



Published January 24th, 2018

ConFire recruits practice rooftop ventilation and fire rescue

By Nick Marnell



Firefighter recruits from Academy 51 break through the roof of Fire Station 16 in Lafayette during Jan. 12 training exercise. Photo Nick Marnell

family are words that weave throughout the biographies of many of the 25 recruits.

David Zalutskiy's family emigrated from Ukraine when he was a small boy. "We weren't wealthy, we didn't have a lot of the things other kids had. At Christmas, the fire department came by and gave our family gifts. I thought that was so great. It made me want to become a firefighter." David's brother Valentin is also an Academy 51 recruit.

After three and a half years serving in the Army, in Afghanistan, Rachel Gregory became an emergency medical technician and felt the calling to the fire service. "My family was very close," Gregory said. "What was better for the family always went ahead of what was better for the individual." Along that same line, Daniel Sarrasin said his desire to serve and protect drove him to become a ConFire recruit. "We all have a servant's heart," Sarrasin said.

"I tore both of my ACLs playing ball," said Claire Watkins, who played basketball at Vanderbilt University and became a recruit at the urging of her fiancée. "My recovery taught me to never give up, to push myself to the limits." Watkins said she feels comfortable with the teamwork she sees among the recruits and within the ConFire organization. "And I'll have a great story to tell at the end of my life," she said.

Dave Watson, senior training captain, runs Academy 51. "My supervisors said I needed to start teaching, because ConFire had to fill the brain drain of so many senior people leaving," he said. "I get to take the experience of people who love what they're doing and pass it on to the recruits." And teaching plays a major role in his life. "My mom's a teacher, my wife's a teacher. It all comes naturally, I guess," Watson said.

The neighbors near the fire station needn't have ever worried. Goetsch said that all of the smoke they saw was simulated, like the smoke from a smoke bomb.



Academy 51 recruits train at Station 16 site. Photo Nick Marnell

Academy 51 recruits from the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District took 14 weeks of book knowledge into the field Jan. 12 as they practiced rooftop ventilation and interior fire rescue at the site of soon-to-be demolished Fire Station 16 in Lafayette. The exercises rang so authentic that passersby along Los Arabis Drive stopped and asked if the structure was burning down.

According to Assistant Fire Chief Lon Goetsch, ConFire recruits opened up ventilation holes in the roof, a procedure that lets smoke and air out of the building and removes heat from the structure. Less heat prevents flashover, where conditions are so superheated the structure becomes totally involved; the less smoke, the easier for firefighters to locate victims and to locate firefighters in distress. The recruits ran into the smoky building, wearing their breathing apparatus, to find and remove people trapped inside.

The exercises displayed how critical teamwork is to a successful fire attack. Not surprisingly, teamwork and

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA