



## NORTH WHIDBEY FIRE AND RESCUE

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **North Whidbey Fire and Rescue Introduces New Fire Chief**



*Fire Chief John Clark and his wife Gina are looking forward to being part of the North Whidbey Island community. Photo courtesy of Kelsie MacDonald.*

OAK HARBOR, WASH. — North Whidbey Fire and Rescue hired John Clark as its new fire chief – three months ago. Chief Clark began his position on March 16 a short time after the COVID-19 pandemic had taken hold in Washington state.

“We should have made the introductions before now, but preparing for and responding to COVID-19 was our priority,” said Chief John Clark. “Now, I’d like to introduce myself, my wife Gina, and thank the people we’ve met so far on Whidbey Island for such a warm welcome.”

Chief Clark joins NWFR with 41 years in emergency services. He last served as Fire Chief for Baker City, Oregon before moving to Whidbey Island. He has also held the positions of Chief for Delta Township, Michigan and Assistant Chief for Washington Township, Michigan earlier in his career.

Chief Clark has extensive experience in volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention. This is important to an agency like NWFR, which primarily relies on part-time paid and volunteer firefighters to respond to an average of 2,400 emergency calls a year. Fire districts across the nation are struggling to attract and retain volunteers due to the time commitment and training requirements. On Whidbey Island, the cost of living is also an issue.

“We have people who want to volunteer, but they’re working two or three jobs to make ends meet. Add family commitments on top of that, and there’s not a lot of time left to give,” said Chief Clark. “My goal is to continue the tradition of volunteerism at the fire district by providing our volunteers with some flexibility so they can stay involved or join the fire district.”

Having an adequate number of firefighters on shift each day is critical to manage increasing call volumes for the fire district (up 45 percent in 10 years). Higher call volumes also are contributing to wear and tear on emergency apparatus and equipment. Two fire engines need replacing, as well as outdated radio equipment and Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBAs) for firefighters.

NWFR is considering asking voters for a Fire Levy lid lift of 15 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value during the November General Election. Currently NWFR has the lowest Fire Levy rate of any fire agency in Island County. If approved by voters, funding would be used to pay cash for these items as opposed to financing them, which costs taxpayers more due to interest payments.

The fire district plans to discuss the lid lift and take public comment during its July 14 meeting. More information will be forthcoming once it is known whether the meeting can be held in person or through a video conference feature.

Chief Clark holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Fire Engineering from University of Cincinnati and a Master’s Degree in Safety Administration from University of Eastern Kentucky. He also is a certified Fire Officer III, Paramedic, Fire Instructor I, Fire Plans Examiner, Fire Inspector, and Professional Emergency Manager.

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*North Whidbey Fire and Rescue provides an emergency response to fires, medical calls, water and high angle rescue, and auto accidents. The agency serves 18,000 people over 55 square miles, which includes the unincorporated area west of the City of Oak Harbor from Deception Pass Bridge (to the north) and Libbey Road in Coupeville (to the south). Highly-trained part-time paid and volunteer firefighters respond to an average of 2,400 calls per year.*