

# RIVER FOREST FIRE DEPARTMENT

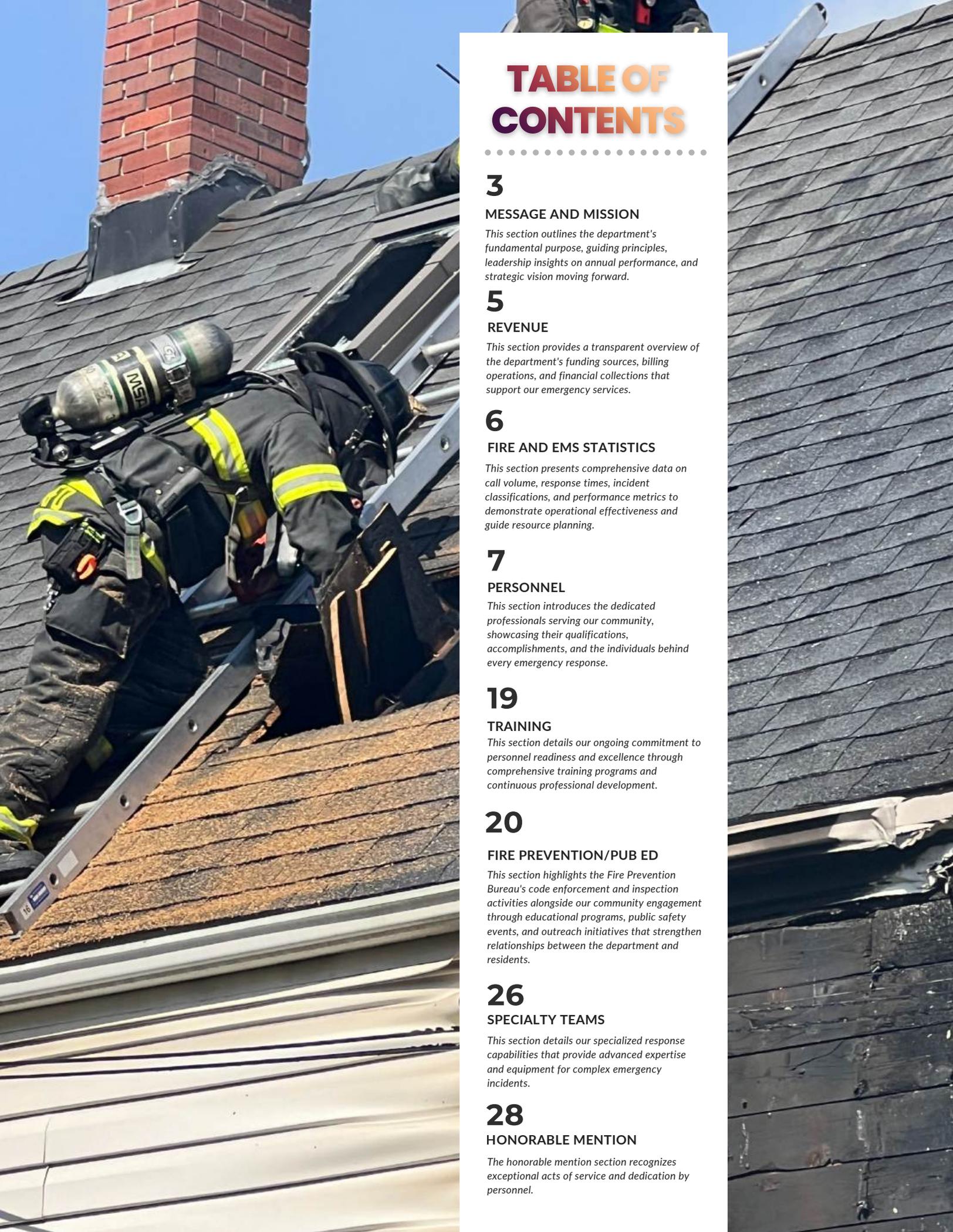


# 2025 ANNUAL REPORT



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# Message from the Chief



February 16, 2026

*To Village President Cathy Adduci and the Board of Trustees, I am pleased to submit the annual report for the River Forest Fire Department for the year 2025.*

*This past year, we remained focused on our mission of providing the highest quality services to our residents, business owners, and guests. I encourage you to review this report to see the breadth of accomplishments achieved by our department over the past year. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Administrative Assistant, Renee Morris, for her dedicated work throughout the year and her efforts in preparing this report.*



# Message from the Chief (continued)...

*During 2025, we responded to 2,831 emergency calls. Of these responses, 1,529 were EMS and rescue-related calls, including motor vehicle accidents. The remaining 1,302 responses involved fire-related emergencies, including structure fires, vehicle fires, wildland fires, automatic fire alarms, and other emergency situations. As an active member of MABAS (Mutual Aid Box Alarm System) Division 11, the River Forest Fire Department participated in 295 mutual aid requests from neighboring communities while providing assistance 759 times to our neighbors and other MABAS divisions.*

*As detailed in this report, our department accomplished a significant volume of work over the past year. This work extended well beyond emergency response and included fire and EMS training, vehicle and station maintenance, fire prevention, public education, fire investigation, hazardous materials response, and technical rescue operations. I want to express my deep appreciation to our officers and firefighter/paramedics, who take great pride in their work and demonstrate professionalism in everything they do.*

*I would also like to thank Village President Cathy Adduci and the River Forest Board of Trustees for their continued support throughout the year. Their commitment has been instrumental in establishing the River Forest Fire Department as one of the finest departments in the region and throughout the State of Illinois.*

*Respectfully submitted,*

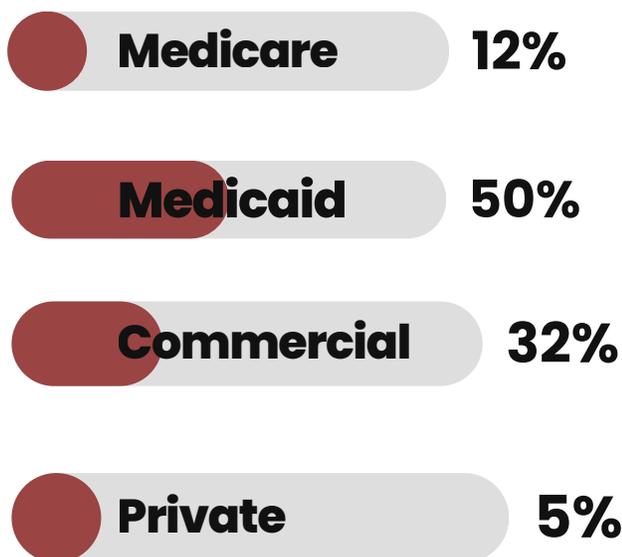
*Thomas Gaertner*  
Fire Chief

# Revenue

The River Forest Fire Department bills for emergency medical services provided to both community members and visitors, with additional billing authority for non-resident vehicle fires and traffic collisions. Collections and outstanding account management are administered through Paramedic Billing Services (PBS) of Elmhurst, Illinois. For the year ending December 31, 2025, invoices totaling \$2,660,523 were submitted to private insurers, Medicare, and Medicaid programs, resulting in \$1,974,094 in revenue collections.

Our department delivers Advanced Life Support (ALS) transport services to multiple regional healthcare facilities, including Loyola University Medical Center, Rush Oak Park, Gottlieb Memorial Hospital, Hines VA Medical Center, West Suburban Medical Center, MacNeal Hospital, and Community First Medical Center.

EMS Coordinator, Lucas Finrock, worked in coordination with Administrative Assistant, Renee Morris, and PBS representatives to pursue and secure previously outstanding payments.



<b>Payer</b>	<b>\$\$</b>
Medicare	\$237,858
Medicaid	\$986,646
Commercial	\$644,129
Private	\$105,461
<b>Total \$1,974,094</b>	

# Fire and EMS Statistics

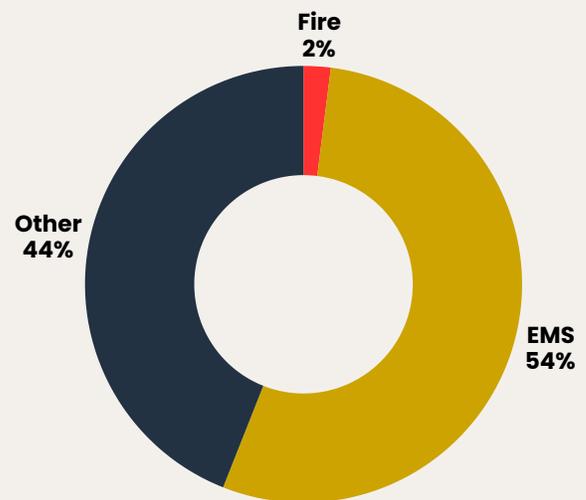
2025 Total Call Volume

**2,831**

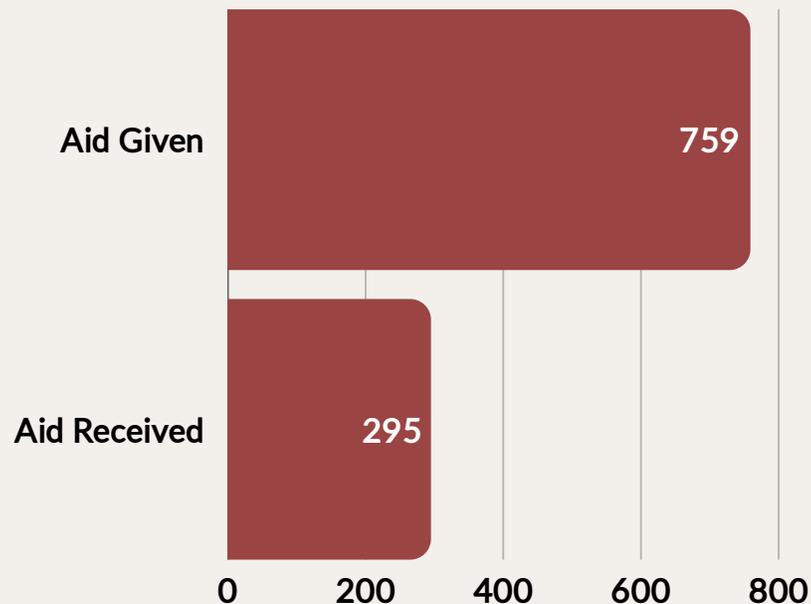
## EMS Call Types

• BLS	589
• ALS	581
• Refusals	224
• Lift Assists	56

## Incident % by Type :



## Mutual Aid



Totals are estimates due to the department's transition to a new Records Management System (RMS) during this period.

# Personnel - Administration



**Thomas Gaertner - 45 Years of Service**  
Fire Chief

Chief Thomas Gaertner brings over four decades of fire service experience, beginning his career with the United States Air Force and continuing through leadership positions at Broadview Fire Department, where he retired in 2015 after 29.5 years and received the State of Illinois Medal of Valor in 2002 for rescuing two elderly individuals from a fire. Following his retirement, he served as Deputy Director of the Northeastern Illinois Public Safety Training Academy (NIPSTA) before becoming Deputy Chief and Fire Chief at North Riverside Fire Department. Chief Gaertner currently leads the River Forest Fire Department, bringing extensive operational experience and a proven commitment to excellence in fire service leadership.

Deputy Chief Bochenek leads with a philosophy that fire and EMS services extend far beyond emergency response, encompassing public safety, education, and meaningful community engagement. Under his leadership, department personnel participate in diverse initiatives ranging from neighborhood block parties and STEM fairs to medical camps partnered with Concordia University, demonstrating innovative approaches to community problem-solving. He is dedicated to developing solutions that strengthen community resilience while fostering direct connections between firefighters and the citizens they serve.



**David Bochenek - 17 Years of Service**  
Deputy Chief

# Personnel - Administration



**Ryan Lambert - 32 Years of Service**  
Fire Marshal

*Fire Marshal Lambert is an experienced fire service professional bringing over three decades of expertise across fire prevention, emergency operations, and arson investigation. He has established a proven track record of creating robust inspection and life-safety initiatives and overseeing code compliance programs to enhance public safety.*

*Renee Morris serves as the department's administrative assistant, supporting the Fire Chief with payroll processing, medical records maintenance, billing, accounts payable, and fulfilling FOIA requests and subpoenas. She manages the department's social media platforms. She additionally serves as Secretary for the Board of Fire and Police Commission, playing a vital role in the hiring process for firefighter/paramedics.*



**Renee Morris - 8 Years of Service**  
Administrative Assistant

# Training Division



**Michael Smith - 24 Years of Service**  
Lieutenant

*Lt. Smith serves as the department's Training Officer and Fire Investigator, developing and delivering comprehensive educational programs that maintain operational readiness and professional development for all personnel. In his investigator role, he determines fire origin and cause, collects and analyzes evidence from fire scenes, and documents findings for departmental review.*

# Black **Shit**



**Quentin Boyd - 14 Years of Service**  
Lieutenant

*Lt. Boyd serves as the division coordinator for uniforms, EMS operations, and the HazMat TRT team, while overseeing station maintenance and supply management. As an active member of the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team, he brings specialized technical expertise to complex emergency response operations.*

*FFPM Fischer brings decades of dedicated service as a firefighter/paramedic and former EMS Coordinator, responding to thousands of emergency calls while providing critical fire suppression and advanced life support to the community. Throughout his distinguished career, he has become a trusted mentor to newer personnel, exemplifying the highest standards of the fire service through his commitment to continuous training and professional development.*



**Stephen Fischer - 23 Years of Service**  
Firefighter/Paramedic

# Black Shift



**Jason Bencik - 11 Years of Service**  
Firefighter/Paramedic

FFPM Bencik serves as an acting officer when needed, stepping into leadership roles to maintain operational effectiveness. In his role as union secretary, he advocates for firefighter safety, benefits, and working conditions while fostering collaboration between personnel and department leadership. He also serves as a member of the foreign fire tax board, contributing to departmental financial oversight and resource management.

FFPM Seablom serves as a Fire Investigator Officer, combining emergency response expertise with specialized skills in determining fire origin, cause, and circumstances. His investigative role requires meticulous attention to detail and technical knowledge to analyze fire scenes, collect evidence, and document findings for both departmental and legal purposes. In addition to his investigative duties, he serves as president of the union board, advocating for firefighter interests and workforce representation.



**Adam Seablom - 9 Years of Service**  
Firefighter/Paramedic

# Black Shift



**Jonathan Buchholz - 8 Years of Service**  
Firefighter/Paramedic

*FFPM Buchholz coordinates CPR instruction programs, training community members in life-saving techniques. Through his dedication to public education and emergency response, he extends the department's impact beyond emergency calls by empowering citizens with critical skills that can save lives.*

*FFPM Abuzineh joined the department nearly a year ago as a firefighter/paramedic, adapting to the demands of emergency response while continuing to develop his skills and knowledge. His enthusiasm and commitment to serving the community reflect the dedication of the next generation of firefighters entering the profession.*



**Sameh Abuzineh - 1 Year of Service**  
Firefighter/Paramedic

# Gold Shift



**Paul Zipperich - 23 Years of Service**  
Lieutenant

Lieutenant Zipperich was promoted to his current rank on January 14, 2024, and now coordinates the Fire Investigation Division, Radio Communications, Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus, and Apparatus Floor Maintenance, ensuring seamless operation of critical departmental systems. As a CPR Instructor, he is dedicated to training the community in life-saving techniques.

FFPM Viera provides emergency medical care and fire suppression while responding to a wide range of community emergencies with professionalism and skill. As a paramedic student preceptor, he mentors the next generation of emergency medical providers, sharing his field experience and clinical expertise to develop competent, confident paramedics ready to serve their communities. His service on the foreign fire tax board reflects his dedication to supporting departmental funding and fiscal responsibility.



**Adan Viera - 16 Years of Service**  
Firefighter/Paramedic

# Gold Shift



**Adam Howe - 11 Years of Service**  
Firefighter/Paramedic

*FFPM Howe consistently delivers quality emergency medical care and fire suppression services to the community. His decade-plus career reflects a steadfast commitment to protecting lives and property through reliable, professional emergency response. As a member of the foreign fire tax board, he plays an important role in ensuring proper allocation of resources that support departmental operations and equipment needs.*

*FFPM Basa serves as EMS Coordinator, overseeing emergency medical operations while also providing CPR instruction to department personnel and community members. His role as union treasurer reflects his commitment to financial stewardship and departmental resource management.*



**Matthew Basa - 8 Years of Service**  
Firefighter/Paramedic

# Gold Shift



**Jarrett Ercoli - 5 Years of Service**  
Firefighter/Paramedic

*FFPM Ercoli provides emergency medical care and fire suppression services while building a solid foundation of operational experience. His commitment to continuous learning and professional growth reflects his dedication to delivering quality emergency response to the community.*

# Red Shift



**Edward Howe - 23 Years of Service**  
Lieutenant

*Lt. Howe coordinates comprehensive maintenance operations including vehicles, equipment, hose, and outdoor station facilities, ensuring operational readiness across all departmental assets. His invaluable knowledge of vehicle maintenance has proven essential to minimizing downtime and maximizing fleet reliability. As vice president of the union board, he advocates for firefighter interests and represents personnel in matters affecting their working conditions and benefits.*

*When called upon, FFPM Doran serves in an acting officer capacity, ensuring seamless operational leadership and crew coordination. He contributes specialized skills as a department mechanic, ensuring apparatus reliability and operational readiness for emergency response. He also serves as a certified Car Seat Technician, providing child passenger safety education to the community. As a member of the foreign fire tax board, he demonstrates commitment to departmental financial oversight and resource management.*



**Christopher Doran - 17 Years of Service**  
Firefighter/Paramedic

# Red Shift



**Lucas Finfrock - 14 Years of Service**  
Firefighter/Paramedic

*FFPM Finfrock serves as an EMS Coordinator, overseeing emergency medical operations and protocol compliance while ensuring the highest standards of patient care across the department. His role as a Car Seat Technician demonstrates commitment to community safety education through child passenger protection programs.*

*FFPM McKenna responds to medical emergencies and fire incidents while maintaining readiness to protect the community. His OSFM HazMat Technician certification equips him with advanced knowledge to safely handle dangerous materials incidents, adding valuable technical expertise to the department's response capabilities.*



**Brian McKenna - 9 Years of Service**  
Firefighter/Paramedic

# Red Shift



**Jonathan Rouse - 6 Years of Service**  
Firefighter/Paramedic

*FFPM Rouse responds to diverse emergencies while honing his skills in both fire suppression and advanced life support. In his role as a paramedic student preceptor, he shapes future paramedics by providing real-world instruction and mentorship, ensuring they gain the competence and confidence needed for successful careers in emergency medicine. As a CPR Instructor, he also trains the public in life-saving techniques, extending his educational impact beyond paramedic students. His membership on the foreign fire tax board demonstrates his commitment to maintaining adequate funding streams that support essential fire department programs and services.*

*FFPM Kyles provides emergency medical care and fire suppression services to the community during critical incidents. As a CPR Instructor, he shares life-saving knowledge with citizens, expanding the impact of emergency preparedness beyond the firehouse. As a member of the foreign fire tax board, he helps oversee the distribution of tax revenues that directly enhance departmental capabilities and community safety initiatives.*



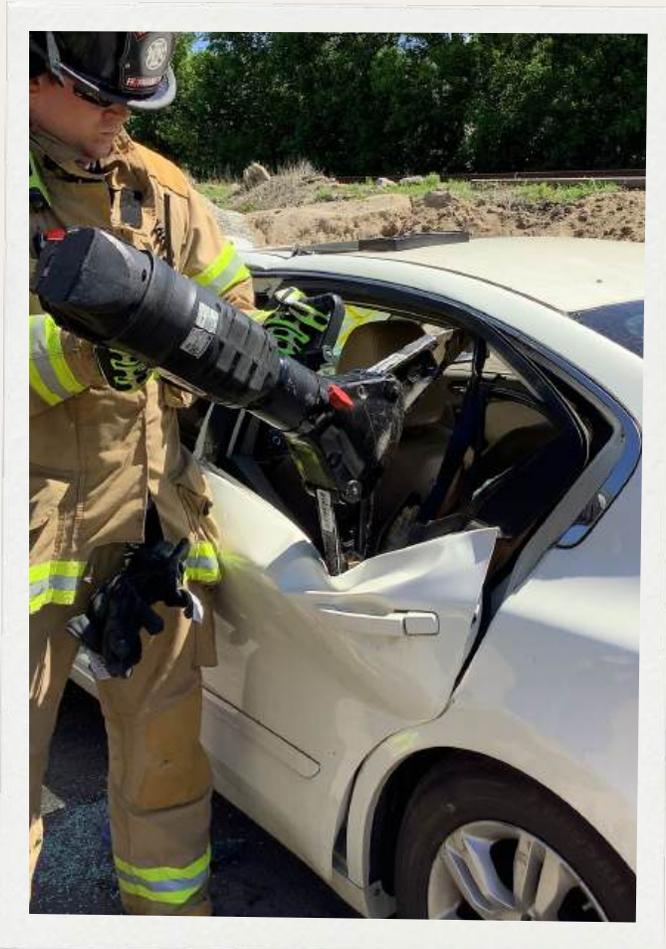
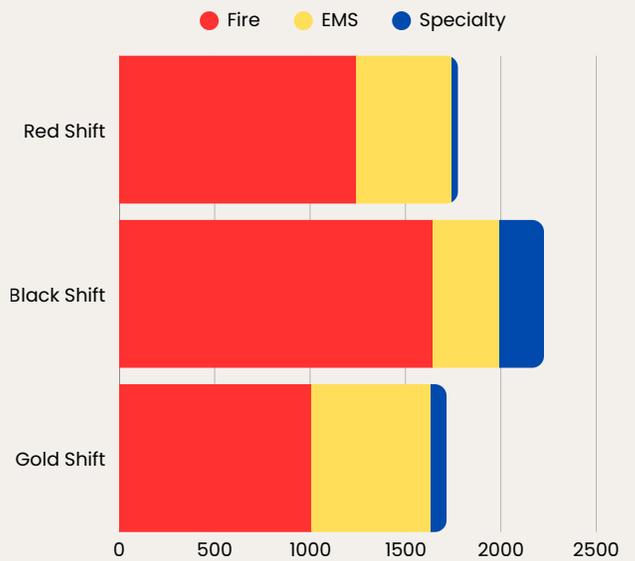
**Timothy Kyles - 2 Years of Service**  
Firefighter/Paramedic

# Training

*The River Forest Fire Department Training Division is dedicated to strengthening community trust and public service through the delivery of safe, innovative, and comprehensive training programs. By providing emergency service personnel with high-quality education and professional development opportunities, we ensure they are equipped to serve our community with professionalism and competence.*

## Totals Training Hours by Category

● Fire	3898
● EMS	1474
● Specialty	345



# Fire Prevention/Pub Ed

The Fire Prevention Bureau (FPB) is comprised of the Fire Chief and Fire Marshal, with day-to-day operations overseen by the Fire Marshal who directs all prevention initiatives. Working alongside on-duty personnel, they support River Forest property owners and residents through code enforcement, risk mitigation, and safety education programs. The Bureau's core mission centers on guaranteeing that all structures provide safe environments for occupants and first responders alike. This mission is accomplished through comprehensive plan examinations, construction project oversight for new commercial and multi-family developments, annual safety assessments of existing facilities, investigation of safety concerns, and verification of fire protection system compliance documentation. Additionally, the Bureau enforces applicable international, national, and municipal fire and building regulations and standards. FPB staff review and inspect all development activities ranging from minor renovations to ground-up construction.

The Bureau leverages active fire companies to support the existing building assessment program. This approach guarantees that commercial and multi-residential properties receive annual evaluations and that any identified fire safety hazards are promptly resolved. The process maintains adherence to all current codes and relevant standards. Fire company crews are designated annual maintenance inspections for properties within one of three designated prevention zones. These inspection assignments rotate yearly among the three shifts, enabling personnel to access various structures.


**RIVER FOREST FIRE DEPARTMENT**  
**FIRE PREVENTION BUREAU**  
**MONTHLY REPORT**  
**December 2025 and End of Year 2025**

Monthly Activities	Monthly Totals		YTD-Year to Date	
	Dec-24	Dec-25	2024	2025
**FPB Inspections	8	6	141	151
**Company Inspections	7		182	83
FPB Re-Inspections	4	3	85	66
Company Re-Inspections	12		92	41
Special Inquiry/E/L Site Inspections	3	2	15	8
Construction Inspections (Rough/Finals)	3	8	47	51
Inspections with Building Department	1	0	2	15
Inspections with/for State Fire Marshal	0	0	4	4
Permit Inspections (cont. hot work, UST)	1	0	31	30
<b>TOTAL INSPECTIONS</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>599</b>	<b>449</b>
School/Business Emergency Plan/Drills	2	0	30	17
Violation Notices Issued	7	3	162	131
Violations Noted	19	10	391	301
Violations Corrected	16	5	249	191
Permits Issued	1	0	33	32
** Complaints Received & Investigated	0	0	3	1
All Meetings/Consultations	9	2	73	52
Training Activities	1	0	31	32
Fire Suppression/Warm System Test/Final	2	0	14	5
Fire Suppression Hydrants	1	0	6	3
** Plan Reviews and Revisions	12	4	139	191
** Average turn around (Business Days)	2.06 days	1.5 Days	2.41 days	3.9 days
Public Education Programs	3		56	77
Public Education Program Contacts	24		2484	3353
Misc Fire Prev Activities (See Narrative)	8	4	89	131

\*\* Performance Measures for the Chief  
 Fire Marshal Kevin Willey  
This information is contained in the monthly report from First Due

# Fire Prevention/Pub Ed

## River Forest Community Safety Team (RFCST)

*The River Forest Community Safety Team (RFCST) is a safety program originated by the Police Department and includes the Fire Department. We teach safety on several subjects including Fire Safety, Scene Safety, Bike Safety, Gun Safety, Crossing the Street, and Safely Calling 911 for Help among others. We presented safety information to 1089 students and teachers on the various safety topics in all the public and private schools in town and that program accounts for nearly one-third of our public education contacts. We feel that the program is extremely important to the safety of all the kids, who in turn take our information back to their families to discuss.*



## Change Your Clock, Change Your Alarms!

*The River Forest Fire Department, in conjunction with the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance, would like to inform all residents of the new Illinois Smoke Detector Act that went into effect January 1, 2023. The Act was updated when statistics from around the country indicated that 71% of smoke alarms, which failed to operate in residential fires, were either missing, disconnected, or had dead batteries. The Act requires all Illinois residents to replace their old smoke alarms with the type that has a long-term 10-year, sealed battery. The new Act was updated to reflect changes in new smoke alarm technologies. At the end of the 10-year life cycle, these new Smoke Alarms will automatically alert the homeowner with an end-of-life signal to replace the alarm.*

# Fire Prevention/Pub Ed



**Scan here for  
more information!**

## Be Alarmed: Smoke Alarm Installation Program

*In 2025, the department continued its participation in the Be Alarmed: Smoke Alarm Installation Program. "Be Alarmed!" represents a collaborative fire safety initiative jointly managed by the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance (IFSA) and the Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal (OSFM). This program supplies fire safety educational resources and 10-year sealed battery smoke detectors to municipal fire departments throughout Illinois. Participating departments then provide safety education and install these alarms in vulnerable households within their jurisdictions while maintaining documentation for program reporting. The educational materials and smoke detection devices are furnished to fire departments without charge through funding secured by IFSA and OSFM, with supplementary support from Kidde and Menards.*

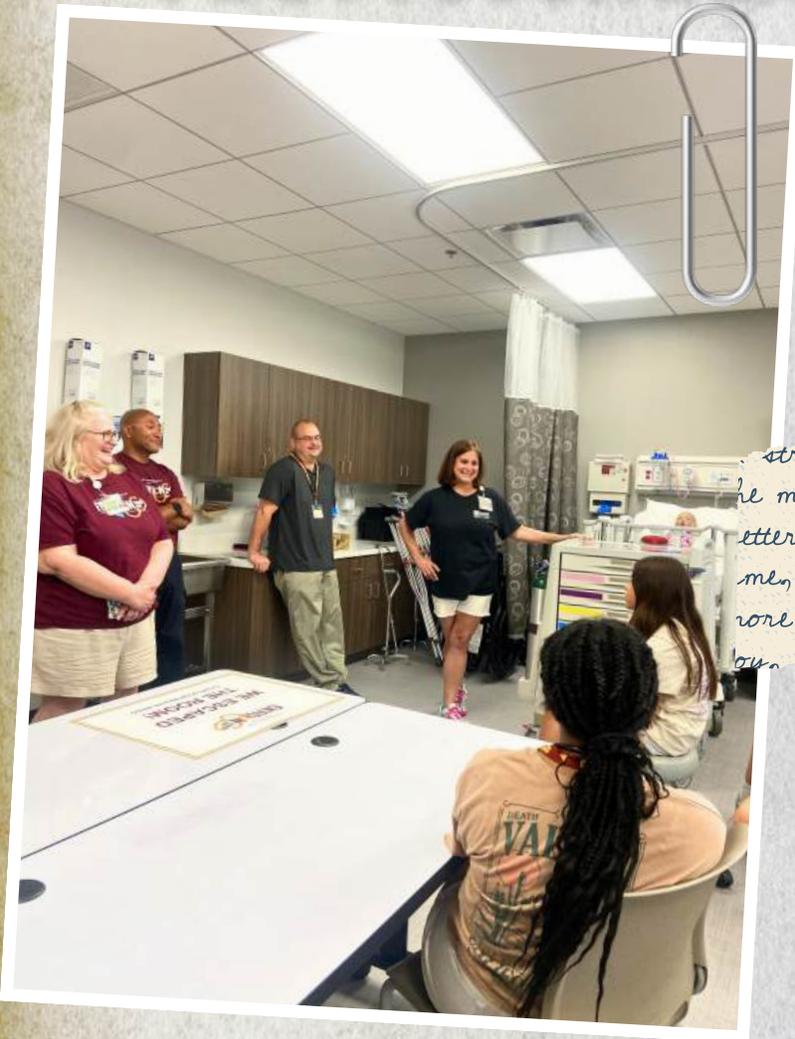
## Smoke Alarm Recycle Program

*With the implementation of the new Illinois smoke alarm legislation, existing alarms featuring replaceable batteries will effectively become outdated. This transition raises concerns about the potential environmental impact of disposing substantial quantities of these devices. To address this issue, the River Forest Fire Department established a recycling initiative to divert these alarms from landfills. Collection stations featuring two prominent yellow bins have been placed at Village Hall and the Fire Station; upon reaching capacity, the contents are shipped to a specialized recycling center in New Mexico. At this facility, technicians dismantle the smoke alarms and recover up to 92 percent of their component materials for reuse.*



# Fire Prevention/Pub Ed

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The **ENVISION Nursing Camp** at Concordia University is a state grant-funded program that teaches local students about various medical field careers through immersive, hands-on experiences including first responder skills and nursing procedures. The camp represents a successful collaboration between Concordia's nursing staff, the River Forest Fire Department, and other community organizations, which is so well-executed that organizers were invited to present at the International Simulations in Healthcare Conference in January of 2025.



# Fire Prevention/Pub Ed



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## Open House

Our 2025 Open House was held on September 20th and was a huge success largely due to the support from the community. We had over 450 attendees who stopped by to experience first-hand the activities of the local fire department and receive critical safety education. A highlight of the event was the burn room trailer demonstration provided by the Northern Illinois Sprinkler Advisory Board, which vividly showcased the life-saving value of residential sprinklers. Young attendees enthusiastically participated as future firefighters by deploying hoses, creating memorable experiences for families.

We featured the Fire Prevention Week theme "Charge into Fire Safety™: Lithium-Ion Batteries in Your Home," which aimed to educate the public on how to safely buy, charge, and dispose of lithium-ion batteries commonly used in modern electronics. The event focused on the importance of handling these batteries correctly to minimize fire risks.



# Fire Prevention/Pub Ed



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**Senior Week** is a weeklong celebration dedicated to honoring, recognizing, and serving seniors in River Forest, with a focus on uplifting and advocating for older adults in the community. During the week, we hosted a breakfast offering helpful tips on stroke awareness, and the police department provided guidance on avoiding scams and fraud.

## Senior Breakfast



# Specialty Teams

## Fire Investigation

The River Forest Fire Investigation Division consists of three trained fire investigators. The fire investigators respond to structure and vehicle fires to determine the origin, cause, and development of a fire. The fire investigator has many tasks that must be completed to properly process the fire scene. A completed investigation consists of photographs throughout the scene and a sketch of the scene. The investigator must interview witnesses and the property owners. The scene has to be processed by removing fire debris to find the origin of the fire. When necessary, artifacts are collected as evidence. In the case of arson, the investigator works with the Police and State Fire Marshal. When the investigation is completed, a fire report is constructed and becomes a legal document that can be used in a civil or criminal court.

The Investigation Division maintains memberships in several professional networks. River Forest participates in the Division 11 Fire Investigation Team, which supplies personnel and specialized knowledge for investigations initiated through MABAS box alarm requests. Division 11 offers training courses to its membership and operates a fully equipped investigation van housed at an Oak Park fire station, containing all necessary tools for conducting thorough examinations.

Fire Investigation Division personnel hold membership in the Fire Investigation Strike Force, a nonprofit entity delivering current instruction on emerging techniques and scientific developments in fire investigation methodology. This education is provided through monthly gatherings and twice-yearly training seminars.

River Forest's fire investigators are affiliated with the International Association of Arson Investigators along with its Illinois Chapter. Both organizations deliver educational resources via classroom instruction, professional conferences, web-based training modules, and technical publications.



# Specialty Teams

## Technical Rescue Training (TRT)

*Technical Rescue Team (TRT) incidents require highly specialized, multidisciplinary responses due to their complex and multi-hazard nature, with team members trained in search, rescue, extrication, structural collapse, rope rescue, confined space operations, and various cutting, shoring, lifting, and breaching techniques. Rapid deployment of appropriately trained personnel and specialized equipment is critical to saving lives, minimizing casualties, and facilitating recovery operations. The recent retirement of four TRT members has created a significant gap in this already understaffed area, with three of the four remaining members eligible for retirement within the next few years. Beyond recruiting and training new personnel, the department requires additional funding to replace aging equipment nearing the end of its service life to maintain compliance with NFPA 1951 standards for technical rescue gear.*



## Hazardous Materials Team

*The River Forest Fire Department is a member of the Division 11 Hazardous Materials Team Co-op, a collaboration of seven neighboring municipalities that share resources, training, and personnel during hazmat incidents. Division 11 maintains its reputation as one of Illinois' premier response teams, with members participating in validation exercises in Champaign to demonstrate proficiency through graded practical tasks. Training for hazardous materials technicians has covered diverse topics including tent city deployment, decontamination procedures, driver operations, grounding and bonding techniques, and materials identification. Team members also received specialized on-site instruction at the BNSF rail yard and ExxonMobil facility, providing valuable real-world experience.*



# Honorable Mention

Founded in 2002 to honor the memory of those lost on September 11th, LemonAid transforms lemonADE into lemonAID—raising awareness and funds for local charities dedicated to helping children. What began as a tribute has grown into a cherished community tradition, turning remembrance of tragedy into an opportunity for positive action. Each year, the families of Bonnie Brae open their hearts to neighbors who respond with extraordinary generosity and support. In recognition of this enduring spirit of giving, the Village of River Forest designated the 700 block of Bonnie Brae as "LemonAid Place" in 2011.

In 2025, we marked a bittersweet milestone: it was the last year Fire Marshal Kevin Wiley joined us before his retirement on December 31, 2025, closing more than a decade of honoring first responders by reciting a dedicated poem at LemonAid.





# Thank You

We extend our sincere gratitude to the residents and stakeholders of River Forest for taking the time to review this annual report and for your ongoing trust in our department. Your continued support enables us to maintain the highest standards of service and invest in the training, equipment, and personnel necessary to protect our community. We remain deeply committed to serving River Forest with excellence, and we look forward to building upon this strong partnership in the years ahead.

*River Forest Fire Department*