

Portland Metro Fire Camp is designed to instill confidence, build leadership and team skills in young women through hands-on firefighter training. Girls aged 16 to 20 are given the opportunity to participate in this annual event. In previous years, the majority of the participants were from the Portland Metro area, but also reached from Vancouver to South Salem, and as far as Bend. The camp is taught by female firefighters from Portland Fire & Rescue, Albany Fire Dept., Bend, Camas/Washougal, Clackamas County, Columbia County, Gresham, Medford, Newberg, Salem, Tualatin Valley and Vancouver Fire departments.

The camp itinerary is mainly hands-on stations each day broken into taking hydrants, pulling pre-connects, stretching 2 ½ hose, controlling nozzles, turret and standpipe evolutions, low angle rope bag operations, low roof prop axe work, raising and climbing ladders including the aerial, search and rescue drills, Denver drill, introduction to the SCBA, performing the Physical Agility Test, extrication operations, forcible entry and extinguisher fundamentals. Emergency medical skills, nutrition, physical fitness and interview skills were also covered in a classroom setting. The campers participated in physical training and team building exercises in a competitive mode throughout the camp. Arson demonstrations by Investigator Jackson and Zeus, the Fire Dog, are a highlight and give another insight to the fire department. Station 1 emphasizes the technical work of the fire service with a high angle rescue drill, using camp participants in the rescue operation. Campers are provided lunch and snacks. Throughout camp, there are team and individual competitions that focus on team aspects and building confidence. At closing of camp, participants are given a camp tee shirt, bag with various small items, information/resource sheet and a certificate of completion.

Portland Fire Bureau previously contributed to the camp with details to cover shifts and/or compensation to the participating firefighters. Outside departments that sent firefighters compensated their employees with shift relief and travel coverage for a few. The PFFA, Clackamas, Gresham and Portland Fire Chiefs unions also support the camp financially. Previous years, Costco donated a gift card, Jim & Patty's Coffee House donated snacks, Evelyn's bakery offered baked goods at cost and Round Table offered a discount. Fire House Subs has stepped up and donated 2 days worth of lunches for counselors and campers. The retail stores of Lucy, Lululemon, Title 9 and Nike donated items throughout the years, given to the participants throughout the camp.

The first camp in 2009 had 16 applicants and 14 participants. In 2010, 68 young women applied and 26 participated. 2011 was another great success with 27 girls participating. The largest camper participation thus far was 2012 with 39 campers. From the 2009 camp, 2 participants completed the Portland (Explorer) Cadet Program. In 2010, 4 of the 5 girls in the Explorer Program had participated in Fire Camp. In 2008 and the previous 5 of 6 years, no girls enrolled in the Explorer Program. Of the 26 participants in 2010, 5 are pursuing fire careers and 3 are working towards nursing careers due to the exposure of EMS in the Fire Camp. 5 campers that have graduated high school from the 2011 camp are pursuing fire careers. One prior camper is a firefighter for a small department in Georgia and currently in charge of creating their first Explorer program. Portland and Gresham firefighters were involved the first year (one person from Gresham), adding Clackamas, Hillsboro and Salem the second year, increasing to 9 outside agencies throughout the next years. 2016 saw 90 applications with Fire Camp 38 total campers.

The Portland Metro Fire Camp is currently the only one of its kind, a multi-day camp, not overnight. 'Camp Blaze' is a weeklong overnight camp held at state training facilities in Washington State, Colorado and California. The July 2011 edition of the IAFF magazine highlighted a weekend overnight camp in Houston, TX.

The camp is presented towards girls aged 16-20 as a viable career and an educational opportunity. The United States Department of Labor 2009 statistics show 3.4% of personnel in the fire service are women. PFB is currently at 7% and for Clackamas, 5% of its workforce are female. The vision of the Fire Camp

is to present knowledge and skills to young women in order to become successful candidates in any fire departments' application process. One goal of the camp is to increase and ensure the presence of capable, confident and strong women in the fire service.

The requirements of a firefighter are well emphasized throughout training, but individuals often perform a function in a manner unique to their capabilities. The camp is currently taught by women because of the interest of these firefighters to pass on their knowledge and skills of the job to others. Providing these learning experiences to young women who may not have thought about pursuing a career in firefighting from positive, strong role models is necessary in changing the mental attitude of uncertainty.

The education campers receive throughout the weekend can directly affect the job of a firefighter. They are aware of the challenges on an emergency scene, the problem solving skills needed, the disciplines of the fire service and the EMS aspect on a daily basis. This information can then be relayed to their family, friends and others within their contact. The hope is to educate the public on their own responsibilities for safety and the duties of the Fire Bureau.

All of the campers were enthusiastic about the daily events and had a positive outlook on their future with a fire department. Attitudes of apprehension as a young woman interested in the fire service were positively changed throughout the weekend. The most common statement from campers after the weekend was they now thought firefighting was attainable to them.

"Fire camp gave me the knowledge that there are physically challenging jobs out there for women".

"I enjoyed being around a group of empowered women and motivated girls!"

-2011 Fire Camp participants (from anonymous survey)