On April 30, 2026, a federal class action lawsuit was filed in the United States District Court for the Western District of Washington challenging E2SHB 2034. The lawsuit seeks to prevent the State from transferring billions of dollars from the LEOFF 1 Pension Fund and alleges that the law violates the contractual pension rights of LEOFF 1 members and beneficiaries under the United States and Washington Constitutions.

We expect the State of Washington to file its answer to the complaint on July 21, 2026. In the August newsletter, we will provide a further update explaining the nature and content of the State's response and the major legal issues it raises.



You're Never Too Old

You're Never Too Old: Two Women Who Kept Moving Forward

In this month's President's Message, I wrote about setbacks, changing expectations, and the difficult decision to adjust a goal rather than abandon it altogether. As many of you know, I had hoped to complete a full marathon this year, in part because of the inspiration I have received from writing this column. Injuries interfered with my training, and I have now reset my goal to completing another half marathon.

When I think about continuing despite setbacks, I am inspired by people like Gladys Burrill and Jenny Wood Allen—two remarkable women who demonstrated that age does not have to determine when we stop setting goals, accepting challenges, or moving forward.

Gladys Burrill was 92 years old when she completed the 2010 Honolulu Marathon in 9 hours and 53 minutes. Her accomplishment earned her recognition by Guinness World Records as the oldest female marathon finisher at the time.

But the most remarkable part of Gladys's story may not be the record itself. It is the life that came before it.

Born in 1918, shortly after the end of World War I, Gladys grew up in difficult circumstances. Her father developed black lung disease after working in the Colorado mines, and Gladys described much of her early life as being spent in poverty. At age 11, she contracted polio.

None of that prevented her from building a life filled with adventure. Over the years, Gladys became a multi-engine aircraft pilot, hiked in the desert, rode horses, and eventually became a marathoner.

And she did not start young.

Gladys completed her first Honolulu Marathon in 2004 at the age of 86. By the time of her record-setting finish six years later, she had completed five Honolulu Marathons.

Her record also came after two painful setbacks. In 2008, her husband of 69 years—her greatest supporter—died only days before the marathon. She had hoped to complete the race in his memory but was unable to finish. The following year, stomach cramps forced her to stop at mile 16.

Then, in 2010, at age 92, she tried again—and finished.

Retired Firefighters Of Washington

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Gladys was known as the “Gladysator,” not only for her endurance but also for her positive attitude. Even after she stopped competing in marathons, she continued walking six days a week, covering between 30 and 50 miles.

Her philosophy was wonderfully simple: eat well, exercise, think positively, and “just put one foot in front of the other.”

Another woman who lived that philosophy was Jenny Wood Allen of Scotland.

Jenny ran her first marathon at age 71. She went on to complete 16 London Marathons and also participated in the New York Marathon. In 1999, at age 87, she completed the London Marathon in 7 hours, 14 minutes and 46 seconds, earning recognition as the oldest female marathon finisher.

Three years later, at age 90, she broke her own record by walking the London Marathon one final time.

Jenny’s story contains a particularly satisfying bit of irony. A former Member of Parliament, she was pushed out of politics at age 76 after the Dundee East Conservative Association decided she was “too old.” Jenny strongly objected, reportedly saying that she could have “run rings round” many of the people who made that decision.

Considering what she accomplished afterward, she may have meant that literally.

Jenny lived to be 99 years old. She had often said that she intended to keep running “till I drop.” She even wrote her own epitaph in advance:

“I have done my best in the race.

I have finished the course and kept the faith.”

The stories of Gladys Burrill and Jenny Wood Allen remind us that the finish line is different for each of us. Sometimes the goal is a marathon. Sometimes it is a half marathon. Sometimes it is simply getting up, putting on our shoes, and moving forward again after life has knocked us off course.

The important thing is that we keep moving.

One foot in front of the other.

At any age.



You’re Never Too Old No. 2: Three Sisters and 316 Years of Life

Our “You’re Never Too Old” story this month about marathon runners is not the only story I want to showcase. Sometimes the most amazing stories are not about one extraordinary moment. They are about a lifetime—or, in this case, three lifetimes—of simply continuing forward.

Three sisters from Brazil, Levita de Deus Nunes, Zoraide de Deus Mota, and Zulina de Deus Nunes, have achieved something almost impossible to imagine. Together, the three women have lived more than 316 years.

Levita, the oldest, is 109. As a young girl, she helped run the family home and cared for her younger siblings while her parents worked in the fields. She never married or had children, but devoted much of her life to her family. Throughout the decades, she continued creating beautiful things with her hands through crochet, knitting, and sewing.

Zoraide, 104, spent her working life helping others. She began as a primary school teacher and later became a nurse, working in several hospitals before retiring. Along the way, she married and raised five children.

Then there is Zulina—the “baby” of the family—at 103. She raised six children and, like Levita, maintained a lifelong love of sewing and embroidery. When her marriage ended and life took an unexpected turn, her sisters were there to help her begin again.

Perhaps that is the most inspiring part of their story.

These three women have lived through more than a century of change. They have known hard work, responsibility, marriage, motherhood, careers, disappointment, and loss. Through it all, they remained close, helping one another through life’s inevitable ups and downs.

Their record is remarkable. But their lives remind us of something even more important: longevity is not simply about counting the years.

It is about what we do with them—and who walks beside us along the way.

At 109, 104, and 103, these three remarkable sisters offer a powerful reminder that family, purpose, resilience, and love can carry us through an extraordinary journey.

And perhaps they also remind us of something we should never forget:

You’re never too old to keep moving forward—and you’re fortunate indeed if you have someone beside you for the journey.



A Rescue That Defied the Odds

Eight Days Beneath the Rubble: A Rescue That Defied the Odds

In the aftermath of a disaster, there are stories of tragedy, stories of courage, and occasionally stories so remarkable that they remind us what human beings are capable of when they refuse to give up on one another.

The rescue of Hernán Gil is one of those stories.

On June 24, twin earthquakes devastated parts of Venezuela. Gil, a security guard, was working in a small concrete booth in the basement parking area of a shopping center when the earthquakes struck. The structure above him collapsed, burying him beneath an estimated 140 tons of rubble.

Remarkably, the small security booth formed a protective shell around him. Gil was alive—but completely trapped.

Eight days later, he would emerge from the rubble.

The rescue was anything but simple. After a paramedic with the Costa Rican Red Cross heard faint cries coming from beneath the debris, an international team began the painstaking effort to reach Gil. According to news reports, more than 100 hours passed between the time rescuers first located him and the moment they were finally able to bring him out alive.

Teams from several countries participated in the operation. Among them were firefighters from Chile, including members of an urban search-and-rescue team who helped lead the extraordinarily dangerous operation. One Chilean firefighter described it as the most complex and technically difficult rescue operation he had ever faced.

For retired firefighters, it is not difficult to understand what that means.

The rescuers could not simply dig faster. Every movement mattered. Access tunnels through the unstable wreckage were subject to collapse. Aftershocks, heavy rain and shifting debris added to the danger. The rescuers had to balance urgency with patience: move too slowly and Gil might not survive; move too quickly and the rubble could shift, killing both Gil and those trying to save him.

Eventually, rescuers were able to insert a small camera into the space where Gil was trapped. They provided him with water, nutrients, a face mask and protective goggles while they continued working toward him.

Gil, amazingly, remained cheerful. He talked with his rescuers, remembered individual team members and even requested particular flavors of hydration drinks.

Think about that for a moment. Eight days beneath a collapsed building, surrounded by concrete and darkness—and he was still joking, talking and encouraging the people trying to save him.

But this story is just as much about the rescuers.

Firefighters and emergency personnel know something about entering places that everyone else is trying to escape. They understand that rescue work is often performed in darkness, confusion and danger, with no guarantee of success.

In Venezuela, rescuers from different nations, speaking different languages and wearing different uniforms, shared one mission: there was a human being alive beneath that rubble, and they were not leaving without him.

After eight days, Hernán Gil was carried out alive.

It was called a miracle. Perhaps it was. But miracles sometimes have help—from courage, training, teamwork, patience, technology and people, including firefighters, who simply refuse to quit.

For those of us who spent our careers in the fire service, there is something familiar in that determination.

Someone was still alive. So the rescue continued.



The Cancer Detecting Pigeon

The Pigeon That May Help Doctors Detect Cancer

When we think of the fight against cancer, we imagine highly trained doctors, sophisticated computers, advanced laboratories, and some of the most expensive medical equipment ever created.

We probably do not imagine a pigeon.

Yet researchers have discovered that the humble pigeon—often dismissed as little more than a park nuisance—may possess visual abilities that could eventually help doctors and artificial intelligence systems detect medical problems that might otherwise be missed.

The story begins with a troubling problem in medical imaging. Radiologists examine enormous numbers of images, searching for tiny abnormalities that may signal serious disease. According to the research described

in Popular Science, radiologists can sometimes miss abnormalities even though their eyes and brains appear to have noticed that something is unusual.

Researchers using eye-tracking technology found something remarkable: when radiologists looked directly at a suspicious lung nodule but ultimately concluded that a scan was normal, their eyes often lingered on the abnormal area and their pupils widened. In other words, some part of the brain seemed to recognize a warning sign—even though that recognition never reached the doctor's conscious decision.

That raised an extraordinary question: Could scientists somehow study this unconscious visual recognition system?

Enter the pigeons.

Dr. Gregory DiGirolamo and his colleagues trained six pigeons to watch short videos of CT scans and determine whether the scans showed lung nodules—growths that can sometimes indicate cancer.

The training method was surprisingly simple. The birds were shown medical images and rewarded with food when they correctly identified certain scans. Some were trained to recognize nodules, while others were rewarded for correctly identifying scans without them.

And the pigeons learned.

Even more amazingly, they were able to apply what they had learned to scans they had never seen before.

But the biggest surprise was still to come.

After learning to recognize lung nodules, the pigeons also began responding to two other lung abnormalities they had never been specifically trained to identify: emphysema and ground-glass nodules, hazy areas that can sometimes indicate early lung cancer.

To human observers, these conditions can look very different. The pigeons' performance suggested that there may be some subtle visual characteristic shared by these abnormalities—something that their visual systems detected even though researchers had not taught them to look for it.

The goal, of course, is not to place a pigeon beside the radiologist in the hospital reading room.

Instead, researchers hope this work will help them better understand how the unconscious visual system recognizes subtle warning signs. By combining information about where doctors look, how long their eyes pause, and how their pupils react, researchers hope to train artificial intelligence systems to recognize when a doctor's unconscious brain may have detected something important.

Such an AI system would not replace the radiologist. It could act as a second set of eyes—perhaps even helping the doctor notice something that his or her own brain had already detected but had not consciously recognized.

The possibilities may extend beyond lung scans. Similar techniques could someday help cardiologists interpret heart tests, airport security personnel detect hidden threats, or even art experts distinguish genuine masterpieces from clever forgeries.

It is an astonishing thought: one of humanity's most familiar and underestimated birds may help scientists understand how we see, how we miss things, and how technology might help doctors catch disease earlier.

Sometimes scientific breakthroughs begin with billion-dollar machines.

And sometimes, apparently, they begin with a pigeon staring at a CT scan and waiting for lunch.



The Tiny Table That Saved Your Pizza—and the Mystery Behind It

Some inventions change the world in dramatic ways. Others quietly keep the cheese from sticking to the top of your pizza box.

You have probably seen the tiny three-legged plastic table sitting in the center of a delivered pizza. Most of us remove it without a second thought. Yet this simple little object solved a problem that plagued pizza delivery for years.

As pizza delivery became increasingly popular after World War II, cardboard pizza boxes made it possible to stack and transport hot pizzas. But there was a problem: steam from a fresh pizza could soften the cardboard, causing the lid to sag onto the hot cheese. Opening the box could reveal a disappointing sight—your toppings stuck to the cardboard lid.

Then came Carmela Vitale.

In 1983, the Long Island woman applied for a patent for an elegantly simple solution: a small, three-legged plastic device placed in the center of the pizza to keep the box lid from touching the cheese. The invention became commonly known as the “pizza saver.”

Millions of people have encountered versions of this

tiny invention, yet remarkably little is known about the woman behind it.

That mystery became so intriguing that fellow culinary inventor Alison Grieve reportedly spent two years trying to learn more about Vitale. Her search produced surprisingly few answers. Even Vitale's patent attorneys apparently had little information about her.

Grieve has said she would love to hear Vitale's story, learn whether she was proud of her achievement, and take her around to pizza parlors so customers could thank her personally.

It is an amazing mystery surrounding an incredibly ordinary object. Somewhere along the way, Carmela Vitale saw a simple problem that millions of people had experienced and found a wonderfully simple solution.

The next time you open a pizza box and toss aside that tiny plastic table, give it another look. Behind those three little legs is a story of invention, mystery, and one of the smallest unsung heroes of takeout food.



A 52-Year-Old Pot of Soup? Believe It or Not!

A 52-Year-Old Pot of Soup? Believe It or Not!

Every once in a while, you come across a story that is so unusual you have to read it twice just to make sure you didn't misunderstand it. This is one of those stories.

Imagine walking into a restaurant and ordering a bowl of beef noodle soup made from a broth that has been continuously preserved and cared for since 1974. That's not a typo. The "mother stock" at Wattana Panich, a family-owned restaurant in Bangkok, Thailand, has been lovingly maintained for 52 years, making it one of the world's oldest continuously tended soups.

Even more amazing is the dedication required to keep it alive.

The broth has been passed from one generation to the next like a treasured family heirloom. Today's caretaker, Nattapong Kaweenuntawong, is actually four years younger than the soup itself. He represents the third generation of his family to watch over the famous broth, a responsibility he describes as both an honor and an obligation.

He says they "almost never take vacations" because

someone must constantly care for the soup. Every day fresh beef, herbs, soy sauce, fish sauce, and other ingredients are added while a portion of the original broth remains in the pot, preserving the flavor developed over five decades. Each evening, after the restaurant closes, the family follows a carefully choreographed routine of straining, boiling, and safely storing the broth before repeating the process the following morning.

What may sound like an impossible feat is actually supported by food science. By bringing the broth to a full boil each day and following strict food-safety procedures, the family has maintained an extraordinary record. Remarkably, the restaurant reports that not a single case of food poisoning has ever been linked to its famous soup.

The restaurant's story has spread around the world through social media, attracting visitors from every continent. Many come because they are fascinated by the idea of tasting history. They leave because the soup lives up to its reputation. One seasoned traveler who has sampled beef noodle soup throughout Asia and Australia ranked it among the two best bowls he has ever eaten. Another tourist returned three separate times during a single vacation because, in his words, "It's insane how good it tastes."

Perhaps the most remarkable part of this story isn't the soup itself—it's the commitment behind it.

There is no written recipe. The family's greatest inheritance isn't a cookbook but the ability to recognize when the broth tastes "just right." That knowledge has been passed from grandparents to parents and now to grandchildren through years of experience, careful observation, and countless spoonfuls of tasting. Today, the owner's 19-year-old daughter is already learning the subtle art of judging the broth's flavor, ensuring that this culinary tradition may continue for decades to come.

As retired firefighters, we can appreciate this kind of dedication. Throughout our careers, we inherited traditions, skills, and values from those who came before us. We learned that excellence isn't achieved overnight. It is built one shift, one lesson, and one generation at a time.

A pot of soup that has been alive for 52 years may sound unbelievable. But perhaps the real story isn't about soup at all. It's about preserving excellence, honoring family traditions, and faithfully carrying forward something worth protecting.

Some legacies aren't measured in years—they're measured in the care people devote to keeping them alive.

June-July 2026

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