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FEATURED

Frederick Co. internship program trains firefighters of tomorrow

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In a training exercise, volunteer firefighters Riley Becker, 17, with Independent Hose Company, left, and Tiffany Huber, 18, with New Market District Volunteer Fire Department, assist volunteer Evert-Jan Möller as he pretends to be a man down during a volunteer internship program on Tuesday. The program provides teaches a variety of skills to Frederick County volunteer firefighters.

Staff photo by Katina Zentz

Three firefighters entered a building that simulated a burning third-floor apartment fire.

In the training exercise, Bryan Duvall douses the flames with a hose while Tiffany Huber and Riley Becker search for a missing firefighter. The rescuers' vision is impaired as they grasp for their comrade, who lies limp on the floor.

The downed firefighter's mask is not working properly. It could be broken.

Moving quickly, Huber and Becker replace the mask by the feel of their gloved hands and prepare to move the victim. Duvall joins them to lend support. The three start to drag the victim toward the stairwell.

A sensor attached to Huber's oxygen tank begins to rattle angrily.

"We gotta go! I'm almost out of air," she yells.

The three firefighters guide the victim past bulky furniture. The sound of beeps and gushes of air fills the room. Finally, they reach the stairwell.

Then, the man portraying the victim sits up. He starts providing feedback. The training exercise is complete.

Tuesday marked one of the last classes of the year for the Frederick County Division of Volunteer Fire and Rescue Services Work Learning Internship.

Deputy Chief M. Shane Darwick, director of the volunteer division, said the new program gives students a chance to become certified in numerous skills in just nine months, for free. Normally, it might take a person two years, working nights and weekends, to reach this level of training, according to Darwick.

"It's an incredibly important program for us to bring new volunteers into the system" and train them efficiently, said Chief Tom Coe, who heads the Frederick County Division of Fire and Rescue Services.

For those interested in pursuing fire and rescue as a career, Coe said the internship program gives participants a sense of what to expect from the academy.

The internship program is aimed at high school seniors but is open to all volunteers 16 and older who meet the requirements. Requirements include being a member of a volunteer fire and rescue company and passing a fire department physical.

Classes run from noon to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday and follow the Frederick County Public Schools calendar.

The program started in August. Students are set to graduate Thursday.

"I always wanted to do it since I was a little kid," Becker said after the training exercise.

Becker, 17, attends Gov. Thomas Johnson High School and volunteers with the Independent Hose Company in Frederick.

Becker and his classmates honed their skills at the Frederick County Public Safety Training Facility in Frederick, where a tall tower serves as the staging area for exercises. Since starting the class, Becker said, he believes his communication skills have improved.

Instructors on Tuesday hailed from the New Market District Volunteer Fire Company. Volunteers Tanner Williamson and Justin Wright said their company is largely volunteer driven, so they wanted to help educate the next generation.

"Look at you — that's a company officer in the making," Williamson said as Huber led the Rapid Intervention Team.

Huber, 18, volunteers with New Market and attends Urbana High School. She was drawn to the medical side of fire and rescue after growing up seeing first responders at BMX competitions she used to run.

Huber said the internship has helped build skills she can use on calls.

"I'm not really going there for myself," she said. "You're going there on somebody's worst day."

That sentiment was felt among several internship participants.

"I just want to help people save lives," said Duvall, who has relatives in the fire service.

Duvall, 17, attends Tuscarora High School and volunteers at United Steam Fire Engine Company in downtown Frederick.

Watching over the class on his day off was Battalion Chief Doug Wallick.

His daughter Cheyann, 19, was among the participants. She attends Frederick Community College and volunteers with Independent Hose Company.

"It's interesting watching her grow," said Doug Wallick, who works in the same field. "To see her desire to follow that is humbling."

The class included a mix of high school seniors and Frederick Community College students. Upon graduation, participants are eligible for credits at the college.

Darwick said nine students consistently attended since August, while others joined at various points of the program to get certified in specific areas.

The class offerings include Firefighter I, hazardous materials, emergency medical responder, rescue technician skills and more. The University of Maryland Fire Rescue Institute provided programming and textbooks, according to Darwick. Frederick County Division of Fire and Rescue Services supplied instructors, which included volunteers.

Darwick said he is looking forward to the next crop of volunteers. Five signed up so far for next year.

Darwick saw the camaraderie in the class come early. He said he has enjoyed watching them grow.

That pride in the next generation, Darwick said — it'll put a lump in your throat.

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More Information

For more information about the Division of Volunteer Fire and Rescue Services Work Learning Internship, visit fcvfra.com.

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