



Community Dispatch

NEWS FROM NORTH MASON REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY | FALL 2022

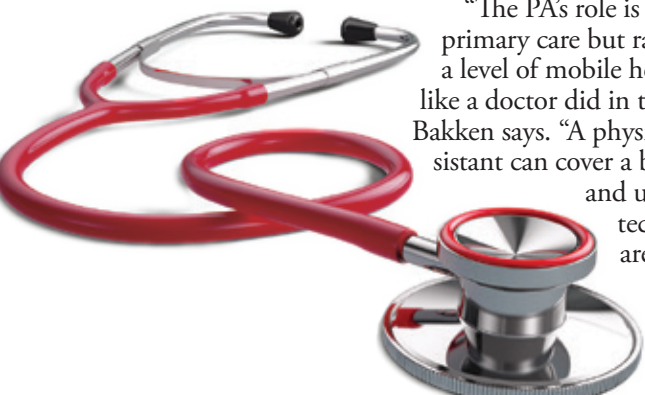
Physician Assistant Makes ‘House Calls’ as Part of New, Innovative NMRFA Program

One of the biggest goals for the Fire Authority is to prevent emergency room visits, as well as minimize 911 calls for nonemergency medical services. In a small and rural community like North Mason, however, access to medical services is limited — and often times, individuals call 911 because they don't think they have other choices.

“We want to change the mindset of people calling 911 when they don't have a life-threatening emergency,” says Chief Beau Bakken. “Often, an individual simply needs an inexpensive medication or a post-discharge follow-up, but they don't know where else to turn.”

To increase local access to healthcare and provide another option for the community, the Fire Authority is launching a new Physician Assistant Program. This unique program — the first one of its kind in Washington state — provides a full-time PA for North Mason residents who have a variety of temporary, nonemergency needs such as follow-up care after a hospital stay or medical home visit. In many cases, a return to the emergency room can also be prevented with simple follow-up care.

“The PA's role is not to provide primary care but rather provide a level of mobile healthcare like a doctor did in the old days,” Bakken says. “A physician assistant can cover a bigger scope and use medical techniques that are different



from what EMTs and paramedics offer, and we want to bring that deeper level of service to the community.”

NMRFA received a \$337,000 grant funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which will provide capital funds for state-of-the-art equipment. Additionally, the Fire Authority is in the process of forging a partnership with Mason County Hospital District No. 2 to help fund the program.

According to preliminary discussions, the hospital district would partially fund the service for an initial three-year period from its property tax collections. Both fire and hospital commissioners would have to approve the proposal before formalizing the partnership.

“A lot of people have a difficult time navigating the healthcare system in the North Mason area for various reasons,” says Sandra Robertson, MCHD-2 superintendent. “When the North Mason Regional Fire Authority responds to a medically related 911 call, they have two options: either transport the patient to the emergency room or leave them at home. This new program will provide another option, because a lot of situations can be handled by a physician's assistant and don't require an emergency or urgent care visit — yet still require some level of care.”

“It will be exciting to see just how far this program can go and how much it can improve people's lives.

— Sandra Robertson
MCHD-2 superintendent

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New Resource Access Program Focuses on Prevention and Mental Health

Emergency medical services call volumes have skyrocketed across Washington state in the past three years, and NMRFA is no exception. The demand for EMS has increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the behavioral health crisis and population growth.

A NMRFA analysis of the EMS call data for the past five years revealed that the increasing call volume wasn't the result of more life-threatening calls. Rather, most calls were directly related to behavioral and social health deficiencies, substance and chemical dependency, and a lack of access to the healthcare system.

The Fire Authority took a creative approach to the problem by implementing a Resource Access Program (RAP) at the beginning of this year. RAP provides proactive interventions and community resource navigation for individuals who are struggling with complex physical, mental or social difficulties. RAP uses analytics in real-time to identify eligible 911 callers, make a determination as to specific needs and provide intervention and community service navigation assistance. Many, if not most, of these individuals are high-frequency 911 callers and well known by the medical responders.

As part of RAP, first responders on the scene of an emergency call evaluate immediate and emergency medical needs before assessing for other medical, behavioral and social health needs. An emergency room may not be the best place for someone experiencing depression, dependency or social isolation; instead, a

community resource may better serve the needs of this patient.

Once the EMS crews identify this type of need, they refer the patient to the NMRFA emergency prevention specialist (EPS) for a same-day or next-day follow-up. The EPS serves as the RAP coordinator, as well as providing patients with a risk and needs assessment, investigating contributing circumstances and helping individuals connect with appropriate community resources.

"One of our goals is to reduce 911 calls. Systems can be difficult to navigate and people often don't know where to start, so they turn to emergency services," says D. Abraham "Abe" Gardner, NMRFA's EPS. "With this program, not only are we there during their emergent need, but we can also coordinate services and support beyond that."

Gardner, who joined NMRFA in February, was a public health program coordinator for five years with Mason County. In that role, he helped develop, implement and coordinate several public health programs, including the Substance Use Mobile Outreach Program and the Behavioral Health Navigator Program for the Mason County Sheriff's Office and Shelton Police Department.

As the Fire Authority's EPS, Gardner oversees 16 volunteers, who are specially trained as RAP responders. They can assist with a myriad of tasks, including home safety inspections.

"The most exciting aspect of RAP is to see community members receiving the support and help they need and engage with needed services in a healthy and positive manner," Gardner says.

Following the RAP implementation, NMRFA quickly discovered that numerous 911 calls for nonemergency events were immediately reduced — and in some cases, eliminated. The initial results are already exceeding expectations, with a significant reduction in segments of EMS call volumes. Several individuals referred to RAP have now been involved with services that have had a life-changing impact — and will likely save their lives.



Abe Gardner, RAP coordinator



The NMRFA Resource Access Program team

Resource Access Program

The objective of RAP is to ensure that individuals are set up for success and receive tangible help for their needs. NMRFA strives to avoid missing anyone who may "slip through the cracks." Community and general support

services that the EPS has referred RAP participants to thus far have included, among others:

- Fall and fire hazard mitigation
- Smoke alarm installation
- Social interaction and mental

health support provision

- Substance use disorder resource navigation
- Housing support
- Transportation assistance
- Intensive case management

Change of Guard at the Tahuya Fire Station

There's a new face at the Tahuya Fire Station. Firefighter/paramedic Tavia Henry joined NMRFA in September and assumed the role of community outreach coordinator in Tahuya in October.

An EMT for more than a decade and a paramedic since 2015, Henry loves helping people and comforting patients. She originally pursued a career as a physician. When she took an EMT class, however, she realized she prefers working with patients in the field rather than in a hospital.

"I grew up on a farm and always had to think on my feet and be resourceful in different situations," she says. "Being a firefighter and EMT offered the kind of environment I enjoyed, and then becoming a medic as the next step in my career was a great way to provide more patient care."

Henry is no stranger to the local community. She completed her internship with NMRFA during paramedic school at Tacoma Community College and greatly enjoyed this area.

"Seeing how involved the North Mason community is was amazing," she says. "It's what I was looking for in a fire department because I love the small-town feel."

While working at a private ambulance company and later at the Tacoma Fire Department, Henry knew she wanted to return to North Mason.

"In a big city, we were running really short transports and I was only with patients for about five to 10 minutes," she explains. "I love medicine and helping people, and I wanted to be able to work with patients longer and get to know them better."

Her opportunity finally came when Robert Collamore graduated from paramedic school and took a shift position at the Belfair Fire Station. As the new community outreach coordinator, Henry will work with the Community Resource Teams, as well as assist with other initiatives, such as the new physician assistant and resource access programs.

"Tavia brings such a high level of talent and experience to our team," says Chief Beau Bakken. "It's great to see people wanting to come and join the Fire Authority from other jurisdictions."

Bakken commends Collamore for his five years of work in Tahuya and looks forward to Henry continuing those efforts.

"Robert built up the Community Response Team in Tahuya and was a great ambassador for the community," he says. "He did phenomenal work. I'm excited to bring somebody of Tavia's caliber to that position."



Tavia Henry, community outreach coordinator

The service, which will charge a nominal fee, will be accessible through EMS and hospital referrals, as well as self-referrals by contacting the Fire Authority.

Adam Boyd, a North Mason resident who worked at Peninsula Community Health Services in Belfair for three and a half years, will serve as NMRFA's physician assistant. Boyd has long ties with NMRFA — his professional career began as a resident firefighter in Belfair when he was 19 years old. Although he obtained an associate's degree in fire science, he was compelled to pursue a path as a physician assistant. He completed medic school in 2013, later working as a paramedic and eventually obtaining a master's degree in physician assistant studies.

"Adam understands the fire and EMS system. He lives, works and plays here — he's one of us," Bakken says.

Boyd says the PA program is an opportunity to show the community that the Fire Authority's mission is to ensure overall health.

"Patients often times feel that their needs might not be adequately addressed, given the current state of the health-care system, time constraints, volume of patients flooding the system, shrinking workforce, etc., and this is our chance to help bridge that gap and try something completely different," he says.

Working at PCHS, Boyd saw firsthand the amount of time and energy it takes to provide meaningful care. He hopes that his work at NMRFA continues to help support the hospital systems as well as the primary care and specialty providers, intervening with situations and medical conditions and actively teaching and promoting preventative medicine.

"So many health quandaries can be prevented, reversed or adequately managed with simple 'back to basics' strategies and someone behind them giving them proper support and a little bit of guidance," he says. "We're bringing the education, treatment and strategies to people, at their home, and providing not only medical services but a spectrum of other services to improve their quality of life."

If the pilot is successful, Bakken hopes that other communities in Mason County and beyond can implement similar approaches.

"Eventually, we hope to build out the program here to seven days a week," he adds.

Robertson notes that the North Mason community is fortunate to have such innovative and enthusiastic leaders as Chief Bakken.

"His mission is to find ways to improve and expand services within our community and beyond," she says. "His entire staff share his enthusiasm and their hearts are in helping our area. It will be exciting to see just how far this program can go and how much it can improve people's lives."

Outreach Program Educates about Burn Care

In the past year, local emergency responders have noted an uptick in improper home care for burns, resulting in poor outcomes for patients. To help educate the community, NMRFA plans to launch an educational program about burn care.

"The wrong treatment for burns can

have disastrous outcomes," says Capt. Carl Ehresman. "We decided to target this problem with outreach to help prevent negative impact on patients."

In addition to flyers that will be distributed around North Mason, the Fire Authority will provide classes to train indi-

viduals in home burn care. Separate classes will be offered in English and in Spanish over the course of the next six months.

If you're interested in scheduling a class for your service group, church or another organization, please contact us at 360.275-6224.

In-House Academy Trains Fire Chaplains

The chaplain program is an instrumental part of the Fire Authority, delivering much needed comfort and support for families who suffered a significant loss. The need for the chaplains has grown bigger as callouts have increased, but the recruitment of new chaplains didn't keep up with this growth.

"We went from maybe a callout once a week or every two weeks for every chaplain to three or four per week. But we didn't have a good pipeline to grow the program, and our three chaplains were working beyond capacity," says Fire Chief Beau Bakken.

The biggest challenge for the program was training. The only available training was offered only twice a year at the Criminal Justice Training Center in Burien, and the pandemic downsized that training further.

"It was almost impossible to participate in the five-day academy, driving back and forth, especially for volunteers who had a job," Bakken says. "And the limited availability of the academy made it even more difficult to train chaplains."

This fall, NMRFA is solving this challenge by offering its own, in-house fire chaplain training academy through the



NMRFA Fire Chief Beau Bakken and Capt. Ryan Cloud present at a recent chaplain academy training session.

Mason County Fire Chiefs Association. Following a local recruitment campaign, 15 candidates enrolled in the program from across the county.

The seven-week training commenced at the end of September, with instructors from Mason County.

"We've been really pleased to see people from throughout the county," says Bakken,

who is the president of the North Mason Fire Chiefs Association. "When a family is suffering, you need someone who can assist almost immediately, and we're excited to have chaplains available in different communities."

The Fire Authority plans to offer the fire chaplain academy every year. More information is available at northmasonrfa.com.

Strict Safety Protocols Help Maintain Full Emergency Response Staffing During the Pandemic

Like many other emergency services and other healthcare providers, the Fire Authority has been stretched to the max over the last three years. The pandemic has challenged the staff in new ways — but NMRFA was able to continue operations fully staffed.

Part of the success is the result of fast action as soon as the pandemic started. Capt. Carl Ehresman, NMRFA medical services officer, implemented strict safety protocols within two weeks. These protocols required personal protective equipment (PPE) such as N95 masks and full gowns for responders in the field even before the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) came up with the first guidelines.

"As the COVID situation evolved and the CDC advice changed, we had to change our policies. Just as we got used to going in one direction, we had to move in another direction. I've written more policy in the past two years than I have in my entire career."

Although the staff couldn't completely avoid COVID infections, the strict protocols prevented additional exposure. As a result, full staffing continued throughout the pandemic.

"We had to do things differently and be incredibly nimble, both at the station and in the field," Ehresman says. "But we

planned well to make sure we had responders available."

Chief Beau Bakken notes that like so many other community members, NMRFA personnel had to work through adverse personal conditions, including family stress and illness, as well as uncertainty due to the fast-changing situation. Despite that, many paid and volunteer staff stepped up for additional duties, such as coordinating vaccination events.

"Our responders here didn't miss a day — we had no downtime," Bakken says. "The rigs still went out the door every day, even as our call volumes went up 17% compared to pre-pandemic days. I'm very proud of our people. I see it in their faces that they're tired, but they're resilient and they're bouncing back."

The Fire Authority will maintain enhanced safety protocols even after the pandemic subsides. Responders will continue to wear surgical masks when treating patients at home and transporting them.

"The community can expect masks to be a permanent fixture for us," Ehresman says. "It protects both the patients and the responders. We get exposed to a lot of patients daily, and we don't want to spread any virus to other patients."

Fire Prevention: Home Garages



When we think of fire prevention, we often think of our primary residence or our homes, and how we might mitigate damage and loss to the spaces we spend the most time in. The Fire Authority would also like to spotlight another important area to protect and prioritize when thinking of fire prevention: our garages.

According to FEMA and the U.S. Fire Administration, “Garage fires tend to spread farther and cause more injuries and dollar loss than fires that start in all other areas of the home.” Here are some tips that they and the NMRFA recommend to keep your home and garage safe:

- Store oil, gasoline, paints, propane and varnishes in a shed away from your home.
- Keep items that can burn on shelves away from appliances.
- Plug only one charging appliance into an outlet.

- Don't use an extension cord when charging an appliance.

- Be mindful of the condition your electrical wiring is in.

In addition to the practical and everyday prevention activities that are listed above, FEMA, the U.S. Fire Administration and NMRFA have some prevention recommendations to think about when you are building or remodeling your garage, because there can be “safety through construction.”

- Install a 20-minute fire-rated door that is self-closing and self-latching from the garage to the house (in attached garages).

- Install a ceiling made with 5/8-inch Type X gypsum board (or equivalent) if you have living space above the garage.

- Install a wall with ½-inch gypsum board (or equivalent) if the wall attaches the garage to your home.



- Install an attic hatch cover if you have attic access from the garage.

- Install a “heat alarm,” not a smoke alarm, in your garage. The heat alarm will sound if the temperature rises too high.

Home garage fire prevention includes a number of straightforward, common-sense suggestions, but when they are out of sight, garages are oftentimes out of mind. Therefore, the NMRFA is encouraging you to be proactive and intentional in setting you and your family up for success while not only prioritizing primary residence fire prevention but your garage space as well.

If you have any questions, need clarification or would like the NMRFA to provide recommendations specific to your garage, please reach out. We are here to help.

Trails End Lake Station Purchase Opens New Possibilities

The Trails End Lake Fire Station has been on the capital facilities list for possible expansion for many years. Thanks to quick action from NMRFA leaders and fire commissioners, that expansion moved a step closer to reality.

Currently, the Fire Authority owns a single-bay apparatus station at Trails End Lake, staffed by volunteers who respond from home. Earlier this year, a three-bedroom, two-bathroom home next door to the station came on the market, and the Fire Authority moved quickly to acquire it.

“We saw an opportunity when a developer placed a new, double-wide home on the property next door, and we had to act quickly,” says Assistant Fire Chief Scott Cooper. “The home is located within 15 feet of the fire station, and our goal is to come up with a staffing plan for it.”

The discussion is in early stages, with

exact plans to be solidified later. Cooper notes a variety of possibilities, from overnight staffing to a student firefighter program.

Part of the capital improvement plan includes upgrading the apparatus bay and adding a vehicle exhaust extraction system.

“Our thought is that we will have an ambulance and a fire engine at Trails End Lake and respond to both aid and fire calls,” Cooper says.

The Fire Authority is pursuing federal grants to help with a staffing plan, which will be developed later by the fire commissioners.

“Buying an existing house instead of building a facility saves taxpayer money in the long run,” Cooper says. “This is a great opportunity to improve our services in that area and expand the work of our core volunteers there.”

Remembering Don Cady

The Fire Authority lost a longtime supporter and advocate this year with the passing of Don Cady. A longtime North Mason resident, Cady was a champion for NMRFA and has contributed to many of our projects and programs.



A 15-year member of the Citizen Advisory Committee, Cady was instrumental in brokering a deal to build the Tri-Lakes Fire Station. He was a remarkable and beloved individual who helped the entire community in numerous other ways.

Don Cady will be sorely missed.

New Headquarters Open for Business



Top, the new Fire Authority headquarters in Belfair. Above, the ribbon cutting early this year. Since the building opening, community members have been stopping by regularly to tour.

The North Mason Fire Authority started a new chapter earlier this year with the opening of its new headquarters. The 21,000-square-foot facility, which was funded by a voter-approved bond, was completed on time and on budget — despite the pandemic and shortages of construction labor and supplies.

“The Emergency Management Campus opening was the culmination of seven years of work that’s finally come to fruition,”

says Fire Chief Beau Bakken. “We hit our mark for the \$10 million budget and we moved in on time, which is rare this day and age.”

The state-of-the-art building brings the Fire Authority’s headquarters into the modern age, aligning with current safety standards while accommodating for the growing needs of the community. Almost triple the size of Station 21, the new headquarters provides ample space for paid and

volunteer personnel, administrative staff and more apparatus.

NMRFA used an innovative, progressive design method for architecture and construction, which optimized both the budget and the construction timelines. One of the largest-ever construction projects in Mason County and the largest public safety project, the modernized campus was designed to serve the needs of the North Mason region for the next five decades.

Old Station 21 Modifications

With the new Fire Authority headquarters now complete, work is underway to repurpose Station 21 into a space for Mason County emergency services. The old NMRFA headquarters will house the North Mason satellite locations of Mason County Sheriff’s and Mason County Division of Emergency Management.

The county is in the process of redesigning a portion of the building and making various improvements to fit its needs. When completed, the repurposed building and the new NMRFA headquarters will create a unified North Mason Emergency Management Campus. The campus will enhance interagency planning and disaster response to the local community while enabling resource sharing to reduce operating costs.

WSRB Ratings Update

The Washington Surveying & Rating Bureau (WSRB) recently reviewed NMRFA’s fire suppression and protection capabilities, with no change in ratings. Every five years, the WSRB evaluates components such as water supplies, fire-safety control features, the 911 dispatch and the Fire Authority’s equipment and operations. Many insurance underwriters use the protection classification to determine fire insurance rates for each area.

NMRFA SERVICES

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- Car seat inspections
 - Address signs
 - Vials of Life
 - Free bike helmets
 - Home safety inspections
 - Auto-dialer units
 - Free smoke detectors
 - Burn regulations
 - Loaner life vests
 - Blood pressure checks
 - First aid/CPR workshops
 - Emergency preparedness assistance
 - Commercial building fire inspections
- ... and more

Burns First Aid

Major burns need emergency medical help. Call 911 or seek immediate care for major burns.

Treating major burns

Until emergency help arrives:

- Protect the burned person from further harm. If you can do so safely, make sure the person you're helping is not in contact with the source of the burn. For electrical burns, make sure the power source is off before you approach the burned person. Don't try to remove clothing stuck in the burn.
- Make certain the individual is breathing. If needed, begin rescue breathing if you know how.
- Remove jewelry, belts and other tight items, especially from the burned area and the neck. Burned areas swell quickly.
- Cover the burn. Loosely cover the area with gauze or a clean cloth.
- Raise the burned area. Lift the wound above heart level if possible.
- Watch for signs of shock. Signs and symptoms include cool, clammy skin, weak pulse and shallow breathing.
- Do not apply anything to the burn

(ointments, creams, oils, etc.). Keep the burn clean.

Treating minor burns

For minor burns:

- Cool the burn. Hold the area under cool (not cold) running water for about 10 minutes. If the burn is on the face, apply a cool, wet cloth until the pain eases. For a mouth burn from hot food or drink, put a piece of ice in the mouth for a few minutes.
- Remove rings or other tight items from the burned area. Try to do this quickly and gently, before the area swells.
- Don't break blisters. Blisters help protect against infection. If a blister does break, gently clean the area with water and apply an antibiotic ointment.
- Apply lotion. After the burn is cooled, apply a lotion, such as one with aloe vera or cocoa butter. This helps prevent drying and provides relief.
- Bandage the burn. Cover the

burn with a clean bandage. Wrap it loosely to avoid putting pressure on burned skin. Bandaging keeps air off the area, reduces pain and protects blistered skin.

- If needed, take a nonprescription pain reliever, such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, others), naproxen sodium (Aleve) or acetaminophen (Tylenol, others).

Information provided by the Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research



Quemaduras Primeros Auxilios

Quemaduras graves que necesiten ayuda médica de emergencia. Llame al 911 o busque atención inmediata para quemaduras graves.

Tratamiento de quemaduras graves

Hasta que llegue la ayuda de emergencia:

- Proteja a la persona quemada de daños mayores. Si puede hacerlo de manera segura, asegúrese de que la persona a la que está ayudando no esté en contacto con la fuente de la quemadura. Para quemaduras eléctricas, asegúrese de que la fuente de alimentación esté apagada antes de acercarse a la persona quemada. No trate de quitarse la ropa atascada en la quemadura.
- Asegúrese de que la persona quemada esté respirando. Si es necesario, comience la respiración de rescate si es que la conoce.
- Retire las joyas, cinturones y otros artículos apretados, especialmente del área quemada y el cuello. Las áreas quemadas se hinchan rápidamente.
- Cubra la quemadura. Cubra sin apretar el área con una gasa o un paño limpio.
- Levante el área quemada. Levante la herida por encima del nivel del corazón si es posible.

• Esté atento a los signos de shock. Los signos y síntomas incluyen piel fría y húmeda, pulso débil y respiración superficial.

• No aplique nada a la quemadura (pomadas, cremas, aceites, etc.) Mantenga la quemadura limpia.

Tratamiento de quemaduras menores

Para quemaduras menores:

- Enfriar la quemadura. Mantenga el área bajo agua corriente fría (no fría) durante unos 10 minutos. Si la quemadura está en la cara, aplique un paño fresco y húmedo hasta que el dolor disminuya. Para una quemadura en la boca por comida o bebida caliente, ponga un trozo de hielo en la boca durante unos minutos.
- Retire los anillos u otros artículos apretados del área quemada. Trate de hacer esto rápida y suavemente, antes de que el área se hinche.
- No rompa ampollas. Las ampollas ayudan a proteger contra las infecciones. Si una ampolla se rompe, limpie suavemente

el área con agua y aplique un ungüento antibiótico.

• Aplicar loción. Después de enfriar la quemadura, aplique una loción o crema, como una con aloe vera o manteca de cacao. Esto ayuda a prevenir el secado y proporciona alivio.

• Vendar la quemadura. Cubra la quemadura con un vendaje limpio. Envuélvalo holgadamente (ósea que no apriete) para evitar ejercer presión sobre la piel quemada. El vendaje mantiene el aire fuera del área, reduce el dolor y protege la piel con ampollas.

• Si es necesario, tome un analgésico sin receta, como ibuprofeno (Advil, Motrin IB, otros), naproxeno sódico (Aleve) o paracetamol (Tylenol, otros).

Información proporcionada por la Fundación Mayo para la Educación e Investigación Médica



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Visit us online for 24/7 information: northmasonrfa.com

Santa's 2022 North Mason Schedule

DEC. 10 2 p.m. Trails End Lake

DEC. 15

5-7 p.m. Lynch Cove and Beards Cove

DEC. 12 5-7 p.m. Twanoh Falls
& Cedar Street

DEC. 16

5-7 p.m. Belfair Fire Station 21

DEC. 14 5-7 p.m. Tahuya River Valley,
Collins Lake, Maggie Lake



Season's Greetings!