

# The Woods welcome Asheville firefighters as their new neighbors

**MADDY SHERER**

Arts & Features Staff  
Writer  
msherer1@unca.edu

Move-in day at UNC Asheville was briefly postponed for residents of The Woods this year due to fire hazards in the buildings' construction.

To counteract these safety concerns and ensure the safety of The Woods' residents, several members of the Asheville Fire Department have taken up residence in one of the new halls.

Asheville Fire Department Assistant Chief Michael Coggins, age 42, said the firefighters proximity to campus is crucial.

"Really, in order to occupy that building, an agreement

was made between the NC Department of Insurance and UNCA which involved the Asheville Fire Department being housed on the campus 24 hours a day, with four people, an engine and a 35-foot ladder," Coggins said.

Their chief responsibility in cases of emergency would be to evacuate students from the buildings first, then perform their firefighting duties.

"They would do what they need to, but their primary reason is to make sure that everybody has exited those buildings," Coggins said. "If something happens, we can react almost immediately to assist in whatever way we need to, so someone is there to provide that structure to them."

Most students became

aware of the firefighters' presence just by seeing them on campus.

"I think it was maybe public knowledge to the Magnolia (Hall) residents, but I don't remember there being an email that was sent around to the whole Woods," said Resident Assistant Leigha Johnston.

A few days before move in, Johnston received an email informing her that two students living in one of Magnolia Hall's suites were reassigned to different suites.

"When I asked my boss about it, he said, 'No, I'm not really sure what that's for,'" she said.

Johnston only learned about the firefighters once students started moving into the buildings.

"I don't feel affected by it," Johnston said. "I have had a couple residents tell me that they're noisy, but they're also still active firefighters, so if they have an active emergency, they have to be noisy."

She said she hasn't heard any other complaints from residents, and also emphasized how the firefighters kept her well-informed on their business in The Woods.

"The first night, when I was walking around hanging up my door tags, one of them came over and talked to me, kind of showing me what the Department of Insurance's questions were in the stairwells and pointing out what specifically was the reason we had to move in late and why we were there,"



Captain Erik Stalte relaxes on a Magnolia Hall balcony (left).