



THE DISPATCH

RETIRED FIREFIGHTERS OF WASHINGTON

DECEMBER 2025

President's Message



As the holiday season fades and a new year begins, I often find myself reflecting on the spirit that seems to rise so naturally around Christmas—the spirit of giving, kindness, and looking beyond ourselves. That sense of goodwill doesn't have to be packed away with the decorations.

In fact, I think it's one of the best gifts we can carry forward into the new year, shaping not only how we help others, but how we care for our own hearts and minds.

That thought came home to me recently as my wife, Wendy, headed out the door with her guitar in hand. She was joining our pastor to take communion to members of our congregation who are shut-ins—people who can't get to church anymore due to age, illness, or limited mobility. Along with communion, Wendy brings music. A few familiar hymns sung in a living room or bedroom can lift spirits in a way that words alone often cannot. When she returns home, she's always quietly energized, even joyful. Giving of herself gives something back to her as well.

That's the often-overlooked truth about service: while it clearly benefits those on the receiving end, it also nourishes the giver. It provides purpose, connection, and a sense that we still matter in very real ways.

Many of us spent our careers in the fire service answering calls, helping strangers on what might have been the worst day of their lives. Retirement may have closed one chapter, but it didn't take away our ability—or our calling—to serve. Community service doesn't

have to be formal or grand. It can be as simple as checking in on a neighbor, offering a ride, volunteering at a food bank, mentoring a young person, or using a particular skill you've developed over a lifetime.

In my role as President of the Retired Firefighters of Washington, I often think of this work as another form of service. Helping members navigate complicated medical issues, sort out pension or benefit problems, or understand financial realities can be stressful at times—but it's deeply meaningful. Advocacy and even lobbying on behalf of our members feels like community service to me, because the goal is always the same: to make life a little better, a little fairer, for others.

One of the most rewarding parts of this role comes when someone reaches out to say, "Thank you—you really helped," or when a member tells me that a newsletter article made them laugh, gave them hope, or helped them feel less alone. Those moments remind me that service doesn't always look like a big public gesture. Sometimes it's quiet, personal, and unseen by anyone else—but it matters.

As we step into this new year, I encourage each of you to consider how you might serve. Not out of obligation, but out of opportunity. Service keeps us engaged, connected, and purposeful. It strengthens our communities, and just as importantly, it strengthens us.

The fire service taught us to show up when we were needed. That lesson doesn't expire. Wherever you are, whatever your abilities, there is still a place for your experience, compassion, and generosity. And in giving to others, you may discover that you receive far more than you expected.

Stay well, stay connected, and thank you—for all the ways you continue to serve.



Pension Law Demystified

Important Update on SSB 5085 and SHB 2034: A Major Victory—But the Fight Continues

As many of you know, SSB 5085 and SHB 2034 remain two of the most serious legislative threats to the integrity of the LEOFF 1 Pension Fund. Both bills seek, in different ways, to treat pension funds as a potential tool for addressing state budget problems rather than as trust funds held exclusively for the benefit of retirees and beneficiaries.

During the 2025 Legislative Session, we successfully temporarily defeated both bills, preventing their passage. However, the Legislature then directed the Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP) to conduct a formal review and issue a report back to lawmakers by January 2026. Over the past year, the SCPP held six meetings devoted to studying these proposals, hearing testimony, and evaluating their legal, fiscal, and policy implications.

In last month's newsletter, I summarized what occurred at the September and October SCPP meetings and promised to update you on the final meeting held on November 18th. I am pleased to report that there is very good news.

At that November 18th meeting, the SCPP voted to make no recommendation on either SSB 5085 or SHB 2034. This is a significant victory. Had the Committee recommended passage of either bill, it is highly likely that the Legislature would have moved them forward in the 2026 Session. Now we can argue that if the SCPP saw such little merit in the bills so as to not recommend passage of either, legislators should also reject them as well.

This outcome did not happen by chance. It was the direct result of aggressive and sustained advocacy—testimony at SCPP hearings, countless phone calls, emails, letters, Zoom meetings, and in-person discussions with legislators. While we would have preferred a formal “do-not-pass” recommendation, the fact that the Committee could not find sufficient merit to recommend passage speaks volumes.

That said, the battle is not over. Both bills will be reintroduced in the 2026 Legislative Session. With large state budget deficits looming, the temptation

to “skim” pension funds will be real. We are well positioned, however, with strong legislative relationships and a clear, credible message: pension funds are not budgetary tools.

We will remain vigilant, united, and engaged. This was an important win—but now we must finish the job.

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

RFFOW General Membership Meeting – January 14, 2026

Please mark your calendar for the next Retired Firefighters of Washington (RFFOW) General Membership Meeting, to be held on Wednesday, January 14, 2026, via Zoom only, beginning promptly at 9:00 a.m. Pacific Time.

As with all of our General Membership Meetings, a Zoom link will be emailed to members two days prior to the meeting, and again on the morning of the meeting for your convenience—making it easy to find right at the top of your inbox.

We are especially pleased to announce our Special Speaker, Dave Morris, a retired Spokane County Sheriff's Deputy, Board Member of the Spokane C.O.P.S. Program, and Region 7 Director for the Washington State Crime Prevention Association. Dave will be presenting an important and timely program on how to recognize, avoid, and protect yourself from scams and fraud.

Sadly, seniors are often the primary targets of increasingly sophisticated scams—many of which are designed to appear legitimate, urgent, and even personal. Dave's presentation will provide practical, real-world guidance to help you identify red flags, avoid costly mistakes, and protect both yourself and your loved ones.

Following the presentation, we will conduct RFFOW organizational business and provide updates on issues important to our membership including the status of the LEOFF 1 Pension Fund bills SSB 5085 and SHB 2034.

This is a meeting you won't want to miss. We strongly encourage all members to attend—and to consider inviting a spouse or family member to listen in as well. We look forward to seeing you on January 14th.



Robert Walker, Seattle Fire Department Firefighter, passed away November 30, 2025 at the age of 75. Robert joined the Seattle Fire Department in September of 1977 and retired in July of 2023 after 25 years of service. No further information at this time.

Lt. David J. Paul Jr., Tacoma Fire Department, passed away on Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 2025. He retired from the fireboat in December 2004.



Annual Dues are Due

Time to Pay Your Dues

January marks the first month of the year when the \$60 RFFOW annual dues are due. Most of you use the automatic pension deduction method for paying dues, so if you do that, no action is necessary. But for those who pay by check, please get your check in the mail ASAP. The dues slip is included at the end of the newsletter like normal.

If you would like to start paying your dues by a automatic pension deduction (at \$5 per month) just go to our website at www.rffow.org and there will be a button that you can use to download that application, or instead you can call me at (360) 710-9375 and ask me for one and I will put it in the mail to you.

Thank you so much for your attention to this matter and for being such a loyal RFFOW member.

Retired Firefighters Of Washington

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Retired Firefighters of Washington

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You Are Never Too Old... Even If You're a Bird

Every once in a while, a story comes along that stops you in your tracks—not because it's loud or dramatic, but because it quietly shatters what we think we know about aging, limits, and endurance. This is one of those stories.

High above the vast Pacific Ocean, on a tiny speck of land called Midway Atoll, a bird named Wisdom has just returned home once again. That might not sound remarkable at first—until you realize that Wisdom is 75 years old and is preparing to become a mother... again.

Wisdom is a Laysan albatross, a seabird known for flying thousands of miles over open ocean. She was first tagged by scientists back in 1956—during the Eisenhower Administration—after laying an egg. Since then, she has returned to the same nesting grounds year after year, season after season, decade after decade. Over her lifetime, she has laid an estimated 50 to 60 eggs and successfully raised as many as 30 chicks. Last year alone, at the age of 74, she became the oldest known wild bird in the world to successfully lay an egg. And now—at 75—she's back again.

Let that sink in. Seventy-five years old. Still flying across oceans. Still nesting. Still giving life.

Each year, Wisdom returns to Midway Atoll, a place many of us know from history as the site of the pivotal World War II Battle of Midway. Today, those islands are a protected wildlife refuge and sanctuary for millions of birds and marine life. It's a fitting place for

a survivor like Wisdom—one who has lived through wars, generations, and enormous environmental change, yet continues her ancient cycle of life.

Biologists even note that she arrived earlier than usual this season, a sign of strength and determination. Her mate has not yet been spotted, but in past years she has re-paired and continued on, undeterred by loss or change. There's something quietly powerful about that.

We often hear that the animal kingdom has its own legends—Greenland sharks that live for centuries, deep-sea creatures that seem almost immortal. But Wisdom's story stands apart because it isn't just about long life. It's about continuing to live with purpose.

For us, as retired firefighters, Wisdom's story feels familiar in a different way. We understand endurance. We understand showing up year after year. We understand loss, resilience, and continuing on anyway. Many of us spent careers answering calls long after others would have slowed down. Wisdom is doing the same—just with wings instead of turnout gear.

Her life is a reminder that aging does not mean the end of contribution. It doesn't mean the end of growth. And it certainly doesn't mean the end of making a difference.

If a 75-year-old albatross can cross oceans, build a nest, and raise new life—then surely there's still plenty of purpose left for all of us.

Wisdom proves what we like to say around here:

You are never too old. Not even close.



Blessed to Be a Blessing

Every one of us reading this is blessed. I don't mean that in some abstract, bumper-sticker way. I mean it in the simple, everyday sense: we woke up this morning, we drew a pension we earned, we had coffee, we have friends, memories, stories, health enough to show up, and people who know our name. That is blessing — plain and simple.

And here's something I've come to believe more and more as I've gotten older: when blessings flow into our lives, they naturally want to flow back out. Not as guilt. Not as obligation. Not as a scorecard. Just as an instinct. A reflex. Almost like breathing.

When a life has been filled with opportunity, love, hardship survived, second chances, steady friendships, and meaningful work, something inside us quietly says, "I've been given a lot. I want to give something back." It doesn't require a committee meeting or a dramatic sacrifice. It's simply the natural overflow of a full cup.

Some people think generosity is only about money. That's the easiest thing to measure, but it's far from the most important. Many of us live on fixed incomes now. That doesn't limit our ability to bless others one bit. We give in a hundred other ways: encouragement, humor, wisdom, patience, listening, mentoring, checking on a widow, calling an old friend, welcoming a new retiree, telling a story that makes someone laugh or feel seen.

Let's be honest — firefighters have always been natural givers. We just called it "the job." We didn't overthink it. We saw a need and we moved toward it. That instinct doesn't retire when we do. It just changes uniforms.

There is also a quiet spiritual truth woven into all of this. No matter how you understand God, faith, or purpose, most traditions agree on this: life itself is a gift. And gifts are meant to be shared. Gratitude is the soil where generosity grows. When you recognize how much has come into your life — sometimes despite your own mistakes — you can't help but want to pass something good forward.

And here's the part we sometimes overlook: being a blessing isn't just good for others — it's good for us. It gives meaning to our days. It pulls us out of isolation. It reminds us that we still matter, we still have influence, and we still have something powerful to give.

Sometimes that gift is as simple as a smile in the grocery store, a joke over coffee, a thank-you note, or telling a younger person, "You're doing better than you think." Other times it's stepping up in bigger ways. All of it counts.

We are blessed — beyond what we often recognize. And when blessing becomes our natural response rather than a forced obligation, the world around us quietly becomes a better place.

And so do we.



The Simplest Medicine

Movement: The Simplest Medicine We've Ever Known

From the ancient Greek gymnasiums to Roman military drills, people have long understood something that modern science now confirms: human beings are built to move. Even Aristotle believed that a sound mind required a sound body. Two thousand years later, research has caught up with that wisdom—and the message is especially important for us as retired firefighters (as well as our spouses).

Movement is not a luxury or a fitness trend. It is a biological necessity. Without it, nearly every system in the body begins to decline: muscles weaken, the heart loses efficiency, metabolism slows, and the brain becomes more vulnerable to disease. The good news is that the reverse is also true. When we move—even gently—the body responds in powerful ways.

Every time a muscle contracts, it sends chemical messengers called myokines into the bloodstream. Think of these as internal firefighters, traveling throughout the body to reduce inflammation, improve blood sugar control, and even support brain health. As we stay active, the heart becomes more efficient, blood vessels stay flexible, and oxygen delivery improves. In plain language: movement helps everything work better.

The brain benefits just as much. Physical activity stimulates the release of neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin, which improve mood, focus, and emotional balance. Exercise also increases a substance called BDNF—often described as "Miracle-Gro for the brain"—which supports memory, learning, and resilience to stress. Remarkably, regular movement can even influence how our genes behave, turning beneficial genes "on" and harmful ones "off" through a process known as epigenetics.

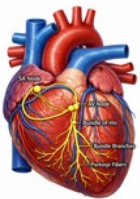
Here's the most encouraging part: you don't need to train like you're back on the job. Public health guidelines recommend 150 minutes of moderate activity per week, but research shows that even 10 minutes of walking can reduce stress, lift mood, and begin reversing the damage caused by too much sitting. The most important factor isn't intensity—it's

consistency. Gentle, regular movement done in a way that's enjoyable and sustainable provides the greatest long-term benefit.

In contrast, inactivity has become one of the leading contributors to disease worldwide. It is linked to heart disease, diabetes, depression, many cancers, and accelerated cognitive decline, including Alzheimer's disease. The World Health Organization now ranks physical inactivity alongside smoking and poor nutrition as a major risk factor for early death.

As technology advances, exercise may become more personalized through wearables and tailored programs. But the core truth will never change: movement remains one of the most powerful tools we have to extend not just lifespan, but health span.

For retired firefighters, this is hopeful news. A daily walk, light strength work, gardening, stretching, or playing with grandkids all count. Movement doesn't have to be hard to be healing. Sometimes, the simplest medicine really is the best.



Promising Breakthrough for Heart Disease

A Promising Breakthrough for Heart Disease—and New Hope for Those Living with A-Fib

Heart disease is something many of us live with every day. For retired firefighters and other seniors, conditions like atrial fibrillation (A-fib)—an irregular and often rapid heartbeat—are especially common. There are many other types of heart disease as well. A-fib can increase fatigue, shortness of breath, stroke risk, and anxiety, and despite how widespread it is, treatment options have changed very little over the past three decades. This includes treatment for other heart conditions as well.

That's why a recent breakthrough from Michigan State University (MSU) is worth paying attention to. It provides greater insight, and resources, to fight

different types of heart disease, in this case A-fib.

MSU scientists have created the first living human "heart organoid" capable of replicating A-fib. An organoid is a tiny, lab-grown model of a human organ. In this case, the organoids are about the size of a lentil—but they are remarkably realistic. They beat rhythmically on their own and contain structures similar to real human hearts, including chambers and blood vessels.

Until now, researchers have struggled to develop new drugs for A-fib because they simply did not have an accurate way to study the disease in human heart tissue. Animal models don't behave like human hearts, and testing directly on people is risky and limited. This new development changes that.

Led by biomedical engineer Dr. Aitor Aguirre and his team, MSU researchers used donated human stem cells to grow these miniature hearts. In their latest work, they went one step further by adding immune cells—specifically macrophages—that play an important role in heart development and inflammation.

Why does this matter? Because inflammation is now believed to be a major driver of A-fib.

When researchers triggered inflammation inside the heart organoids, the beating became irregular—just like A-fib in real patients. Then came the remarkable part: when they added an anti-inflammatory drug, the heart rhythm partially returned to normal. For the first time, scientists were able to watch this process unfold in living human heart tissue.

This breakthrough could finally end a 30-year drought in new A-fib medications. Instead of only treating symptoms, future drugs may target the underlying causes of the condition. Researchers believe this approach could lead to safer, more effective, and even less expensive treatments.

Looking ahead, MSU scientists hope to create personalized heart models using a patient's own cells, allowing doctors to test which treatments work best for each individual. This includes not just A-fib, but other common heart diseases. One day, this research could even support the development of transplant-ready heart tissue.

For those of us who have spent a lifetime protecting others, it's encouraging to know that science is working just as hard to protect our hearts.



Teenagers Take On the Impossible — and Just Might Win

Every so often, a story comes along that makes you shake your head in disbelief and say, “You’ve got to be kidding me.” This is one of those stories. A group of ordinary public-school students—teenagers—took on a medical challenge that has frustrated adult scientists for decades: early detection and treatment of Lyme disease. And incredibly, they may have succeeded.

At Lambert High School in suburban Atlanta, a team of students decided they weren’t content working on safe, predictable science fair projects. Instead, they aimed straight at a national health problem affecting nearly half a million Americans every year. Lyme disease is notoriously difficult to diagnose in its earliest—and most treatable—stage. Current tests often can’t confirm infection for two full weeks. By then, damage may already be underway. Untreated Lyme can lead to arthritis, nerve damage, and even heart problems.

That’s where these teenagers stepped in.

Using advanced CRISPR gene-editing technology (which I described in last month’s newsletter)—the same cutting-edge tool used in top research institutions—the students attempted something bold: to create a test that could detect Lyme disease within just two days of infection. Even their own teacher warned them that the project was “high risk, high reward” and admitted she could hardly imagine it actually working. University professors they consulted were equally skeptical.

But the students pressed on.

Working long hours in a college-level lab at their public high school, they targeted a protein created during Lyme infection and used CRISPR to isolate it. Their goal was to make that protein visible with a simple, kit-style test, similar to a COVID or pregnancy test. After months of trial, error, and relentless effort, they saw something extraordinary: proof that early detection might actually be possible.

And they didn’t stop there. They even explored using CRISPR as a way to block the Lyme bacteria itself—a potential alternative to antibiotics, which many patients grow resistant to.

The team took their work to Paris for the international

iGEM competition—often called the “Olympics of science.” More than 400 teams from around the world competed. Despite facing teams from countries where biotechnology is a top national priority, these American high school students finished in the top ten worldwide and were the only U.S. high school team to do so.

A Stanford professor and co-founder of iGEM called their Lyme disease diagnostic better than anything he had seen before.

Let that sink in.

Teenagers. Public school. Taking on a medical problem that stumps professionals. They didn’t just do well—they pushed the boundaries of what is thought possible.

For all of us who spent our lives solving problems under intense pressure, this story is a powerful reminder: courage, grit, and determination still fuel the next generation. And sometimes, the ones who change the world haven’t even graduated yet.



New Year’s Resolutions

New Year’s Resolutions: A Different Kind of Reset

Every New Year arrives with the same question: So... what are you going to do differently this year? By now, most of us have learned that bold declarations made on January 1st have a suspicious habit of disappearing by February 1st—right about the time the treadmill becomes a clothes rack.

Maybe this year calls for a smarter approach.

Instead of grand resolutions, consider small adjustments. Go to bed 30 minutes earlier. Read one book you’ve been meaning to read for years. Walk a little farther, stretch a little longer, complain a little less (that one’s tough). Small changes don’t attract much attention—but they stick.

We spent our careers mastering discipline, consistency, and patience. Those same traits still serve us well, even if the goals are quieter now.

A New Year doesn’t require a new you. It just offers a chance to fine-tune what already works—and maybe retire one habit that never really did.

After all, progress doesn’t need sirens. It just needs direction.

December 2025

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NEXT GENERAL MEETING
January 14th at 9:00 A.M. (Pacific)
Zoom Only — link to be emailed

2026 Retired Firefighters of Washington Membership Dues

Mail to: P.O. Box 12324 Mill Creek, WA 98082

☐ Dues paid by Payroll Deduction, only updating contact information

Name of current member: _____

Name of spouse: _____

Department Retired From: _____

☐ Prior Act ☐ LEOFF 1 ☐ LEOFF 2

Address: _____

Name and date of death of former
member if deceased:

_____ Check No: _____

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

2026 Dues: \$57 Legislative Fund Donation: \$3 Amount Enclosed _____ (Date) _____