



WASHINGTON STATE
COUNCIL OF FIRE FIGHTERS

RETIREES ASSOCIATION

COUNCIL

RE*CONNECTION

**Retirees Edition*

September 2026

WSCFF Retirees Association Newsletter

Serving Active Retirees of the Washington State Council of Fire Fighters

Retirees Association Board Members Bring LEOFF 1 Concerns to the SCPP

Members of the WSCFF Retirees Association Advisory Board recently brought the concerns of LEOFF 1 retirees directly to the Select Committee on Pension Policy as the committee continues its study of local pension boards and medical benefit liabilities.

George Orr L876, Curt Vandver L726, and WSCFF Retirees Association Vice Chair Roy Orlando L31, addressed the committee. WSCFF President Dennis Lawson was also in attendance.

George spoke candidly about what these discussions mean to retirees who have relied on the LEOFF 1 system for decades. He reminded committee members that firefighters of his generation served at a time when the job often carried significant risks, fewer protections and different expectations than exist today.

For George, that service came with an understanding that the benefits promised to firefighters would still be there when their working years were

over.

“I thought we had a deal, and this scares me,” George told the committee.

He urged the committee to proceed carefully and to listen to the retirees and local boards who would be directly affected by any changes. His message was not simply about how the system is administered, but about the uncertainty that discussion of change creates for retirees who have depended on it for many years.

A Seattle active retiree who heard George’s testimony later described it as “beautiful, warm and touching” and thanked him for giving committee members the “lay of the land.”

George closed his testimony with a simple request:

“I just want to go to sleep peacefully and not worry about losing my benefits.”

Curt focused on how the local board system works in practice. He explained that the boards differ in their structure, responsibilities and funding and raised concerns about the complexity of moving those responsibilities into a statewide system.

**“I think the local boards are working,” Curt told the committee.
“I have not heard any complaints about the local boards.”**

Roy focused on several points he wanted clearly understood as the study moves forward. He explained that the LEOFF 1 medical benefit applies to the primary LEOFF 1 member and not automatically to surviving spouses, and that medical coverage can vary among employers and local boards.

“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,” Roy told the committee.

He also asked that LEOFF 1 members themselves have a voice in the process if a survey is conducted as part of the study.

“I’d like to request that the primary members, the LEOFF 1 members, be included in that survey and have some input into it,” he said.

Committee members thanked George, Curt and Roy for sharing their experience and concerns. During the discussion, the committee chair emphasized that the Legislature does not want to undermine the benefits LEOFF 1 retirees have relied upon and welcomed continued input from retirees as the study moves forward.

WSCFF President Dennis Lawson, who attended the meeting, later thanked the Advisory Board members for their continued commitment and work.

The WSCFF Retirees Association will continue to follow the SCPP’s work and make sure the voices and concerns of LEOFF 1 retirees remain part of the discussion.

[Watch the Full SCPP Meeting and Testimony](#)

FAST PAC

Give a Little, Earn a Lot

The WSCFF’s Firefighters Action Support Team Political Action Committee (FAST PAC) was established to allow WSCFF members and retirees to make personal, voluntary donations for political action in Washington State. FAST PAC funds are used to educate and help elect public officials who will stand with us in the fight for better wages, benefits, and working conditions, and work to protect and enhance our pensions. We also support certain ballot issues that affect our members or departments. Specific criteria, including voting records, are used to determine which candidates receive support. Contributions are made to officials who support firefighter issues, regardless of party affiliation.



Scan the QR code to learn more about FAST PAC and voluntary contributions.

[Learn more about FAST PAC](#)

Retirement by Design

Retirement by Design is the first in a series of articles from WSCFF Retirees Association Board Member Steve Hostetter. With 9 years of retirement behind him and a longtime interest in retirement planning and life after the fire service, Steve will share what he has learned about building a fulfilling retirement. Look for additional installments in upcoming newsletters.

I've been retired for 9 years now, and although I still have a lot to learn, I've gained a little knowledge about retirement that I'd like to share. It's a subject that interests me, so I read about it and I listen to media on the subject often.

My initial interest was purely in the financial aspect of retirement, but I've come to understand there's a lot more to it than that. A lot of retirees have plenty of money and still have issues being content with their retirement, and in some cases this leads to addictions, relationship issues, and other unhealthy outcomes.

To be frank, I don't like the term retirement. To me, it implies some kind of earned entitlement to do anything one wants, or nothing if it suits them. A laissez-faire life where you eat till you're tired and sleep till you're hungry.

I prefer the term “financially independent”, even though continuing to work for money can certainly be a healthy and sometimes necessary thing to do after a fire department career.

But regardless of the verbiage, a fulfilling retirement seems to consist of four core elements. The terms vary from one author to the next, but they have the same implication. They are: having a sense of purpose, living a healthy lifestyle, having deep, meaningful relationships, and, of course, being able to finance it.

As this article is written for those of you who are already retired, we skip the issue of finances. I'll address the other elements in a series of articles, starting with this one on a sense of purpose.

Like it or not, we are wired to be productive in one sense or another.

Having a sense of purpose means waking up with clear reasons to engage with the world, a feeling that your life has direction, and a belief that your daily activities matter. It translates personal values into meaningful actions, moving one beyond just surviving to actively thriving.

Maybe it's because a career in the fire service fulfills this psychological need so easily that transitioning to something different can be all the more difficult for us. We've never really had to question whether or not our lives make the world a better place. But in retirement we do.

So what does it mean to have a sense of purpose?

I have a few friends who could go fishing every day and feel perfectly fulfilled by it. To them it's a mission and an art. They study what the fish are eating and when. What the tides and waves are doing. It's a skill they have an incredible passion for.

I have other friends who feel the same way about golf. That's not me. But I wish I had an interest I was as passionate about as they are.

My point is that a healthy sense of purpose can come from a variety of sources, and it doesn't have to be something that is going to change the world.

Some firefighters already have a second career they enjoy that is completely different from the fire service. Other folks might have a job in mind they've always wanted to do. There are volunteer opportunities from A to Z that either fit in with a firefighter's background or are completely different.

During COVID, I took calls for the Red Cross for a few months. I had the time and enjoyed helping people who needed a little guidance. It was different than anything I had done before, but in my wheelhouse given my firefighting background.

Helping others, including our family, is obviously worth our time and consideration.

I know retirees who work alongside their adult children in their businesses, and others who care for grandchildren or parents as they get older. What could be more important than that?

Personally, I have a variety of things that I do to fulfill this need to be relevant in retirement, and the list changes from time to time.

I routinely spend a little quiet time thinking about what I do with my time and how I can make the most of what I have left on this planet.

Whether you work for money, volunteer, have a full-time hobby, or do a little bit of everything, it's critical that what you do aligns with your core beliefs and values.

What is it all for? What do you want written on your tombstone?

I encourage retirees, present and future, to take some time and give this some serious consideration. For some, it comes easily and naturally. For others, it takes some work and trying some new things before finding a niche.

But for all, it is an essential part of a well-rounded "retirement" (yuk, still hate that word).

Fraternally,

Steve Hostetter

WSCFF Retirees Association Board Member

Local 2819 Retiree

Remembering Mike Cooper

A Life of Service and Connection



The Washington State Council of Fire Fighters mourns the loss of RA Advisory Board Member Mike Cooper. Mike was active in the WSCFF for decades before joining the RA Board in 2023. His passion, dedication, knowledge, and friendship are deeply missed.

James “Mike” Cooper died August 20, 2026, at his home in Elma, surrounded by his family. He was 74.

Mike spent most of his life serving others, and retirement never seemed to change that. He remained connected to firefighters, the union and the people he cared about because those relationships mattered deeply to him.

Mike once wrote:

“We all have stories from the job. Not just the big calls or union wins, but the moments that made a difference. Those moments shape who we are and don’t disappear when we retire.”

That belief stayed with him throughout his life.

The fire service was part of Mike's story from the beginning. His father was a firefighter and later served as fire chief in Edmonds. Mike joined a cadet program while still in high school and became a volunteer firefighter at 18.

He went on to spend 26 years with the Shoreline Fire Department, retiring as a lieutenant in 2006. He also spent many years serving Local 1760 and the WSCFF.

Mike credited Jim Rudd and George Orr as early mentors who helped shape the way he thought about union solidarity and looking out for other firefighters.



“Brotherhood. Advocacy. Showing up. These weren’t just slogans on the union hall walls. They were lived values. And they still matter.”

Mike carried those values with him long after his active career ended.

One of his favorite sayings was:



“My job as an old firefighter is to help young firefighters become old firefighters.”

He meant it.

Mike cared about making the fire service safer for those coming behind him. He spoke about what his generation had learned and, during his own battle with cancer, was willing to share his experience in the hope that it might help another firefighter.

That same concern for others could be seen outside the fire service. Mike spent much of his adult life coaching youth soccer and wrestling and was involved with the Edmonds and Edmonds Woodway High School wrestling programs. Many people will remember his unmistakable voice, but they will also remember how much he cared about the young people around him.

Mike continued that spirit of service through the WSCFF Retirees Association. He was elected to the Advisory Board in June 2023 and reelected in 2026.

He believed retired firefighters still had an important place in the union. He wanted members to understand the benefits they had earned, stay connected and share what they had learned with younger generations.

When asked why he wanted to continue serving, Mike answered simply:

“I still had work to do.”

That answer says a great deal about him.

For all the work Mike did throughout his life, his family was always at the center of it.

Mike and Chrystal met at church when they were in junior high. They married July 7, 1973, and shared 53 years of marriage. Mike liked to point out that their anniversary, 7/7, was easy to remember because 77 had been his father’s call sign when he served as fire chief in Edmonds.

When Mike spoke about the importance of preserving the stories of retired firefighters, he said:

“If you are reading this, your story matters. Whether it was a fire, a union fight, or a moment you were there for someone, it matters. That is how we pass the torch. That is how we stay connected.”

Those words feel especially meaningful now.

Mike believed our stories mattered because the people behind them mattered. He understood that the connections made over a lifetime in the fire service do not simply end when the uniform is put away.

Mike will be deeply missed by the people who loved him and by the fire service community that was such an important part of his life.

Celebration of Life for Mike Cooper

Saturday, September 26, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

Olympia First Baptist Church
904 Washington St SE
Olympia, WA 98501

A reception will follow the service.

Parking is available nearby, including at the WSCFF office lot and Columbia Bank.

Come dressed as you knew him. Whether you knew Mike through the fire service, coaching, public service or another part of his life, his family would love to see that reflected in the room. Department uniforms and local gear, team jackets, coach's polos, scout uniforms and campaign T-shirts are all welcome. Mike was never much for dressing up. He would much rather see the people and connections that were part of his life than a room full of suits.

In lieu of flowers, Mike's family has asked that donations in his memory be made to the [Washington State Council of Fire Fighters Cancer Foundation](#).

Visit the WSCFF Cancer Foundation

In Memory

Mike Cooper, Local 1760 Shoreline

August 20, 2026

Mike Cooper served 26 years with the Shoreline Fire Department, retiring as a lieutenant, and spent 20 years on the executive board of L1760, including 15 years as president. He later continued serving retired firefighters as a member of the WSCFF Retirees Association Advisory Board.

Mike will be remembered for his union leadership, his commitment to firefighters and their families, and his belief in showing up for those who came before him and those coming behind him.

Patrick Hart, Local 452 Vancouver

June 22, 2026

Patrick Clark Hart served with the Vancouver Fire Department, retiring as a lieutenant after many years of service. He also served 20 years in the National Guard, attaining the rank of Major, and had a lifelong passion for flying.

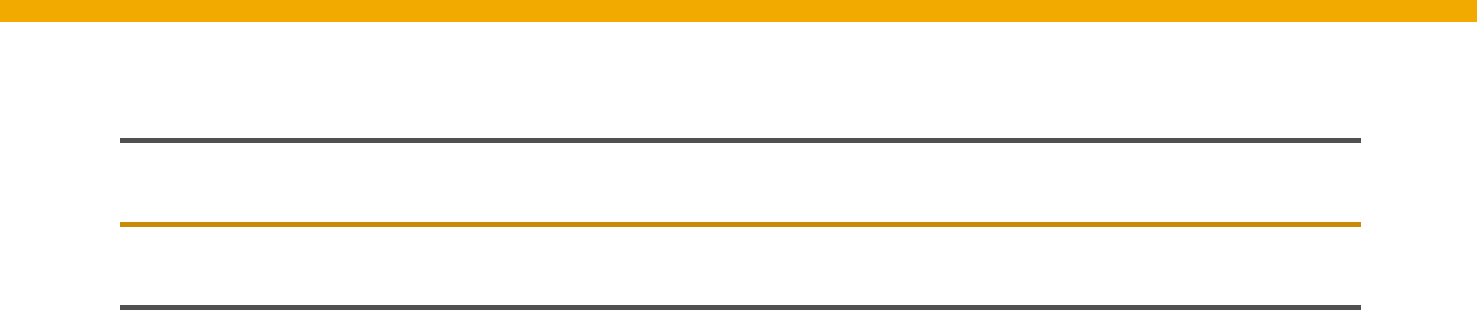
Pat will be remembered for his service, his adventurous spirit, and the lasting impact he made on his family, friends, fellow firefighters, and community.

Thank you for reading!

Our active retirees keep the spirit of the fire service alive.

Stay safe, take care of one another, and feel free to **reach out** with any updates or stories to share.

- The [WSCFF Retirees Association Advisory Board](#)



Retirees Association

Roy Orlando
Pat Hepler

Steve Hostetter

George Orr

Curt Vandver

- Roy Orlando, Co-Chair, served 39 years with Local 31 Tacoma and actively monitors pension legislation and union benefits to support retirees.
- Pat Hepler retired as a Battalion Chief after many years with Snohomish County Fire District #1 and has been a longtime advocate for firefighters and their families.
- Steve Hostetter retired as a Battalion Chief from Central Kitsap Fire and Rescue and enjoys sharing his knowledge on retirement planning.
- George Orr has over 50 years with Local 876, including leadership roles and time as a state representative focused on firefighter issues.
- Curtis Vandver retired as Deputy Chief from the Puyallup Fire Department after 34 years of service and has been a 55-year member of Local 726, remaining active on LEOFF and fire pension boards. He also serves as West Vice President of the LEOFF Association and continues to advocate on pension and firefighter issues.



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