

# Hanford Fire Recruit Academy trains at HAMMER

Karin Nickola, FH

Six Hanford Fire Department recruits recently finished a six-week school at the Volpentest HAMMER Training and Education Center. The training prepared the recruits for employment with the fire department by ensuring their proficiency with Firefighter I skills, as defined in the National Fire Protection Association standards.

Sessions comprised both traditional classroom lectures and hands-on practice with HAMMER props. Instructors included Hanford firefighters Gene Tolley, Dennis Byrne and Howard Simonton as well as Kennewick firefighter Nathan Rabe.

“In the safety awareness atmosphere we are working in, the best and safest way for us to train new people in the fire/rescue field, which for many is their first taste of firefighting, is at a facility like HAMMER,” said Tolley of the Hanford Fire Department. “The props we expose the new recruits to have numerous safety features built into them. At HAMMER we can train recruits in proper techniques while allowing them to experience the unexpected and learn to handle situations safely.”

Realistic training at HAMMER is a close representation of real-life situations. At the facility’s Fuel Truck Prop, for instance, training simulates advancing onto a burning truck to close a valve, effectively shutting off the flow of fuel to the truck.

“In real-life situations, anytime you’re dealing with liquified petroleum gas, there’s a high risk of explosion,” said Hanford firefighter apprentice Brandyn Wehde. “So you have to know what you’re doing. And even though it’s only training, it’s real hot out there. It’s pretty intense.”

## Selection process

One of the tools used to select the recruits was a physical ability test held at HAMMER in May. Constructed in accordance with the International Association of Fire Fighters and International Association of Fire Chiefs Joint Labor Management Fitness and Wellness Task Force initiative, the physical ability test is grueling. Candidates have only 10 minutes and 20 seconds to complete the eight-station course.

Among other things, while wearing a 50-pound vest with two 12.5-pound shoulder pads, a hard hat and work gloves, prospective firefighters must first walk on a stair-stepper for three minutes at the rate of one step per second. Only the shoulder pads are removed for the remaining activities, in which the candidate must:



Josh Hatch  
Hanford firefighter  
apprentice



Dennis Byrne  
Hanford firefighter and  
instructor

*Continued on page 19.*

## Hanford Fire Recruit Academy trains at HAMMER, cont.

- Pull a 1.75-inch fire hose 150 feet
- Carry a chain saw and a rescue circular saw 150 feet
- Bring an unextended 24-foot ladder from floor to wall position, and extend a standing 24-foot ladder to a specified height before lowering it
- Swing a 10-pound sledge-hammer at a mechanical target until a buzzer sounds
- Crawl through a darkened tunnel maze
- Drag a 165-pound mannequin 70 feet
- Complete ceiling breach and pull repetitions.

HAMMER's testing equipment was purchased with Washington state-appropriated funds made available through the support of former State Senator Valoria Loveland and HAMMER namesake Sam Volpentest.

### Hanford, Kennewick share training

For the past eight years, the Hanford and Kennewick Fire Departments have conducted joint recruit academies, to the advantage of both. And even though Kennewick wasn't hiring in November, their instructors helped teach several classes. Likewise, Hanford assisted Kennewick a few years ago when the Hanford Fire Department wasn't hiring.

"This sharing process affords both organizations increased abilities and perspectives," said HAMMER staff member Don Olsen. "Kennewick firefighters respond more frequently to residential structural fires, while Hanford is more versed in industrial structural fires. The exchange of expertise broadens each department's knowledge base.

"It's also much more cost-effective to share resources, and there are things that can be accomplished with larger groups that just aren't possible with a few. You can have a more complete training program with one group of six firefighters than you can with two groups of three."

### Bright futures

While confident and excited about new career opportunities, Hanford recruits recognize they are still apprentices compared to seasoned veterans. They know they will be fighting fires on a limited basis at first, and additional training courses will be required through Columbia Basin College or Yakima Valley Community College. But that doesn't diminish their commitment or enthusiasm, some of which seems to be in their blood.

"My father has been a firefighter for 20 years," said Hanford firefighter apprentice Celeste Rose, "so I really appreciate this line of work. And it suits me. I'm active, I've always participated in sports, and I enjoy a challenge."

"My father and two uncles are firefighters for Pasco, Kennewick and Benton County," said Hanford firefighter apprentice Chuck Sleater. "It's been in our family for a long time. It's always something I've wanted to do since I was young." ♦



Recruits for the Hanford Fire Department participate in "real as it gets" training at the HAMMER fuel truck prop.