



 = Volunteer Firefighters

FIRE SERVICE FEATURE

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Firefighting crews on standby 24/7

Firefighters at a recent Station Officers Course, conducted by the NZ Fire Service for our rural fire officers, are put through their paces. The course was based around incident management and command and control at incidents.

When the station sirens blare and the pagers buzz, a trained and committed team of volunteer fighters across north Rodney stand ready to respond.

For 365 days of the year, 24-hours a day the duty crews are on standby, never knowing if the next call will be a medical emergency, motor vehicle accident, an out-of-control scrub fire, house ablaze or, occasionally, a cat up a tree in need of rescue.

"If you stay in the service long enough, you see it all," says principal rural fire officer Scott Marchant, who has been a Wellsford fire volunteer for 20 years.

Puhoi, Matakana and Ahuroa are the three rural brigades north of the tunnels, administered by Rodney District Council. The remaining stations at Leigh, Mahurangi East, Warkworth and Wellsford come under the NZ Fire Service.

"We work together, follow the same training and back each other up."

The three northern Rodney rural fire stations have 44 volunteers, aged from 18 to 66 years. The urban fire service has 93 local volunteers including Wellsford. Scott estimates that about 10 percent of the volunteers are women.



Firefighters at a recent Station Officers Course, conducted by the NZ Fire Service for our rural fire officers, are put through their paces. The course was based around incident management and command and control at incidents.

Last year, the seven stations attended more than 1000 callouts.

"The local brigades are all within the top 10 busiest stations in NZ to attend rural incidents, mainly because there are so many small scattered communities."

But with a turnover of about 20 percent, mainly due to changed employment circumstances, the responsibility of manning the trucks is increasingly falling on the shoulders of a few.

Warkworth, in particular, is in dire need of new recruits.

Volunteers are given full training which includes attending a seven day recruit course or the equivalent three day basic skills, one day first aid, two day breathing apparatus and one day Realistic Fire Training Building. Some pre-course learning is required, but on-station help is available. Attendance at brigade weekly training nights is required. Fire officers need a reasonable level of fitness, with good upper body strength and women are definitely strong enough.

Info: 0800 347 373 or contact your local brigade.

Recruits needed from page 1

hours of the night, which can also be disruptive for families."

Philosophically, Ian says he thinks it's a sign of the times.

"I've definitely never seen the numbers as low as they are now. I think employers are reluctant to give staff time off when things are tough economically. Most of the volunteers we have are self-employed so it's their own businesses that come second when they respond to a callout during the day. Although there's plenty of young families in Warkworth, lack of local employment means that a lot of these people work outside the area so they wouldn't be available to respond to callouts even if they wanted to."

All brigades say that meeting daytime calls is the biggest challenge. It's one of the reasons they are keen to recruit more women, who may be in a position to respond more easily to daytime calls. Ian says the unpredictability of when volunteers might be needed is also a factor that deters employers.

"A medical could take an employee away from work for an hour but something major could mean the loss of the best part of a day. Additionally, we can go for days without a callout and then get three or four in one day. It's just impossible to predict."



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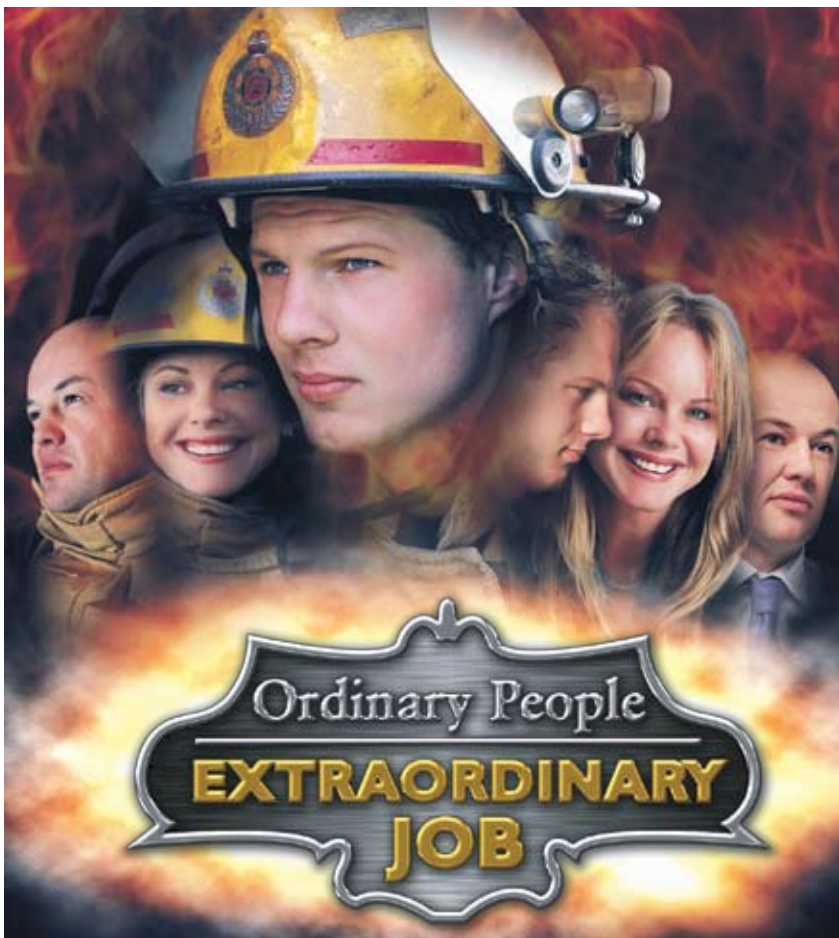
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The New Zealand Fire Service and Rodney Rural Fire Authority plays a major role in providing an emergency response to the Rodney community. The community depends on volunteers for their every day fire protection.

Men and women from many walks of life are volunteer firefighters. Volunteers include the self-employed, mothers at home, shift workers, people looking for work, tradespeople and professionals.

They are all people who care about their communities and want to be actively involved in them.

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS

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- Ahuroa
- Matakana
- Puhoi
- Kaukapakapa

Urban Areas

- Warkworth
- Wellsford
- Leigh
- Helensville

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volunteer.fire.org.nz

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Ordinary young people making a difference

Tough lessons learned early in line of duty

For former Mahurangi College and Matakana Primary School student Ben Jeffries, 22, joining the local fire brigade has improved his confidence and provided him with an opportunity to learn important life skills.

“But more than anything, it’s made me realise how precious life is,” he says. “I attended my first major incident last Easter – a double fatality on SH1 in the Dome. It was really gruesome and you can’t help but be affected by things like that. But, in the end, I just felt really thankful that it wasn’t me or someone close to me. I know I’m more careful on the roads now and I warn my friends as well.”

Ben joined the Matakana Fire Brigade about two years ago, following in his brother Zack’s footsteps. He transferred to Warkworth when he moved into town last November. As well as his fire duties, he juggles two jobs – he is a baker at the Dough Puncher Bakery on Omaha Flats Road and the part-owner of the games shop Redzeed, on SH1, specialising in Warhammer and Magic, the Gathering games.



Ben Jeffries finds time for a variety of interests outside his fire duties, including being an events coordinator for Warhammer and Magic, the Gathering games.

“I think most of us join the fire service because we want to help people and there’s a real buzz in knowing what to do when people need help. I don’t have any hesitation in recommending it to anyone.



“There’s also a really good social side to being in the brigade – you know you can always go up to the station, have a few beers, watch a game on TV and be with a friendly bunch of guys.”

Community benefits from mother’s priorities

Life’s busy for working mother-of-two Moana Kaire, but not too busy that she can’t find time to be a volunteer fire fighter with the Warkworth brigade.

“I guess it’s about setting priorities,” she says. “I wouldn’t say I’m a particularly organised person, but if you really want to do something it is possible to find the time and the fire service is flexible enough to accommodate different lifestyles.”

Moana always wanted to be a community volunteer and signed up after attending an open day. At present, she is Warkworth’s only woman fire fighter.

“What keeps me motivated is that you get to help people at a time when they really need it, and you can see that people appreciate that help,” she says.

During the day, Moana works as a customer service officer at the Mobil Service Station in Warkworth, just below the fire station, but can only respond to calls outside working hours. She says it’s frustrating to see the truck heading off to an emergency, as she always feels she would like to be onboard.

“Being a fire fighter is a long-term commitment



Moana with her two boys Corbin 6, and Jasper 4. “The boys think its cool that I’m in the fire service, and they love coming down to the station especially on family days.

for me. There are things I love about it – like cutting up cars in training and using the breathing apparatus – and there’s things that I know I have to work harder at.



“Even though rolling out the hoses isn’t my favourite activity, I still enjoy all aspects of being a fire fighter. It’s the sort of job where you never stop learning and you get a lot of encouragement.”

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Ahuroa Volunteer Fire Brigade

Cnr Komokoriki Hill Road and West Coast Road

Chief fire officer Alastair Todd on 422 5556

Deputy Chief fire officer Alan Davie-Martin 422 4023

The brigade meets and trains at the fire station on Tuesday evenings, from 7pm. They have 15 active members, but ideally would like around 20. The Ahuroa brigade responds to around 50 to 60 calls annually, around 70 percent are medical related and the rest involve fires. They have a 4WD Mercedes truck, which is used for the fire call outs and a 4WD ute, for the medical callouts. Alastair says the best thing about being in the fire service is helping the community and helping people at times of need.

Leigh Volunteer Fire Brigade

Cnr Seatoun Avenue and Hauraki Road

Chief fire officer Steve Paddison on 422 6077

Fire officer Tony Enderby on 422 6127

The brigade trains at the fire station on Tuesday evenings, from 7pm. They presently have 18 members but ideally, would like around 24. Volunteers must live within five kilometres of the station. The Leigh brigade responds to about 90 calls annually, most are medical related. They have a 1984 Hino truck which is ideal for the type of callouts in the Leigh area as it can carry up to 2700 litres. The other vehicle is a community-purchased 4WD. Tony says a fireman's job is rewarding and there's a "real buzz" in being able to help people in your own community. "The brigade is also quite social," he said.

Matakana Rural Fire Brigade

Omaha Flats Road

Chief fire officer Barry Clarke on 422 9363

Fire officer John Badham on 422 2340

The brigade trains at the station on Tuesdays at 7pm. They currently have 15 members and are desperate to recruit more. Barry says around 22 volunteers would be the ideal and they are particularly keen to recruit women who can turnout to daytime calls. Volunteers have to live within about seven minutes of the station. Matakana responds to between 120 and 140 calls annually. They have at their disposal a pump appliance, water tanker capable of carrying 3600 litres and an emergency response vehicle used for medicals and equipped with a canteen, which goes all over Rodney.



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Active member of the Mahurangi East Fire Brigade



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Mahurangi East Volunteer Fire Brigade

326 Mahurangi Road

Chief fire officer Ian Davies on 425 8348

Fire officer Jason Connolly on 0272737679

The brigade trains at the fire station on Tuesday evenings from 7pm and once a month holds a family night. They have 22 active firefighters who live within three kilometres of the station. The Mahurangi brigade responds to around 170 to 180 callouts annually, 80 percent are for medical assistance. They have been allocated the latest Iveco Fire Engine, which they have had for six months. Jason Connolly says the best part of his job is the camaraderie of being a member of a team, who are like an extended family.

Warkworth Volunteer Fire Brigade

2 Church Hill

Warkworth Station 425 8888

Volunteer support officer Ted Fuller on 0800 001 202

Warkworth is by far one of the busiest stations in the district, attending about 300 callouts a year. It currently has a crew of 23 volunteers, but would like to boost this to 32 and is particularly keen to recruit volunteers who can respond to daytime emergencies. The brigade trains on Tuesday evenings from 7.30pm at its Church Hill station. Warkworth operates a rescue tender for motor vehicle emergencies and its volunteers receive special training in this area. Shaun Pilgrim, who has been a volunteer for 25 years, says the fire service presents different challenges every day, as no two calls are ever the same. "You get a chance to learn a lot of different skills and meet a great range of people," he says. "There's a lot of things we do that aren't fun, but it isn't all work and we do have our fun times as well."

Wellsford Volunteer Fire Brigade

100 Rodney Street, Wellsford

Chief fire officer Jim Bowmar 027 4724 951

Deputy chief fire officer John Cowpland 423 8167

The brigade meets for training every third Tuesday of the month. They have 30 volunteers who respond to around 140 callouts annually. About half are motor vehicle accidents, 15 percent are medical and the rest account for fire emergencies. The brigade has been allocated two fire engines. Jim Bowmar says the best part of his job is helping to save lives.

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Puhoi Rural Fire

1 Ahuroa Road, Puhoi
 Chief fire officer Russell Green on 422 0777
 Deputy Steve Hunt on 027 274 6832

The Puhoi volunteers train at their headquarters on Monday evenings from 7pm. They currently have 14 members so are keen to increase their numbers, particularly with volunteers who can respond to daytime calls. Members are required to live or work within five minutes travelling distance of the station. Puhoi is NZ's only rural brigade that is a first response unit to a motorway. As a result, they have received special training in traffic management, evacuation, the tunnels deluge system and fighting fires in tunnels. Orewa police officer Steve Hunt, who has been a volunteer at Puhoi since the force started four years ago, says volunteers share a common desire to help the community and "give something back".

New fire station planned



The Puhoi Rural Volunteer Fire Brigade is fundraising for a new fire station. In the three years since the brigade started, it has responded to more than 300 callouts. Puhoi chief fire officer Russell Green describes the current brigade headquarters, built by the firemen themselves, as "pure kiwi ingenuity". It consists of two 40ft containers sitting side-by-side with a roof over the top and secured by deer gates. The estimated cost of the new station is about \$300,000. A successful fishing competition was held earlier this year, with another planned for next year. "We won't get it by selling sausages, so we're hoping local and central governments will chip in too," Russell says. Rodney District Council has already come to the party by donating land in Ahuroa Road. Locals are also getting behind the project with offers of time and materials towards construction. Russell says their support has been encouraging and appreciated. He hopes to see the new station open by 2013.

Reducing fire risk in rural areas

Rural residents face a higher risk of losing more property from fire than their urban counterparts because fires are not noticed as quickly in sparsely populated areas.

Additionally, they could potentially be seen as being a controlled burn by a farmer and the response in rural areas for extra resources can often take longer.

Principal rural fire officer Scott Marchant says rural fire brigades have large areas to cover.

"This coupled with imperfect road conditions especially during winter months and the lack of adequate water supplies can delay quick intervention," he says.

"Many rural livelihoods such as farming would be seriously at threat if key buildings such as the milking shed, shearing shed or the family

home were destroyed by fire. There are special things rural residents need to remember in order to make their properties safer."

These include:

- Properly signposting your property – rural property numbers are invaluable for a quick response by emergency vehicles
- Making sure emergency vehicles have easy access
- Ensuring an adequate water supply is available for use in an emergency
- Ensuring that any open water supplies are accessible for portable pumps and other such pumping equipment
- Stacking firewood away from the house
- Ensuring smoke alarms are installed in the home

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