



Nick Rosenberger/Spokesman

Firefighters chainsaw a ventilation hole into a plywood roof in Redmond on Dec. 7 during the Redmond Fire & Rescue's training program.

## Firefighters

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"It's been a labor-intensive week," Alayna Calaway, a trainee, said. "A lot of us are sore, but it's a good sore."

Austin Looney, a trainee who previously worked in Alaska, said the training brings in different people who specialize within the department, whether that's in ventilation, ropes or hoses.

"Getting to see everyone's specialty and have them come out and train us on their thing that they're passionate about has really helped," Looney said. The training, he said, has been "freaking awesome."

"It's like the second or third academy I've been through," Looney said. "And this is the best training I've ever had."

Looney said he's always liked working with his hands and helping people, and that he, like the other firefighters, dreams of the "save" — running into a house and coming out with a saved life.

"It just feels good to go and work for a job where you know you're accomplishing something really meaningful," he said.

Calaway, who grew up in a family of firefighters and who previously worked in Sunriver, found a passion for firefighting when she started volunteering at 16 years old.

"I just found a love for it and there's definitely good satisfaction saving a life or saving a home or helping the community," she said.

The intensity of the training has also built a bond between the trainees that is obvious to see — a kinship of dedication, jokes and comfort.

"It's super exciting," said Bigo. "We're all pretty new and so there's a bunch of good energy going in."

Bigo, who worked in ambulances in Redmond for two years, decided to switch to firefighting about a year ago and said it feels good to be part of such a big training group.

Calaway added that the fire department is like a family and they'll spend a third of their lives together — working together, eating together, living together and building bonds.

"It's an awesome feeling to see the group cohesion and to see everybody so motivated," said Welch. "It's really refreshing to see that as an instructor."

"(Firefighting) is the best job in the world," he said.

■ Reporter: nrosenberger@redmondspokesman.com



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Beau Bigo catches his breath while horseshoeing a hose around his knees on Dec. 6 in Redmond.

*"I just found a love for it and there's definitely good satisfaction saving a life or saving a home or helping the community."*

— Alayna Calaway, Redmond Fire & Rescue trainee

*"It's an awesome feeling to see the group cohesion and to see everybody so motivated. It's really refreshing to see that as an instructor."*

— Bill Welch, Redmond Fire & Rescue training captain



Nick Rosenberger/Spokesman

Beau Bigo listens to an instructor on Dec. 6 while training to become a firefighter for Redmond Fire & Rescue.



Nick Rosenberger/Spokesman

Logan Strubhar, a firefighter trainee in the Redmond Fire & Rescue's training program, walks into a smoke-filled Redmond Mobile Fire Training Unit on Dec. 7 under the supervision of Training Captain Bill Welch.

## Officials

Continued from A1

Many of the changes, Taylor said, have been focused on basketball. League games for the season were moved to Mondays and Thursdays for the 5-A Intermountain Conference that includes Redmond, Bend, Caldera, Mountain View, Ridgeview and Summit high schools. Other conferences will play on Tuesdays and Fridays.

"Obviously it's not ideal to play on Mondays," Taylor said. "But it is what it is."

Kelly Havig, the volleyball commissioner, said they had to "completely revamp the IMC schedule to even have a chance to make the season work" for volleyball.

"We did it to have a season, but nobody liked it," Havig said.

Havig, who talked with the *Spokesman* as she drove over the Cascades to officiate a match, said that the number of referees has been declining for a few years, but that it's been especially hard this year. The strain it puts on officials, she said, is not healthy.

### DWINDLING NUMBERS

For many of the commissioners, the issue first became clear during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the referees left due to masking or vaccination requirements, while others at high risk left because they were concerned about contracting the virus.

Mike Smith, Central Oregon basketball commissioner, said the requirements for vaccination were a problem for some officials who chose to leave rather than get the vaccine. Once folks leave, he said, it's hard to get them to come back.

"There's been a shortage, but nothing as acute as when the pandemic happened," Smith said. "It was kind of the perfect storm."

According to Kurt Renstrom, Central Oregon's football commissioner, football lost around eight to 10 officials because of rules surrounding COVID-19.

"The frustrating part about it is nobody is immune to the shortage of officials," Renstrom said. "It's happening across the state."

While every sport has different requirements and numbers of officials for every game, nearly all have struggled with filling games. And the situation has recently taken a nosedive as commissioners try to retain aging referees and entice younger officials to fill the ranks.

"Central Oregon, at least in basketball, has never been in the dire situation we find ourselves in (now)," said Daryl Rothenbucher, president of the Central Oregon Basketball Officials Association. "It really runs the gamut of different things — from overworking the officials that we do have to where there's significant injuries."

The commissioners

said that it's difficult and time-consuming to train new recruits. And, they often face a hostile atmosphere that can push new officials away from returning for a second season.

Without other options, commissioners have had to send out inexperienced officials who often deal with upset parents who verbally disrespect them.

"It burns them out and they quit," Smith said.

"I don't know many other professions where you're expected to be an expert as soon as you pick up a whistle," Rothenbucher said. "I guess to a certain extent it comes with the territory. You have to have a thick skin."

Havig said that while abuse of officials is probably the least likely to happen in volleyball, there's still a fear of parents and a lack of respect for officials.

"It's not okay to yell at the officials. It can't be a part of the game," Havig said. "We have to change that culture."

Cockerill said the verbal abuse in baseball and softball has gotten worse over the years, especially after the pandemic.

### UNEQUAL NUMBERS

But, not all sports have been hit equally in terms of numbers. Floyd Paye, commissioner for wrestling, said the sport has not seen the difficulties other sports have, although he's not sure why.

He pointed towards a high school program that lets students begin officiating early as a possible reason, but wasn't sure if it was the program or simple luck.

Of 162 wrestling officials in Oregon, Paye has 35 of them — over 21 percent of all the wrestling officials in Oregon.

"We're getting everything covered right now," Paye said. "I feel lucky."

OSAA — the state's governing body for high school sports — is trying to duplicate Paye's situation by increasing pay for officials and boosting its mileage reimbursement for high school games by raising game fees by over 10 percent this year.

Despite higher pay-to-play costs possibly cutting out some lower-income students from being able to participate, pay for officials will still be lower than in many other states.

"Oregon referees are getting paid substantially less than referees in other states," Salari said.

Still, not many officials say they do it for the money.

"Nobody's ever gotten rich from umpiring baseball and softball," Cockerill said.

The reason you want to be out there, Renstrom said, is because you love the competition and want to be a part of it.

"Come Friday night there is no better seat in the house," Renstrom said.

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