

# THE RURAL HITCH

A Quarterly Publication of the Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid Association

## Fire Destroys Historic Kimball Castle in Gilford

See Page 7

Full article on page 7



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Green Mountain Communications was awarded the tower contract and is already working on-site. The goal is to have the tower foundation in before the ground freezes, giving us a head start heading into winter. We are now awaiting FAA approval to determine whether tower lighting will be required. Meanwhile, we continue working with the Departments of Safety and Administrative Services on final design elements and finish selections.

#### Financial Update

At the September Board meeting, during the first reading of the proposed 2026 budget, the Board voted to replace Car 1 with a new Tahoe from reserve funds. That replacement had been postponed last year due to uncertainty surrounding the facility project. The Board also approved authorization for a \$750,000 loan to support the new facility. We plan to close on the loan only when the funds are needed — likely in January — which should allow us to take advantage of any potential rate reductions between now and then. The District remains in a strong financial position. Both the new facility and radio tower projects will be completed without any additional assessments or fees beyond those already established in the annual budget.

#### Quick Reminders for Member Agencies

MDC IDs: The LRMFA Member Guide outlines the proper assignment and use of MDC signaling for portable and mobile radios. Several communities have not maintained MDC IDs or have cloned radios, resulting in duplicate IDs — which can cause confusion and pose safety concerns. Lieutenant Matt LaDuke continues leading a district-wide project to correct these issues. He can visit your department to update MDC IDs and ensure your programming matches the State of NH Department of Safety standard.

#### Radio Programming:

Agencies should plan to reprogram their radios at least once per year, either independently or with Lt. LaDuke's help. Statewide programming matrices continue to change, and maintaining current configurations is essential to interoperability. LRMFA is happy to assist at no cost to member agencies.

#### Dispatch Notifications:

Please remember that radio dispatching remains the primary means of emergency notification. While text alerts and mobile apps are convenient, they rely on third-party cellular and internet providers that are outside our control. During a recent CAD upgrade, some units missed text alerts because the system was operating in "offline mode." Our radio network is designed to be rugged, redundant, and reliable — and remains the best way to ensure timely communication.

There's a lot happening across the District, and I'm proud of the teamwork and progress we've seen this year. I want to thank everyone for their continued professionalism and commitment to the mission, and support. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me or Deputy Chief Hannafin. Lt. Matt LaDuke can be reached directly at [mladuke@lrmfa.nh.gov](mailto:mladuke@lrmfa.nh.gov). 

Stay safe,



Jon Goldman, CPE  
Chief Coordinator





# FIRSTNET

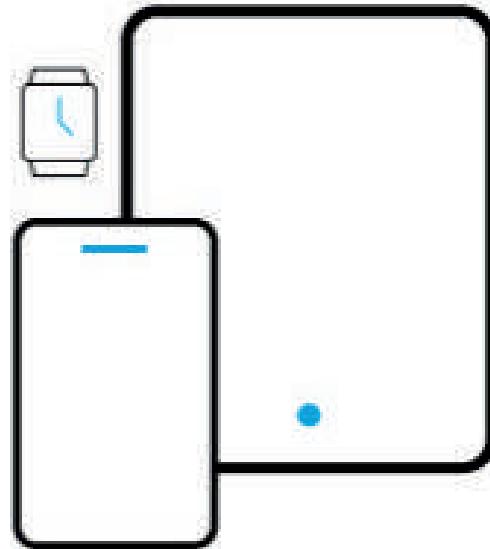
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# FIRE DESTROYS HISTORIC KIMBALL CASTLE IN GILFORD



In the early morning hours of August 27, at 3:42 a.m., Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid dispatched Gilford Fire units to reports of a large outside fire in the Scenic Drive area. As additional 911 calls came in, it became clear this was no routine call — flames were spreading along Route 11 and toward the historic Kimball Castle on Lockes Hill.

When first-arriving crews reached the scene, they found the iconic stone structure — long a local landmark — fully engulfed in fire. Flames had already extended into the surrounding woodland, igniting a fast-moving brush fire. Firefighters immediately went to work deploying hand lines to protect nearby forested areas while launching an aggressive attack on the castle itself.

Command quickly struck a second alarm for additional structural response and a first alarm for forestry resources. A water supply operation was established in Glendale, enabling sustained firefighting operations. Thanks to coordinated efforts across multiple agencies, both the structure and brush fires were brought under control within an hour.

Despite their efforts, Kimball Castle was declared a total loss. Approximately two acres of surrounding woodland burned before the fire was contained. Firefighters remained on scene until midmorning, conducting extensive overhaul and ensuring all hotspots were extinguished. The incident serves as a sobering reminder of how quickly fire can spread in dry conditions, and how critical regional coordination is in moments of crisis.

# LRMFA Training Division

We are looking for new members to join our committee! This committee is open to any on departments within LRMFA. You don't have to be a chief officer or even an officer.

We meet quarterly in a combine in person and online meeting.

## MISSION

The Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid Training Division creates, promotes and fosters individual and organizational effectiveness by developing and offering an array of innovative and diverse fire, EMS, and leadership programs in support of the organization's commitment to member development, partnerships, and organizational enrichment, and social networking.

### **We accomplish our mission by focusing on the following goals:**

1. Provide quality, cost-effective training designed to increase individual and organizational effectiveness
2. Create, promote and foster an organizational environment that values development, diversity and growth opportunities for all members.
3. Provide individuals and their organizations with the tools to respond effectively to customer needs as well as current and future demands for service.
4. Provide opportunities for professional and social networking.

Keep an eye out we will be sending an survey will be emailed and posted about trainings you would like to see come to our district.

Contact Deputy Chief Hall or Deputy Chief Hannafin with any questions or interest



**WE WANT  
YOU**

On August 25, fire departments from Center Harbor, Moultonborough, Sandwich, and Tuftonboro gathered on Lake Winnipesaukee near Camp Tecumseh for a night boat operations training. Working alongside Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid, the exercise focused on improving coordination, communication, and surveillance capabilities during after-dark water incidents. With several lake emergencies occurring this season, joint training like this ensures that first responders remain sharp, connected, and ready to act when seconds count.

# Night Ops Water Training

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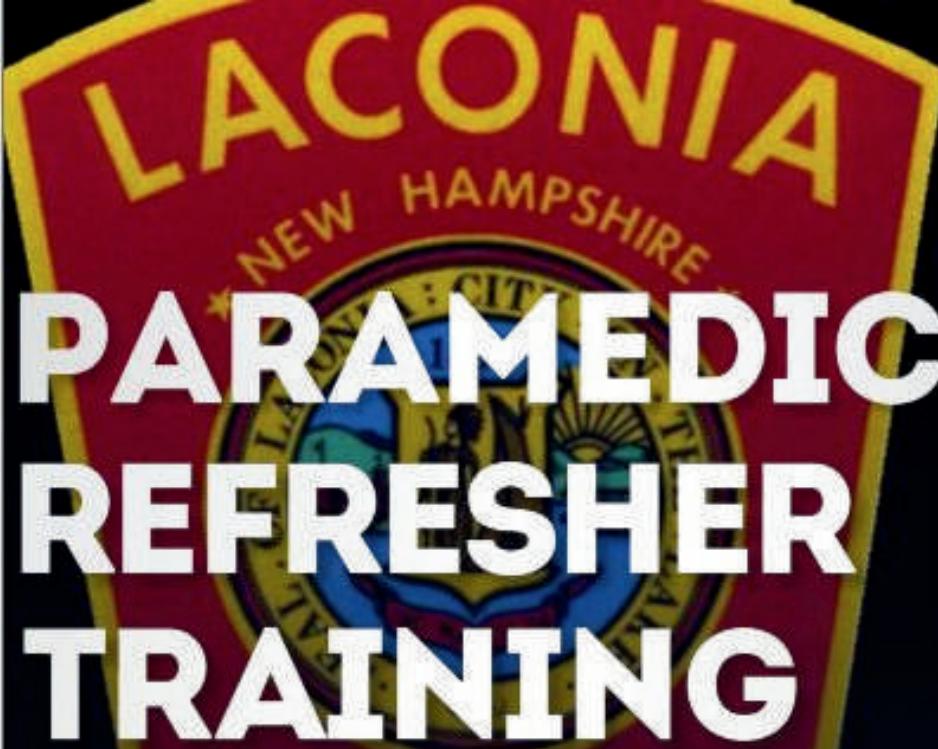
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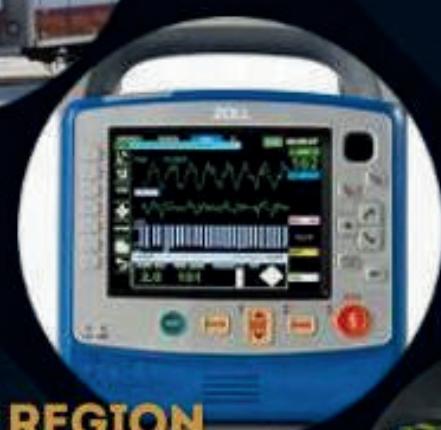
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# Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid Deploys Forestry Task Force to Weare



On the evening of August 18, Concord Fire Alarm requested a Forestry Strike Team from Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid (LRMFA) for deployment the following morning at 0700 hours. At 0530, crews assembled in Tilton and mobilized to Weare under the leadership of Sandwich Fire Chief Ted Call.

Upon arrival, task force members were briefed and assigned to divisions supporting multiple agencies on the scene of a 6-7 acre brush fire. The operational area was divided into Division 1 and Division 2, each supported by a Forests and Lands Patrolman. LRMFA Chief Officers (C1 and C2) managed communications, accountability, and logistics while the Capital Area simultaneously handled another large brush fire nearby. Departments representing LRMFA included Sandwich, Meredith, Gilford, Barnstead, and New Hampton Fire-Rescue, alongside LRMFA command staff.

The activation followed the New Hampshire All-Hazards Mobilization Plan, a coordinated system administered by the NH State Fire Marshal's Office and the NH Federation of Fire Mutual Aids. This plan enables the strategic movement of personnel and equipment from unaffected regions to those experiencing significant incidents. LRMFA last utilized the plan during the 2008 Barnstead Tornadoes and the 2009 Alton Bay Christian Conference Center fire.

In recent weeks, LRMFA has supported operations in North Conway, Keene, and Weare, with an additional request (later canceled) to respond to Conway for multiple brush fires—underscoring the strength of inter-agency coordination during an active wildfire season across New Hampshire.

**Do you want to sign up to receive the LRMFA Rural Hitch, or bi-weekly training bulleting from the Training Division?**

**Go to [www.lrmfa.org](http://www.lrmfa.org) and scroll to the bottom of the page.**

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## CTFD Responds to Condo Fire with Civilian Burn Injuries and Firefighter Mayday



Just after 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, September 4, 2025, Campton-Thornton Fire Rescue (CTFR) and Woodstock Fire Department (Auto Aid) were dispatched to reports of a structure fire at a condominium complex on Condo Road in Campton. Dispatcher Hannah Gannon and Lt. Ricky Fowler began receiving multiple 9-1-1 calls reporting heavy fire and possible occupants trapped inside.

CTFR crews had just cleared two previous calls—a serious medical emergency and an animal rescue involving a horse stuck in mud—allowing a full and rapid response. Engine 3, Engine 4, Rescue 1, Ambulance 2, and Car 1 were immediately en route.

As additional 9-1-1 reports came in, Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid dispatchers confirmed a working fire with occupants possibly inside. A second alarm was transmitted, bringing in additional mutual aid resources.

Upon arrival, first-due units found a three-story, 150-by-50-foot structure with heavy smoke and flames showing. A third alarm was struck. Campton Police and neighbors had already begun evacuations and assisted one burn victim from the building. The injured resident was transported by CTFR Ambulance 1 to Speare Memorial Hospital, with the Campton Police Chief assisting as driver. The patient was later transferred to a Boston hospital for further care.

Inside the building, fire crews advanced attack lines to the seat of the fire. While relieving the initial entry team, one firefighter fell through a weakened section of floor. A mayday was transmitted, and nearby personnel quickly extricated the firefighter, who was transported to Speare Memorial Hospital for evaluation.



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# 2nd Annual New Hampshire Fire & Rescue Conference Recap



The 2nd Annual New Hampshire Fire and Rescue Conference proved to be another outstanding success, bringing together professionals from across the state, the region, and even the country.

This year, 102 attendees participated in a full day of training, networking, and collaboration. With 22 speakers representing New Hampshire, New England, New Jersey, and Texas, the program was truly national in scope. In addition to training sessions and workshops, the conference featured 8 vendors who showcased innovative tools, technology, and services for the fire and rescue community, including:

- FirstNet
- Fire Tech and Safety of New England
- National Fire Sprinkler Association
- North East Simulation Training Associates
- Specialty Vehicles
- Patriot Fleet Group
- Firematic
- Bergeron Protective Clothing



We extend our gratitude to Lakes Region Community College (LRCC) for hosting us, and to the LRMFA Training Division and committee members who put in tremendous work to make this event possible. A special thank you also goes to Amy Hall for designing the beautiful conference logo.

The energy and engagement throughout the day underscored the importance of bringing fire and rescue professionals together to learn, connect, and grow. The dedication of attendees, instructors, and vendors made this event one to remember.



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# LACONIA HONORS FORMER CHIEF'S PASSING

The Laconia and Belmont Fire departments gathered on September 24th and 25th amongst many other departments within the lakes region to honor retired Belmont Fire Chief Albert "Tyke" Akerstrom who passed away on September 16th. Chief Akerstrom became a member of the Belmont Fire Department Call Company in 1963 and then served in the United States Army from 1964-1967 as a mechanic primarily stationed in Fort Richardson, Alaska. After his military service, he started full time with the Laconia Fire Department and rose through the ranks to Captain.

In March of 1984, he was hired to serve the town he loved as the Belmont Fire Chief. He accomplished many of his department goals throughout that time. Providing the town with full-time 24/7 staffing, updating the equipment to Pierce fire trucks and building the current fire station were the highlights of his career. Chief Akerstrom solicited donations and volunteer labor to get the \$1.2-million project completed for under \$200,000 and without any taxpayer money. He decided it was time to retire as Chief in 2004 but remained a member of the Belmont Call Company until 2013, ending a 50-year fire service career.



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# CTFD Responds to Condo Fire with Civilian Burn Injuries and Firefighter Mayday (continued from prior page)

A water supply was established from the Waterville Estates Recreation Center pond, with Woodstock Fire drafting and pumping to the scene. Access to the fire area was hindered by damaged stairways, requiring aerial operations from Woodstock's ladder and Plymouth's tower for suppression and overhaul. A fourth alarm was ultimately requested to rotate personnel through the extended operation.

The structure, lacking both sprinklers and a fire alarm system due to its age, suffered extensive damage. Roughly 40 firefighters worked to contain and overhaul the fire, which was brought under control in about 90 minutes. CTFR units remained on scene until approximately 6:00 p.m. assisting with investigation and monitoring hot spots.

During the response, additional crews handled a half-acre brush fire on Orris Road. Cover companies from Meredith and Alexandria responded, joined later by NH Forest & Lands and U.S. Forest Service personnel.

CTFR Chief Daniel Defosses commended the coordinated response, noting, "This incident underscores the importance of working smoke alarms and immediate evacuation during a fire. Although the building sustained significant loss, the teamwork of CTFR and our mutual aid partners prevented further tragedy. It truly took many villages to get the job done." The New Hampshire Fire Marshal's Office is investigating the cause. No additional injuries were reported.



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Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid joined area departments from across the region for National Night Out, showcasing fire and emergency vehicles, equipment, and community outreach displays. The event brought together firefighters, police officers, and residents for a night of demonstrations, education, and public safety engagement.



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# LAKES REGION MUTUAL FIRE AID BY THE NUMBERS

	Month	Admin	Emergency	Incidents
2025 First Quarter	January	1261	2484	2018
	February	1213	2517	1961
	March	1381	2469	1966
	Total For Quarter	3855	7470	5945
	Avg/Day	42.83	83.00	66.06
2025 Second Quarter	April	1279	2327	1774
	May	1256	2405	1812
	June	1561	2823	2103
	Total For Quarter	4096	7555	5689
	Avg/Day	45.01	83.02	62.52
2025 Third Quarter	July	1594	2968	2526
	August	1655	3146	2282
	September	1460	4968	2297
	Total For Quarter	4709	11082	7105
	Avg/Day	51	120	77
2025 Fourth Quarter	October	0	0	0
	November	0	0	0
	December	0	0	0
	Total For Quarter	0	0	0
	Avg/Day	0.00	0.00	0.00
2025	Month	Admin	Emergency	Incidents
	Total for 2025	12660	26107	18739
	Avg/Day	46.37	95.63	68.64

**SEND US YOUR  
DEPARTMENT NEWS!**

We want to help your agency shine.

*Extra!* *Extra!*

- Do you have a New Hire or Promotion? Let us know!
- How about a retirement? Let us thank them for their service to your community.
- Did you get a new piece of Apparatus? Send us a Picture or two, we love new trucks!
- Hosting a Training? Let us help you fill seats.

Send your Department News to:  
[ruralhitch@lrmfa.org](mailto:ruralhitch@lrmfa.org)