

FRONT LINE



A salute to community volunteer first responders • 2026



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County Board of
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FRONT LINE

A salute to community
volunteer first responders

Features

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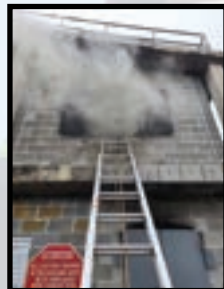
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On the cover:

Training sessions and drills are an important part of a firefighter's service to their community.

Photo courtesy of White Stone Volunteer Fire Department



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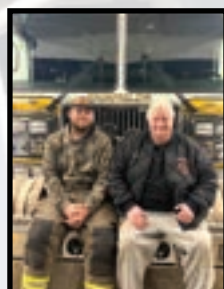
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Welcome to

FRONT LINE

As we finalized this special section to send to the printer, the entire state braced for a winter storm. And our local first responders braced themselves for what could be a long week of answering calls for downed power lines and trees, vehicle accidents and house fires related to space heaters and fireplaces.

But they are prepared, in part because of years of continued training. In this issue of Front Line, we highlight how to become a volunteer firefighter with local departments and the requirements to remain active, includ-

ing training sessions and drills.

We also feature the best of the best in fire departments from Deltaville to Callao and those in between as our reporters introduce readers to the firefighters of the year.

We introduce readers to two rescue squad volunteers, who explain what a difference being a volunteer makes in their lives and the services they provide to the community.

We are proud to tell the stories of our volunteer first responders in Lancaster, Middlesex and Northumberland counties. They are the true heroes in our com-

munity...our neighbors, family members and friends who answer the call day or night with only a thank you as a reward.

We hope by telling their stories our readers will come to appreciate even more the sacrifices our volunteer first responders make, not for a paycheck, but for the simple reward of helping someone in need.

We thank and appreciate them for everything they do.

Lisa & Susan

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FRONT LINE Support Spot

A list of area volunteer fire and rescue organizations can be found on page 31.



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TRAINING IS FUNDAMENTAL AMONG VOLUNTEER FIRE UNITS

Firefighters train like their lives depend on it, because they do...as do the lives of the people they're rescuing.

The moment comes when every new volunteer firefighter is called upon to enter a burning building or respond to a serious accident, and it's training that makes him or her ready.

by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi

Throughout the country and in the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula, volunteer firefighters prepare for that first call with hours of classroom and practical exercises. That friend, neighbor or family member who suits up when the siren blows has to be prepared because fighting a fire isn't simply throwing on a suit and grabbing a water hose.

Chris Cornwell of Weems put on a set of full gear and air pack and entered the burn building in Browns Store for the first time a few weeks ago with 14 other firefighters from Kilmarnock Volunteer Fire Department.

"The adrenaline of it all is right up my alley," said Cornwell, who joined KVFD just a month before the exercise. "I went through two full bottles (of air) because I kept going in.

"You can't see a damn thing, even if you're on the floor," he said, describing the exercise which mimics a burning building. "It's hot, it's uncomfortably hot. You got to be willing to fight through it. But the adrenaline overrides all of that."

The burn building, built 20 years ago through grant funding, is a Rappahannock Regional Fire Training Center and uti-





Firefighters practice removing victims at the regional burn building in Browns Store. Photo courtesy of Kilmarnock Volunteer Fire Department



Fairfields Volunteer Fire Department members enter a burning house during a control burn. Photo courtesy of Phillip Keyser



Firefighters watered down a neighboring home, trees, bushes and storage buildings, while monitoring a burning home during a training exercise in Weems. Photo by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi

lized by departments from Northumberland, Lancaster, Westmoreland, Essex and Richmond counties. It offers departments opportunities to train for real-life situations in a safe environment. The surrounding property also often serves as a medical emergency helicopter landing zone.

“The facility is great,” said Cornwell. Fires were set in wooden crates and firefighters entered the building with hoses but didn’t use water, he said. “We worked in teams, interior and exterior teams both have important jobs. We also did body recovery, which is kind of tricky.”

It was Cornwell’s first time in full gear, maneuvering through a smoke and heat filled building.

“I learned a lot of really good information in one day,” he said. “There was a general evaluation telling you how smoke travels. Everything you see in the movies is pretty much false.

“The uniform is heavy. Everything feels almost not goofy but cumbersome,” he added. “And the fire is hard to see even if you’re close to it or on the floor. You have to use all of your senses.”

Cornwell is in the process of completing Firefighter 1, a 154-hour training program which most volunteer departments require of new members.

“It takes a lot of time, a lot of commitment and then if you have to travel outside of where the department is it’s

a huge burden on some people,” said Fairfield’s Volunteer Fire Department (FVFD) chief Phillip Keyser. “Firefighter 1 is a great class but it teaches you a minimum of what you need to know.”

For that reason, FVFD, unlike most local departments, doesn’t require the course but instead offers an intensive, in-house training program for new and potential members.

Firefighter 1 classes are available but communication about the offerings among the Virginia Department of Fire Programs and local volunteer departments has not been good recently.

“The fire department is the part time job that you don’t get paid for.”

***Charles Brocklebank, Chief,
White Stone Volunteer
Fire Department***

“They don’t really communicate with us,” said Keyser.

A minimum number of 12 to 15 participants are needed for the class to be offered free of charge, he said. Sometimes two

or three local departments can meet that minimum but often new recruits must travel to classes like several new members with KVFD who had to travel to Abingdon, said KVFD chief Bryan Keyser.

“So in place of that, we’ve come up with our training program,” said Keyser. “We call it the Yellow Hat. When you come in as a probationary member you get a book and have a year to learn that. It mirrors Firefighter 1.

“We cater our training specifically to how we respond and what we do,” he added.

Many other local departments like Kilmarnock, White Stone and Hartfield Volunteer Fire Department (HVFD) still require new members to complete Firefighter 1. In White Stone and Hartfield, volunteers have two years to complete the program. In Kilmarnock, you have three years to complete the training. The course includes HAZMAT, CPR and first aid training.

In White Stone, members are also required to take an Emergency Vehicle Operator’s Course (EVOC) on driving fire apparatus.

“In order to be a truck driver, you don’t have to have a CDL, but we have to clear you for driving,” said Charles Brocklebank, chief of White Stone Volunteer Fire Department (WSVFD). “That means an officer drives with you until we believe you are comfortable driving that truck. You have to know how to operate all the equipment on that truck and be able to pump the water off that truck. You are responsible for that truck from the time you leave that station until it comes back.”

And all departments require active members to continue training. It’s not a one and done thing.

Most departments have monthly meetings and monthly drills or training sessions. White Stone firefighters have to attend at least six meetings a year and five training sessions and work all the fundraisers, said Brocklebank. His department offers 11 trainings throughout the year. Those trainings can range from “putting our gear on and doing a mock disaster without fire, to train on drafting, water supply, on the truck, anything that involves firefighting we train on. Sometimes we do classroom training. There are also multiple opportunities with other counties and we apply for classes throughout the year in the area.”



Volunteer firemen from Lancaster County prepare for a control burn exercise. Photo courtesy of Charles Brocklebank



White Stone and Fairfield's volunteer firemen practice ladder work. Photo by Bill Kramer



Kilmarnock volunteer firemen review following an exercise at the burn building. Photo courtesy of Kilmarnock Volunteer Fire Department

Volunteer fire departments from Kilmarnock, White Stone and Upper Lancaster took part in a control burn exercise in Weems. Photo by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi



The burn building in Browns Store serves as a regional training facility for volunteers in Northumberland, Lancaster, Richmond, Westmoreland and Essex counties. Photo courtesy of Kilmarnock Volunteer Fire Department

Life EVAC held a classroom training with WSVFD last year and a few years ago career firefighters from Fredericksburg offered a tips and tricks class in Northumberland County.

HVFD requires members attend six business meetings, four trainings, four cleanups or maintenance events and respond to a minimum of 12 calls per year, according to HVFD captain Kyle McNamee.

“We usually offer about 10 trainings per year, and that’s probably a conservative number,” he said. “We try and make it a mixture with several control burns, which is a county-wide training. As a county, we’re trying to do four to six trainings per year.”

Firefighters in Middlesex recently went to a junkyard and cut up cars to practice vehicle extrication.

They also review plans and walk throughs of high-risk buildings like schools and large commercial buildings.

Fire departments on both sides of the Rappahannock River combine resources when it comes to training, according to Brocklebank, who said when there is an opportunity for a control burn usually all three Lancaster County departments take part. But those opportunities are rare, he added.

“It’s hot, it’s uncomfortably hot. You got to be willing to fight through it. But the adrenaline overrides all of that.”

Chris Cornwell, Kilmarnock Volunteer Fire Department

For a control burn, the conditions have to be just right. The building has to be asbestos free, the owners must have a demolition permit from the county, the weather and wind conditions must be so to protect nearby buildings and trees, he said.

For that reason, departments pay dues to be part of the regional burn building facility in Northumberland, where trainings allow for ladder work and smoke and heat drills in a controlled environment.

“It’s a designed building with temperature sensors. It’s concrete so you it doesn’t burn but it gets hot in there. You can simulate backdrafts and really any situation you want.

“There’s no comparison to a real house fire but it’s the closest thing you can get to it,” he added.



Fairfields Volunteer Fire Department volunteers conduct ladder and hose stretching drills. Photo courtesy of Phillip Keyser

Keyser said it's an ideal training facility for new members not yet comfortable with entering a burning building. "If something isn't right, the egress is right there so you have an easy way to get out."

KVFD had 15 members participate in a recent training drill. That department requires active members participate in 50% of the offered training sessions per year.

"Not everybody is going to be able to grab the hose and run in a burning hose. We know that. But there are other ways they can volunteer."

Phillip Keyser, Fairfields Volunteer Fire Department

agency response, grant from FEMA and offered classes.

Response training for automobile accidents is also high priority, said Keyser. "Vehicle accidents are #1 calls," he said.

Although active members are required to continue with training and have multiple requirements, the consensus is the same around the region. Volunteers are needed at every level.

"Our application is online and open to anyone from 16-70," said Keyser. "Not everybody is going to be able to grab the hose and run in a burning hose. We know that. But there are other ways they can volunteer."

That's also the case in Hartfield, where McNamee says HVFD's associate memberships are "targeted to people in the community who don't necessarily want to go to fires but have more of a support role. They can come to trainings and events but their primary goal is logistics, fundraisers, not actually responding to calls."

Often training sessions are offered regionally, said Keyser, noting that Cople District received a SAFER, or staffing for adequate fire and emer-

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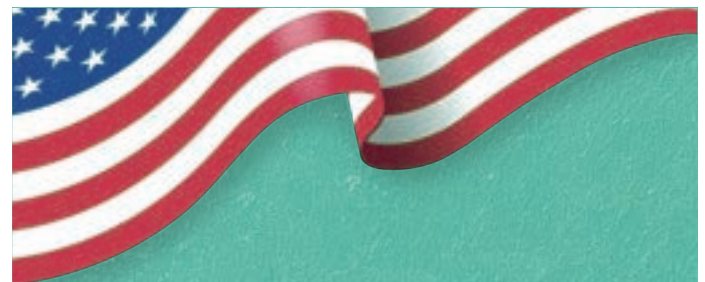
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MEMBER FDIC

Rescue squad volunteers

an important part of team

by Tom Chillemi

If you think you could never be an EMT, a short talk with Valerie Barton will surely give you something to think about.

She did.

At the age of 59, she found herself behind the wheel of an ambulance and in command of a big vehicle with precious cargo. “Driving an ambulance is cool,” said Barton. “It’s challenging. But after hundreds of practice hours, it is very cool to successfully handle that serious job of being in sole charge of the ambulance while an EMT and patients rely on you and your skill set to get them safely to the hospital.”

Barton, who is retired from the financial sector, took the EMT class and passed the test on her first try — at age 64. Ten years later Barton, of Heathsville, is president of the Mid-County Volunteer Rescue Squad.

Try it

Those who think they are too squeamish to be an EMT can be “a third,” someone who assists the EMT, and collects information about the patient, transcribing notes as the EMT calls them out, or do anything that’s needed. “Thirds” learn how to assemble a stair chair, use a people mover, what a Lifepak is, and where all the tools and equipment are on the ambulance. “They are an important part of the team,” said Barton.

“As I reflect on volunteerism,” said Barton, “being a volunteer in the fire or rescue services requires a real desire to help others and, often, on their worst day. It is beyond rewarding to be of service to the community.

“Volunteering brings out the best in everyone,” Barton added. “You see people on their worst day. And suddenly your problems don’t amount to a hill of beans and you have nothing to complain about and a lot to be thankful for.”

Recently retired

Mid-County Volunteer Rescue Squad has fortunately had six volunteers join in the last year, said Barton, adding that volunteering is well suited to the



Take a test ride with the Mid-County Volunteer Rescue Squad. You could be a driver. That’s how Valerie Barton got started.

“It’s been found that if you are engaged with people or have a hobby, you are healthier . . . it extends your good years.”
—Valerie Barton



Middlesex County Volunteer Rescue Squad (MCVRS) members practice life-saving skills. The person at the head is “bagging” the patient — providing ventilation — the others are receiving instructions on what the patient’s vital signs are. They are looking at the LIFEPAK monitor to see if the interventions, like ventilation, are working so they can plan the next step. The role of BLS (basic life support) is to stabilize the patient and transport to a higher level of care or call for a higher level— Advanced Life Support.

recently retired. It gives them a purpose that could be missing since they retired. “It’s been found that if you are engaged with people or have a hobby, you are healthier . . . it extends your good years. We are a family. We are always laughing. It keeps you young.”

MCVRS has people running calls who are in their late 70s and early 80s.

In 1987 Garfield Parker was a founding member of MCVRS. He’s been an ambulance driver from the beginning and still is. The former high school teacher also was a cardiac technician.

By volunteering, you not only help others, you help yourself, Barton said. “It’s the most satisfying thing I’ve done in my entire life!”

“In her words”

Front Line asked Valerie Barton to share her experiences. Here is what she had to say:

Front Line: What motivates you to give of your time with the rescue squad for so many years?

Valerie Barton: I think every volunteer has different reasons as to what brought them to volunteer at a rescue squad. The reason they stay tends to be consistent. I believe, especially in our rural communities, every volunteer knows they make a difference for the citizens they serve. Northumberland County is a big county with 191 square miles, so time counts. Local rescue squads make an impact in the outcomes of emergencies. My reason for

continuing to volunteer is that I absolutely know I can be that helping hand and make a difference in someone’s life in an emergency, and seriously, what could possibly be a better motivator than that?

Front Line: What is rewarding about volunteering?

Valerie Barton: Making a difference. On someone’s worst day, volunteers are there and present, helping in all ways possible. And that worst day doesn’t have to be something tragic. It can be helping a grandparent after a fall, tending a wound, or often, just that comforting presence someone needs on that day.

Front Line: What are some successful encounters and do many come back and say thank you?

Valerie Barton: Nearly every day, I have someone say, “thank you.” Someone will say, “I don’t know if you remember me but” and they tell me how grateful they are, and how thoughtful and kind I was to their loved ones. They remember how quickly we arrived, how happy they were to see us. Sometimes they say, “I didn’t know it was serious but you did, or it wasn’t serious and you still cared.” The thank you cards and notes we receive from our community that I read to our squad members every month remind us of our solemn duty.

Northumberland County doesn’t have a coroner, so EMTs are called to do the death declaration in

the case of an unattended death. This is so very personal and private for the families involved. It is also a tough duty for EMS.

It requires every possible skill one possesses to be able to handle the very worst situation no one ever wants to face, and be sympathetic yet professional with the family that is often present.

Nevertheless, the most profound appreciation I’ve received is in these very delicate and difficult situations. This is top of my mind, because the last case I was called to, I met a woman who was outside her neighbor’s home who said, “I am so glad it is you who are here. You were so kind to me and helped me so much when my husband passed away.” Until that moment, I was focused on my mission in the home I was ready to enter, but, with her words, I immediately recognized her, remembered her husband and that terrible day. Until that very instant, I had no clue of my impact and of the comfort I had given that day. It was extremely humbling to know, on her absolute worst day, my actions made such a lasting impression on her.

I made a difference. Many people never get to know this.

Because of the experiences I have had as a volunteer, I am a better person. Stepping into someone’s home and their life in the way we do helps me keep my life in perspective, by seeing the very real problems others face every day, and realizing just how very fortunate I am.

A passion for helping others

by Tom Chillemi

Pam Walker is among the fortunate few who found her calling early. At the age of 31, she joined the Upper Lancaster Volunteer Rescue Squad (ULVRS), and today Pam Walker is the longest serving active EMS provider in Lancaster County with 40 years of continuous service to the community.

“From the very beginning of my journey I went all in,” she said. She became an EMT and later earned Advanced Life Support status as an Advanced EMT.

“Just try it”

In 1985, she was unsure.

A rescue squad member asked her several times to join, but she didn’t think she could handle it. Her friend persisted and convinced her to “just try it” with the condition she could resign. “I told my husband I will try it if you do it too.” He did! They both joined in 1985 and she has been an active member ever since that first day and earned her life member status after 10 years,” she explained. Her husband Carl also became a life member.

The Walkers, who live in the Millenbeck area in upper Lancaster County, joined when the rescue squad was just two years old.

Before the squad had a building, an ambulance would be parked at a member’s home. And for a time, it was parked at the Walker’s home so she had to respond to all calls.

“I don’t regret a single day,” she said. “Yes, I missed a lot of holiday time and events with my family and do regret that, but I believe they understood my passion for helping others.”

“A family thing”

Her decision in 1985 to help the sick and injured led to a legacy of emergency services by her family. When Pam and Carl Walker joined they had two children ages 5 and 10. “They went along for the ride and were used as patients in our training,” said Pam. “When they got old enough they both joined the squad.”

Her son Everett Walker is now a life member and her daughter Stefanie (Timberlake) went on to be a nurse. They both joined ULVRS, as did her brother Ben Sanford who was a member of Kilmarnock Volunteer



Pam Walker has served for 40 years with the Upper Lancaster Volunteer Rescue Squad.

“I can’t see myself doing anything else.” —Pam Walker

"I don't regret a single day." —Pam Walker

Rescue Squad as well. "So, I guess you can say it is a family thing."

Pam and her son Everett are also employees of Lancaster County Emergency Services, which started in December 2003. "We were the first of four employees and the only two of those four still employed after 22 years," she said. "One thing I can say about myself is I am not a quitter, I'm dedicated, caring and very determined."

Her record speaks of her dedication. Pam has been squad president, vice president, secretary, captain, lieutenant, and currently is treasurer. She also served on the Board of Governors.

In addition she helps train new members.

From the beginning

Upper Lancaster Volunteer Rescue Squad formed in September 1983 by citizens of the upper end of Lancaster County that saw a need for a squad to serve that part of the county, said Pam. At that time there was only one squad serving the entire county and that was Kilmarnock Volunteer Rescue Squad. They did have one ambulance stationed at someone's residence in the Ottoman area. "When we got started we held our meetings in Bethel Church and our ambulance was stationed at a member's house," said Pam. "The squad purchased property in Lively and constructed our station."

"Before that time I had an ambulance stationed at my house so therefore I was obligated to respond to all calls."

In her words

Front Line asked Pam Walker to share

her experiences. The following is what she had to say.

Front Line: What motivates you to give of your time with the rescue squad for so many years?

Pam Walker: "I am motivated by my love to help people when they need it the most. It gives me a sense of purpose and makes me proud of myself to help people in my community. I was born and raised in Lancaster County and I am helping family members, friends and strangers. I can't see myself doing anything else. It is rough sometimes when it is my family but I give it my all in every situation."

Front Line: What is rewarding about volunteering?

Pam Walker: "It warms my heart and makes me feel good about myself that I have helped someone. They don't need to say thank you even though many do. I have become friends with the members I volunteer with and I would say they are a part of my family. We work together and have fun but when it is time to get serious, we do."

Front Line: What are some successful encounters and do many come back to say thanks?

Pam Walker: "I have had many people thank me and have received lots of hugs. The squad has received monetary donations and baked goods brought to the station as thanks. I have even been invited to have an alcoholic beverage before leaving a residence. Of course, that had to be declined but I was invited to come back when not on duty," she said with a laugh.



"From the very beginning of my journey I went all in."
—Pam Walker



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Auxiliary raises funds through bingo, thrift stores and regatta

by Tom Chillemi

The Middlesex County Volunteer Rescue Squad (MCVRS) Auxiliary's weekly bingo games are offered every Monday, except for two weeks at Christmas time. Bingo, which started in 1976, has become more popular and now draws scores of players seeking the \$1,000 "jackpot" paid each Monday when there are at least 60 players, which is nearly every week, said auxiliary president Darlene Revere, who was a founding member of the auxiliary in 1975. Most weeks there are 80 players or more.

Players are lined up at the squad's Deltaville building at 17684 General Puller Highway when the doors open at 5 p.m. They are anxious to get their lucky seat and for dinner. Games begin at 7 p.m. and run until about 10:30 p.m.

Preparation for the food is done on weekends and the kitchen heats up about 1 p.m. on Mondays as the daily home-cooked meal specials come together.

It's nearly a 10-hour day for many who work bingo. The flea market also volunteers put in a lot of time even when the store is not

open sorting items. "We are fortunate to have good workers," said Revere.

Flea markets

The auxiliary also operates two flea markets or second-hand stores. Bargains and Treasures is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Wednesdays and Saturdays at 16395 General Puller Highway in Deltaville across from the former Truist Bank. The Second Time Around shop at 391 Hilliard St. near the IGA Urbanna Market in Urbanna is open Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Rescue Regatta

The squad and auxiliary also raise funds through the Rescue Regatta in July, a sailboat competition near Fishing Bay Yacht Club in Deltaville. Thirty-two teams competed at the 2025 event, which raised \$32,000. "It was our best year yet," regatta treasurer Jim Brewer told a squad installation banquet crowd about the 2025 competition which was the third annual one.



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FRONT LINE Most Valuable Players

Every team has its most valuable players, including volunteer first responder units. They're the members who go above and beyond, who assume leadership roles, who others can count on in a pinch, whose enthusiasm, devotion and drive stand out. Above all, they are team players.

Here are a few MVPs who have recently been recognized by their peers.

Lancaster MVPs

by AnnGardner Eubank

Kilmarnock Volunteer Fire Department

Thomas Watts

For two of the last three years, the Kilmarnock Volunteer Fire Department (KVFD) has recognized Thomas Watts as its firefighter of the year. From his willingness to answer calls for service at any hour of the day to his involvement in fundraising and community outreach, Watts has set an undeniable standard of leadership and dedication.

Watts grew up visiting his grandfather in the Northern Neck and always had fond memories of the area and the people. He moved to the area from Hampton Roads about five years ago and said when he moved, he knew he wanted to join a fire department.

Within a year of relocating, he found himself serving with KVFD and even running calls with Upper Lancaster Volunteer Fire Department as well. His motivation to join came from wanting to give back what he'd hoped for and expect from his community in his own time of need.

"If I'm not home and something were to

happen, I would trust people like the fire department to show up. It's about safety and giving back," he said.

According to Watts, he's one of the 25 or so active members with the same mindset.

"As a group, we're very strong. Our willingness to help and respond to all kinds of calls 24/7 is what makes us strong. We all have the same mindset that we just want to help and be there for our people," he said.

Named firefighter of the year back-to-back in both 2023 and 2024, Watts was voted by his peers in the department to be the recipient of the title based on his overall efforts, willingness to serve, and his impact.

"It's an honor to be tied into this group of people who are so dedicated to helping others," he said.

Voted by those who serve alongside him, Watts' recognition reflects not just dedication, but the shared values that keep Kilmarnock's volunteer fire service strong.



White Stone Volunteer Fire Department

Ryan Stephens

In March of 2011, Ryan Stephens was in his late 20s and was looking for something to do in his free time. With a bunch of buddies already serving in the White Stone Volunteer Fire Department (WSVFD), he decided to give joining the department a go. Over the course of 15 years, Stephens has proven himself to be a dedicated member to the department, willing to answer calls of service at any hour of any day, in turn earning himself the distinguished title of firefighter of the year for 2024.

During his time in the department, Stephens has had several different executive titles as well as leadership roles in the field. Currently he is the assistant lieutenant. Being a member of the department as long as he has, Stephens has been there to answer devastating calls to action, routine vehicular incident calls, help organize countless fundraisers, and see incredible growth like the construction of the new department building and purchase of new engines and trucks. Through it all, he says the biggest challenge area departments are facing is recruitment and retention.

With about 30 active members, many of which are active-life members who may begin to not be able to answer as many calls to service as they get older, Stephens said it's imperative that some younger members step up to the plate and give it a try.

"Anyone from ages 16-70, even if all they can do is help at fund-



raisers, we need the help," he said.

Stephens said that being a part of a volunteer fire department allows community members the opportunity to give back and assist in the betterment of the town and surrounding areas as a whole.

"Whenever there's a problem, fire-related or not, people will either run away from the problem or confront it head-on finding a solution. WSVFD is an extension of that. It's an opportunity to make an issue better," he said.

There's a lot of hard and demanding work that goes into the commitment of the volunteer position. Long training days, answering fire calls at all hours of the night, sacrificing weekends and holidays for fundraising events...it can all add up.

"It's a lot of fun at times, and it's stressful at times, but the reward of being there for your neighbors in a time of need is more than the cost of it all," he said.

After 15 years of service, Stephens' recognition as firefighter of the year is a reflection not only of his dedication and leadership, but of the selfless spirit that defines the

WSVFD. His story serves as a reminder that volunteer fire departments rely on neighbors willing to step forward, learn new skills, and answer the call when others need help most. As Stephens continues to serve his community, his message is clear: the strength of the department—and the safety of the community—depends on those willing to get involved and make a difference.

Upper Lancaster Volunteer Fire Department

Dwight Forrester

A sense of urgency and a desire to help the community led Dwight Forrester to join the Upper Lancaster Fire Department (ULVFD) back in 2023. It didn't take long for his fellow department members to recognize his dedication and willingness to serve and honor him with the 2024 title of firefighter of the year.

Forrester said he had heard calls come over the radio for assistance for a while and always thought to himself "I should be out there helping, too." One day a few years back, he happened to hear a call on the radio saying there was a fire in Lively and that they were going to need back up. Forrester, not a member of the fire department at the time, went to the ULVFD station and asked Jeff Haywood if he could help. Haywood said, "Get in," and the rest was history.

Volunteering with Dream Fields for years, Forrester said he's been aware of how much volunteerism is needed in small, rural communities like his own. Always wanting to join the department, once he wasn't working away from home so much, he found an ample opportunity to begin volunteering with ULVFD.

With about 20 active members in the department, everyone helps out where they can, he said. Using his professional experience, Forrester was instrumental in securing grant funding by partnering with River Counties Community Foundation that would allow the department to secure extrication equipment.

"I'm a big community person. 'It takes a village' is a motto for me. There really is a camaraderie and fellowship within the department," said Forrester.

He said it takes a lot of people and a lot of resources to keep the community safe. He also said across the county, state and nation, volunteerism is desperately needed.

"If you have any willingness to serve, you don't even have to put on the turn-out gear to help. There's all kinds of roles that are needed to help out and it's all appreciated... There are great training opportunities to learn and gain skills and experience," he said.

Forrester said he never set out to earn recognition, only to help where he could. In doing so, he has become an example of how one person's willingness to serve can strengthen an entire community.



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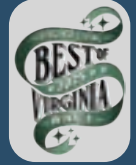


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Middlesex MVPs

by Larry Chowning

Upper Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department

Billy Collier

Longtime fire chief, Billy Collier of Church View, has been a member of the Upper Middlesex (Water View) Volunteer Fire Department

(UMVFD) for 26 years. “We (UMVFD) started out as a branch of Urbanna (Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department) and Hartfield Volunteer Fire Department was a branch of Deltaville (Lower Middlesex Volun-

“When I first started in the fire company, we had a lot of members but so many of them have aged out or passed away,” he said. “It has gotten harder for us to find young dedicated volunteer firemen to be in the fire department.”

Middlesex County is broken down into four fire regions with Water View covering from Route 602 (Old Virginia Street) to the county line at Laneview. It is the most rural area of the county.

Collier noted that what makes the business of fighting fires in Middlesex extra responsive is that all four of the county’s fire departments work together.

The day before this interview, the Water View fire department, along with the other three Middlesex fire companies and volunteer firefighters from White Stone, Essex and Gloucester, helped put out a fire at 3:45 a.m. at Middlesex Metals at Remlik.

Collier also said that David Layman of the Middlesex County Emergency Services Department has helped greatly by pursuing grants to meet the needs of each individual fire department. “David does a good job of finding grants to meet our needs,” said Collier.

“We have a lot of support from the community with our dinners and fundraisers to help raise money to keep it all going,” he said. “We also have more support from the county than we used to. We receive over \$100,000 annually, with the other three departments also receiving that amount. That was recently increased from \$52,000. A portion of these funds from the county comes from the county sharing meals tax revenue.

Although UMVFD numbers are small, Collier said he is thankful for the dedication of the firefighters at UMVFD. “We do this out of love for the community and the fellowship and friendships that we develop from being volunteers are oftentimes lifelong,” he said.



(UMVFD) for 26 years.

teer Fire Department), during the days when Urbanna and Deltaville were trying to each cover half of the county.” “Middlesex County is 40 miles long with Saluda at the halfway point,” said Collier, who grew up in the Glens area in Gloucester County close to the Gloucester/Middlesex County line. He attended Middlesex County Public Schools.

Collier also said that David Layman of the Middlesex County Emergency Services Department has helped greatly by pursuing grants to meet the needs of each individual fire department. “David does a good job of finding grants to meet our needs,” said Collier.

Hartfield Volunteer Fire Department

Kevin McNamee

Kevin McNamee was a professional firefighter and EMT for Chesterfield County for 29 years and has been a volunteer fireman for the Hartfield Volunteer Fire Department since 2012.

McNamee was a fire captain in Chesterfield County and brought all that knowledge to the Hartfield department. He actually moved to Middlesex in 1994 to get his family to the country. His children attended Middlesex County Public Schools.

“I hear volunteer fire departments complaining about training young volunteers, only to have them leave to take on a professional job somewhere else,” said McNamee.

“Well, that works two ways, Chesterfield paid for all of my training and now I’m retired from that and a volunteer for Hartfield,” he said.

Hartfield Volunteer Fire Department has about 27 firemen on its roster with 10 to 12 “really active,” said McNamee. “It is hard to get young people, particularly ones with families,



MIDDLESEX MVPs





to join the department. The classes take a lot of time and when you have a fire at 3:45 in the morning, like we had last week at (Remlik), it takes a very dedicated person to get out of bed to fight a fire.

“The core group that we have here at Hartfield are extremely dedicated,” he said. “We also have a strong women’s auxiliary and much of the fire company’s funds comes from the auxiliary thrift shop.”

McNamee said that the company plans to build a new firehouse behind the current building and connect it to the social hall building. The plan is for the auxiliary’s thrift shop to

take over the present fire station building, he said.

The Hartfield Fire Department recently received a utility terrain vehicle (UTV) as a gift from Greenbaker Capital, a firm that is going to install a “solar farm” (solar power generating facility) in the Hartfield area.

Middlesex County Emergency Services Director David Layman said the unit is equipped with fire-rescue skids. “It is capable of both firefighting and patient transport,” he said. “We are supposed to get an additional one this year for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) when the (solar) project is up and running.”

Lower Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department

John Robins

John Robins was attending Middlesex High School in 1992 when he and a couple of his “buddies” joined the Hartfield Volunteer Fire Department. Under the tutelage of late fire chief Sonny Revere and the late Walter Revere, he learned how important it was to be a volunteer firefighter.

When Robins graduated from college in 1998 and moved home, his former youth league baseball coaches Ed Oliver and Bobby Faulkner encouraged him to join the Lower Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department (LMVFD) in Deltaville. He has been certified in every area of firefighting and is now chief of the department.

Over the 20 years Robins has been fighting fires he sees some differences. “One of the biggest changes is in our equipment,” he said. “We have much better equipment, but it is much more expensive.”

The fire department recently purchased a fire engine that would have cost about \$300,000 a few years ago but now cost more than \$900,000, with additional expenses to equip the vehicle, said Robins.

The LMVFD has the largest membership of any fire department in the county with 46 firefighters. “We are very fortunate in Deltaville in that we have a lot of good dedicated firemen and a strong women’s auxiliary that helps raise funds,” he said.

have generational participation,” he said. “We have someone to pass the torch to.”

Deltaville is the only fire department in the county that has a ladder truck, which LMVFD uses throughout the county to work fires.

Robins noted that Emergency Services Coordinator David Layman recently got grants for the four fire departments which provided personnel equipment for four firemen in each department. Each set cost \$4,500, he said.

“It has really helped us that we have one person out there looking to provide grants for all the departments,” said Robins. “We used to all (fire departments) be out there applying for the same grants. David has coordinated this and that is helping us. Now we don’t have to be out there as much looking for money. We do what we are supposed to be doing — fighting fires.”

Robins also noted that the county’s financial participation to bring fire hydrants to the lower end of the county has greatly aided firefighting. The county provided \$700,000 to fund fire hydrants along the main drag from Cooks Corner to Deltaville.



“I can look back nearly 30 years and I can say that LMVFD is in the best shape with having volunteer firemen than it has been in years,” he said. Robins attributes that success to generations of families being in the fire department. “My sons are now volunteers and there are others who

Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department (Urbanna)

Stephen Pugh

Stephen Pugh is the ultimate volunteer firefighter. He joined the Powhatan Volunteer Fire Department in 2007 and rose to the ranks of lieutenant and assistant chief.

Today he is a member and chief of the Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department (MVFD) in Urbanna. He found Urbanna and Middlesex through Bethpage Camp-Resort, where he had a campsite for 15 years.

Over time he met longtime MVFD and now retired fire chief Ray Burch, who talked him into helping out with the Urbanna company on a part-time basis. He moved to the county and is a full-time volunteer for the department.

"I came out of a volunteer fire department atmosphere," he said. "The fire companies in Powhatan were much more aggressive in trying to entice young people to become volunteer firemen than they are here.

"The departments in the county worked with the Powhatan Public School System to teach fire training in the schools. We got a lot of volunteers from that."

"Yes, we lost many of the young recruits who eventually went to paid fire departments, but they would often come back and help us as volunteers," he said.

"Powhatan has a larger population base to work from, which helps maintain the fire companies there," he said.

"What I like about Middlesex is that all the departments seem to have an obvious respect and love for one another. It is like being in a big family."

The Urbanna fire department has 25 active members with 12 to 14 actively fighting fires, he said. Historically, the auxiliary in Urbanna has been very active, but in recent years many have "aged out" and are now down to five or six members.

Pugh said the Urbanna fire department faces the same challenges that many volunteer groups are facing across the nation. "It takes a lot of heart, time and dedication to be a volunteer fireman," he said. "So many people just don't or can't find the time to join."



The fire department has done well financially, however, as donations are strong from the community and sponsors, with groups like Bethpage Camp-Resort and Mike's Custom Golf Carts creating ways to help the fire department raise funds.

Pugh also said funds made from the Urbanna Oyster Festival have been a game changer in allowing the town's volunteer fire department to fiscally survive.

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Fairfields Volunteer Fire Department

Andrew Jenkins and Andy Wright

Chief Phillip Keyser said two firefighters—Andrew Jenkins and Andy Wright—“went above and beyond in 2025. It was a pretty easy choice. I think that all of our members deserve to be firefighter of the year, but when you stop and take a longer look at it, there is always someone who stands out above



Andrew Jenkins and Andy Wright were recognized for their hard work and leadership with Fairfield’s Volunteer Fire Department.

the rest during any given year. Both are outstanding firefighters and in true volunteer firefighter fashion, are jacks-of-all-trades when it comes to maintaining equipment, have the knowledge and ability make sure everything is ready to go when the alarm sounds, and when something does break down, they are johnny-on-the-spot getting it fixed.”

With his father, Larry, a lifetime member of the department, Jenkins has been around the firehouse and the familiar yellow firetrucks his entire life. He followed his father into the department six years ago, not just for the tradition, but with the goal of helping the community.

While Keyser praised him for “his ability to fix things and being one of our many fearless inside firefighters,” Jenkins said he was “just happy to do what I need to do.” He enjoys “running as many calls as I can” and helping with the equipment, all while working full-time on his farm in Kilmarnock.

Wright brings extensive firefighting experience to the department, having worked 20 years as a professional firefighter for Henrico Fire & Rescue before retiring last year as well as volunteering with Callao VFD for 30 years before a move to Burgess and Fairfield’s VFD. Not only that, Wright spent 15 years serving the community with the Callao Volunteer Rescue Squad.

Wright said he was “surprised” with the recognition, saying he was just “doing the things that need to be done, wherever I’m needed.” In addition to running calls, Wright said he is motivated by “working with the younger generation.”

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Lt. Robbie Hayes Photo courtesy Callao VFD



Capt. Carlos Rolón Photo courtesy Callao VFD

Callao Volunteer Fire Department

Lt. Robbie Hayes and Carlos Rolón

Lt. Robbie Hayes is another volunteer firefighter who has spent decades in public service. In addition to 30 years with the Callao Volunteer Fire Department, he has been with the Lancaster County Sheriff's Office for 26 years.

Hayes grew up in Haynesville, but recalls being interested in the goings on at the Callao firehouse which was just down the road from his grandparents' house. Whenever he visited, he remembers listening to the scanner when the alarm would sound and "watching them go down the road." He shares a familiar excitement today when his pager goes off because that means he will be "helping someone in danger."

But it is not just about running calls. Hayes also appreciates the smiles the department receives when they deliver food and toys to needy seniors and families during the holidays, but acknowledges that "it takes a team to make all that happen." This team or "second family", as Hayes refers to the men and women of the Callao VFD, are one of the reasons he looks forward to monthly meetings and continues to serve. "They're a good group of people."

Hayes is also looking toward the next generation of firefighters. Just as he used to listen to the scanner as a child, his son Hudson, 6, now does the same. "Anytime the scanner goes off he says, 'we gotta call.'"

Carlos Rolón was also recognized. In the short six years he has volunteered with Callao, he has made it to the rank of captain, all while still working full-time as a K9 police officer for the City of Alexandria for 22 of his 27 years on the force. His reason for volunteering with the fire department is the same for working in law enforcement—"I enjoy working for the community and providing a service." Rolón's role as captain ensures the behind-the-scenes operations are running smoothly. "After they run a call, my responsibility is to make sure we're ready for the next one."

Rolón also serves on the board of directors as treasurer along with his wife Judy Taylor, who is the board's secretary. "This is a great community," he said, though he will not make Lewisetta his full-time home until his retirement in a few years. "When a call comes in, that's someone that needs help, whether it's a lift assist for a senior who has fallen or saving a home from a fire. "He wished that more people would volunteer "to see how much it helps."

In selecting Hayes and Rolón for the recognition, Chief Jimmy Brann said they went "above and beyond to ensure our department and community are well taken care of" as well as noting their "excellent leadership skills."



Hudson Hayes, the son of Lt. Robbie Hayes, is already preparing for a future with Callao Volunteer Fire Department. Photo courtesy Robbie Hayes



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Escape plans

Half of home fire deaths happen late at night. A working smoke alarm can wake you up. Every second counts, so know what you'll do if you have a fire. Make an escape plan. Know two ways out of each room. Plan your escape around the abilities of children and older adults.

Electrical fires

Electrical problems are a leading cause of home fires. Start off right in your new home.

Plug major appliances like refrigerators and stoves directly into the wall outlet. Only plug one heat-producing appliance into an outlet at a time. This includes coffee makers, space heaters and microwaves. If you need additional outlets, have them installed by an electrician.

Extension cords are for temporary use only. Keep all cords out of foot traffic, but don't run them under carpets or rugs. Throw away cracked, frayed or damaged electrical cords.

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Heat your home safely this winter

Brrr! Your home's heating systems are working double time to keep you warm this winter. The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) says safety must be your top priority since heating is the second leading cause of home fires. Follow these suggestions to keep your home warm and safe.

The biggest mistake, according to the USFA, is putting something too close to a heating source. Keep anything that can burn three feet away from space heaters, fireplaces, wood stoves and radiators. Remember that skin burns too. Make sure that people and pets stay 3 feet away.

Use portable heaters that have been listed by a testing laboratory—look for the laboratory's label. These heaters should have an automatic shut-off switch so that if they are tipped over, they will turn off on their own. Plug portable electric heaters directly into the wall outlet; don't use an extension cord or power strip. Kerosene heaters must be refueled outside.

Evenings are the peak time for home heating fires. Turn space heaters off when you leave the room or fall asleep."

Older adults are at increased risk from home fires. Older adults have a higher home fire death rate, and heating is the second leading cause of fire deaths for people ages 65 and over.

If you care for an older adult, plan for this increased risk. Check space heaters throughout the season. Make sure that bedding, throws and clothing are kept at least three feet away. Verify that fixed heating equipment is inspected every season and professionally cleaned when necessary. Talk with older adults to make sure that they understand their risk of burns and fire.

Plan for emergencies. Older adults may move more slowly or have trouble hearing a smoke alarm because of hearing loss. Make a home fire escape plan around their abilities.

Keep the telephone, hearing aids and eyeglasses next to the bed. If someone in your care uses a cane or wheelchair, decide who will help them get out in an emergency.

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Signs a fireplace is in need of repair

Fireplaces are most heavily used during winter, when temperatures outside are less inviting and few activities sound more appealing than huddling up indoors around a warm fire. As winter winds down, a season of heavy use can take its toll on a fireplace, making spring an ideal time to inspect these popular features for damage.

The American Heritage Insurance Group notes that neglect of chimneys and fireplaces can pose a range of notable dangers, including increased risk for carbon monoxide poisoning and chimney fires. Poorly maintained fireplaces also may fail prematurely, which is not insignificant, as a new fireplace can cost thousands of dollars. With

so much to gain from a well-maintained fireplace, homeowners can learn to spot signs suggesting a unit is in need of repair.

- Insufficiently vented smoke: Smoke from a fireplace is meant to go up and out of a home through the chimney. If that's not happening, and smoke is instead entering living spaces, then a

fireplace and chimney inspection is in order. When such situations unfold, the chimney may be blocked or a damper may be damaged. Such issues are easily and often affordably resolved. But smoke coming into a home also might indicate structural damage to the chimney or fireplace, which can be a more costly fix.

- Foul odors: Fireplace

afficionados tend to love the smoky aroma that emanates from the fixtures while a fire is burning. If that familiar aroma has been overtaken by a foul odor, then there might be a buildup of creosote within the chimney. The United States Environmental Protection Agency notes creosote is a derivative of the distillation of tar from wood or coal. Though creosote is a byproduct of burning wood, if it's allowed to accumulate over time, the risk of chimney fires increases considerably. A foul odor coming from the fireplace, particularly when it's not in use, is a sign of excessive creosote buildup, which necessitates immediate remediation.

- Water damage: Water damage, which can manifest as rust or dampness around the fireplace or chimney, is another sign a fireplace is in need of repair. Water damage often indicates that water is getting inside. Sometimes that's due to a faulty chimney cap, which is a simple and affordable repair. Other times it could indicate issues with the masonry, which requires a more costly fix.

- Diminished warmth: If cuddling up around the fireplace isn't quite as cozy as it used to be, that drop in warmth could indicate issues with airflow or suggest the buildup of creosote. Diminished warmth around a lit fireplace should be brought to the attention of a fireplace professional immediately.

These are not the only potential indicators that a fireplace is in need of repair. Physical signs like cracks or loose masonry and even unusual noises like cracking sounds also indicate repairs might be necessary.

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How to make homes safer from fires

Over a five-year period beginning in 2015 and 2019, fire departments across the United States responded to roughly 347,000 home structure fires per year. That data, courtesy of the National Fire Protection Association, underscores the significance of home fire protection measures.

Smoke detectors are a key component of fire protection, but there's much more homeowners can do to protect themselves, their families, their belongings, and their homes from structure fires.

- Routinely inspect smoke detectors. Smoke detectors can only alert residents to a fire if they're working properly. Battery-powered smoke detectors won't work if the batteries die. Routine smoke detector check-ups can ensure the batteries still have juice and that the devices themselves are still functioning properly. Test alarms to make sure the devices are functioning and audible in nearby rooms. Install additional detectors as necessary so alarms and warnings can be heard in every room of the house.

- Hire an electrician to audit your home. Electricians can inspect a home and identify any issues that could make the home more vulnerable to fires. Ask electricians to look over every part of the house, including attics and crawl spaces. Oft-overlooked areas like attics and crawl spaces pose a potentially significant fire safety threat, as data from the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA) indicates that 13 percent of electrical fires begin in such



spaces.

- Audit the laundry room. The laundry room is another potential source of home structure fires. NFPA data indicates around 3 percent of home structure fires begin in laundry rooms each year. Strategies to reduce the risk of laundry room fires include leaving room for laundry to tumble in washers and dryers; routinely cleaning lint screens to avoid the buildup of dust, fiber and lint, which the NFPA notes are often the first items to ignite in fires linked to dryers; and ensuring the outlets washing machines and dryers are plugged into can handle the voltage such appliances require. It's also a good idea to clean dryer exhaust vents and ducts every year.

- Look outward as well. Though the majority of home fires begin inside, the NFPA

reports that 4 percent of such fires begin outside the home. Homeowners can reduce the risk of such fires by ensuring all items that utilize fire, including grills and firepits, are always used at least 10 feet away from the home. Never operate a grill beneath eaves, and do not use grills on decks. Never leave children unattended around firepits, as all it takes is a single mistake and a moment for a fire to become unwieldy.

- Sweat the small stuff. Hair dryers, hair straighteners, scented candles, clothes irons, and holiday decorations are some additional home fire safety hazards. Never leave candles burning in empty rooms and make sure beauty and grooming items like dryers, straighteners and irons are unplugged and placed in a safe place to cool down when not in use.

Fire departments respond to hundreds of thousands of home fires each year. Some simple strategies and preventive measures can greatly reduce the risk that a fire will overtake your home.

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FRONT LINE

Support Spot

The area's fire departments and rescue squads depend on donations, fundraisers and volunteers. For those who may wish to make a donation or volunteer, a listing of fire departments and rescue squads in Lancaster, Middlesex and Northumberland counties with their contact information is provided. Email and websites have been provided for those that have them. Some use PayPal.

LANCASTER

Kilmarnock Volunteer Fire Department

P.O. Box 1295
Kilmarnock, VA 22482
804-435-1332
readylanaster.org

Location: 71 School Street
Kilmarnock, VA 22482

Upper Lancaster Volunteer Fire Department

P.O. Box 205
Lively, VA 22507
804-462-5404

Location:
5170 Mary Ball Road
Lancaster, VA 22503

White Stone Volunteer Fire Department

579 Chesapeake Drive
White Stone, VA 22578
804-435-3801

Kilmarnock-Lancaster Volunteer Rescue Squad

P.O. Box 333
Kilmarnock, VA 22482

Location:
61 Harris Road
Kilmarnock, VA 22482
804-435-1474

The Upper Lancaster Volunteer Rescue Squad

P. O. Box 176
Lively, VA 22507
804-462-7375
upperlanasterrescue@
yahoo.com

Location:
123 Norris Road,
Lancaster, VA 22503

MIDDLESEX

Hartfield Volunteer Fire Department

P.O. Box 205
Hartfield, VA 23071
804-776-6880
hartfield_e@gmail.com

Location: 3309 Twiggs
Ferry Road
Hartfield, VA 23071

Lower Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department

P.O. Box 6
Deltaville, VA 23043
804-776-7104
lmvfd.com

Location: 16881 General
Puller Highway
Deltaville, VA 23043

Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department

P.O. Box 71
Urbanna, VA 23175
804-758-2320

Location: 330 Virginia St.
Urbanna, VA 23175

Upper Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department

P.O. Box 75
Church View, VA 23032
804-758-5200
waterviewfire23180@yahoo.
com

Location: 4583 Water View
Road
Water View, VA 23180

Middlesex County Volunteer Rescue Squad

P.O. Box 98
Deltaville, VA 23043
804-776-6875
Provides Emergency Medi-
cal Service (EMS) for the
entire county.

Locations:
Deltaville Station
17684 General Puller
Highway
Deltaville, VA 23043

Hartfield Station
10946 General Puller
Highway
Hartfield, VA 23071

Urbanna Station
391 Hilliard St.
Urbanna, VA 23175

NORTHUMBERLAND

Callao Volunteer Fire Department

P.O. Box 39
Callao, VA 22435
callaovfd.org
Email info@callaovfd.org

Location:
314 Northumberland
Highway
Callao, Virginia, 22435
804-529-6211

Fairfields Volunteer Fire Department

P.O. Box 656
Burgess, VA 22432
fairfields_e.com

Locations:
Reedville Fire House
119 Main St.
Reedville, VA 22539
804-453-4055

Glebe Point Fire House
66 Firehouse Road
Burgess, Virginia, 22432
804-453-6390

Callao Volunteer Rescue Squad

1348 Northumberland
Hwy.
Callao, VA 22435
804-529-6630
callaoVRS@gmail.com

Mid-County Volunteer Rescue Squad

7990 Northumberland Hwy.,
Heathsville, VA 22473
804-580-8615

Northumberland County Volunteer Rescue Squad

412 Reed Ave., Reedville,
VA 22539
804-453-3174

Smith Point Sea Rescue

P.O. Box 662
Burgess, VA 22432
smithpointsearescue.com
All volunteer water rescue
service for the mid-Chesa-
peake Bay

Thank You!

Lancaster County expresses tremendous gratitude for its local first responders and front-line workers. From day-to-day operations to large scale events, your sacrifice and commitment to keeping the community safe touches countless lives every day. We are forever grateful for your service!



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