

Firefighter, paramedic retires after long career in Arlington

By RIKKI KING
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LAKE STEVENS — The adrenaline kept his interest. The people kept his heart.

Dave Safford plans to retire today after 34 years in the fire service, mostly working as a firefighter and paramedic in rural Arlington and Lake Stevens.

Safford, 67, of Arlington, realized it might be time to retire when he started getting older



Dave Safford

than many of his patients, he said. He retired two years ago from Snohomish County Fire District 21, which covers rural Arlington. He stayed on with Fire District 8 in Lake Stevens, but for the first time in years, he stopped carrying a pager around the clock.

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Safford always was an adrenaline junkie, he said. He loved that feeling when the sirens went off. The call could be a fire, a bicycle wreck or chest pains — he never knew what was coming next.

Safford speaks with passion about the interaction between paramedics and others in the health care community. He will miss seeing nurses, doctors, police officers and firefighters from other departments in the field, he said.

They all work in jobs that can carry heavy baggage, he said. They have to learn, emotionally, how to handle what they see. They help each other debrief.

Safford waved off questions about his own accomplishments. Instead, he described the courage and compassion he sees in other firefighters and paramedics.

"We all enjoy helping others," he said. "We wouldn't be in the business if that wasn't part of our character."

Safford now plans to spend his time volunteering with the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. He joined two years ago, ready to share his boating know-how. Safford developed the water-rescue training now used at Lake Stevens. As part of the auxiliary, he coordinated vol-

unteer boat patrols during Aquafest in July.

Lake Stevens Deputy Fire Chief Larry Huff has worked with Safford since the early 1990s. Safford is known as a consistent, dependable employee and a "solid all-around guy," Huff said.

"He's kind of like the Ironman of the fire service," Huff said.

During water-rescue training, Safford walks the crews through every aspect of the call, Lake Stevens Battalion Chief Bruce Huston said. He makes sure they understand what to do from the moment they get the call.

Safford is the kind of guy who shines his shoes at the same time each day, Huston said. He'll be missed around the fire station.

Safford also will miss his patients, he said. Over the years, he got to know a lot of them, especially those with medical conditions that require more-frequent emergency aid.

He also enjoyed working with and training alongside firefighters from all over the county. The crews at Lake Stevens have dubbed him "Gramps," and he hopes the moniker gets passed down.

"A lot of camaraderie, you just miss that," Safford said. "It's like you're leaving a family, but you know you're welcome to come back and visit."

Safford plans to sign off from duty at 9 a.m. today.

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