

Trial by fire

Training burn tests skill; lets outsiders feel the heat

BY WILLIAM COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Hills firefighters had a rare chance on a Friday evening to live up to their name.

The department, which responds to a large number of medical emergencies, has not had too many serious fires to put out. But with two houses set for demolition behind the city complex to make way for the new centrally-located fifth fire station, it was a perfect opportunity for training.

"Everybody had a chance to get into the fire although we ended up with six fires instead of eight," said Lt. Mike Garr. "It went well. It was a good opportunity to test our skills."

Altogether, 36 firefighters, many of them with little fire fighting experience, took part. Dr. Sandy Vieder, who works in the emergency room at Botsford General Hospital, wanted to see first-hand what fire victims and firefighters might encounter. Vieder, along with members of the press, an architect with the firm building the new fire station, and others, donned tanks, masks, boots and the rest of the gear and went into the burning houses on Orchard Lake.

Firefighters were called to the scene on their trucks from the city hall parking lot, to imitate how they would come onto the scene.

"We've tried it other ways," said Lt. Tom Shurtliff, who coordinated the exercise. "We like this because they haven't been inside and don't quite know what to expect."

One of the early crews neglect-



In no time: Within minutes smoldering smoke can turn into flames.

ed to find a dummy placed in one of the houses as a victim.

"Sometimes the mind set is on the fire," Garr said. "We want them to first think about searching and rescuing any victims, then to worry about the fire."

Stations 1 and 3 were the first units to take part. Stations 2 and 4 finished up the exercise under clear skies and mild temperatures Aug. 9.

Garr said one of the most valuable exercises during the night was the self-critiques firefighters underwent after they had fought fires.

"They were challenged," Garr said. "But the self-criticism right after the event really helps."



Burn and learn: Farmington Hills firefighters wait several minutes for a controlled fire to get underway before sending crews in for training.

Breathe easy: Architect Glen Reimer, who works for Greiner Inc., the firm designing the new fire station near city hall, gets a first-hand look at a controlled burn.



STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LEMIEUX



Trading places: Dr. Sanford Vieder from Botsford Hospital goes to the source of some injuries he treats in the emergency room. With him are his wife, Carol, and children, Brandon, 6, and Alex, 2.



STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LEMIEUX

Fresh crew: Newly appointed Battalion Commander Donald St. Clair (middle) poses with recent additions to the Farmington Hills Fire Department. From left are Gary Delp, Ben Vaughan, Dave Jones, and Shelly Hall.

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tion, eight certificates recognizing his work in public education, computer innovation, training and life saving and three life saving awards. He was the department and VFW Firefighter of the Year in 1989.

In addition to moving St. Clair to a command position, the department has also hired four of its paid-on-call firefighters to full-time positions. The four will train and work with current full-timers at the four existing stations.

Gary Delp, 29, has been a paid-on-call firefighter from Station 3 for almost five years. He began full-time on Aug. 1.

Delp, who is a journeyman electrician, was recruited of the year in 1992, has a life saving award and three unit citations.

"I have a lot of firefighters in my family and I really like to work," Delp said.

Ben Vaughan, 24, began full-time on Aug. 15, and started as a paid-on-call firefighter with Delp.

"I've wanted to be a firefighter since kindergarten," said Vaughan, who worked with Botsford General Hospital's security staff.

Vaughan has a life saving award, a unit citation and was Station 2 member of the year in 1994.

Dave Jones, 29, joined the department three

years ago after becoming interested in the job.

"I was an EMT," he said. "I would meet firefighters and talk with them about the job and became interested."

Jones earned a unit citation in 1994. Jones will be full-time on Sept. 3.

Shelly Hall, 25, has been a paid-on-call firefighter for 18 months and will become the first woman to become a full-time firefighter in Farmington Hills.

"I thought I couldn't do it, but I went to an informational meeting," said the Western Michigan University graduate. "I saw (paid-on-call firefighter) Marie Schroeder and decided to try it."

Hall, who works for the Hills police department, will begin full-time duties on Sept. 16.

Like Delp, Vaughan and Jones, Hall was selected from 20 applicants and 11 finalists after a battery of tests and oral interviews with professional firefighters from other departments and Hills command firefighters.

The new firefighters and St. Clair will be honored at Friday's ground breaking ceremonies.

The new station will replace Station 4 as department headquarters.

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