

# A Fire Academy for Employed Veterans

Michael Archer | August 27, 2008

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Of all the fire academies in the U.S., Santa Ana College Basic Fire Academy is the largest, and probably the most intense. In fact, the average fire academy requires 348 hours of instruction time to get a Firefighter One (FF1) certification, SAC Fire Academy requires 560 hours. Although having to take an additional 212 hours may sound like more work for the same FF1 certificate offered by other academies, there's more to it than that. Chief Dan Chidester, the academy co-commander, talks about the Huntington Beach, Calif.-based academy, and explains what makes those additional hours worth the extra effort.

## Multiple Training Programs

"We run three full-time academies a year from August through June, each 14 weeks long," explains Chidester. "The classes run from Monday through Friday and are split up into segments covering different aspects of firefighting, including EMS/EMT, pulling hose, cutting ventilation holes, all the way up to fighting a live fire."

For veterans that already have a full-time job, there's an academy just for you. "We have a part-time academy that consists of four hours on Friday nights, an all day session on Saturdays, and a session one Sunday per month," Chidester adds. "This academy also runs from August through June with the same exact curriculum and instructors."

## Entry Requirements

There are certain basic requirements for applicants to SAC Fire Academy. "Entry requirements include a GED or high school diploma, taking a Biddle test on the first day [and] then again on the last day," Chidester says. "We also require eight core semester classes to get into the academy, such as Introduction to Fire Science, which gives applicants a basic understanding of firefighting."

In order to prepare for the SAC Fire Academy applicants should build up reading and note-taking skills, brush up on basic math skills, and be prepared to take college-level classes. And, Chidester advises that you also "keep your police record clean and stay in good physical shape, because you carry a lot of weight as a firefighter."

## The Best of The Best

If what you've read so far makes SAC Fire Academy sound a bit like the Marines, there may be a reason. Chidester was in the Marines from 1968-1970 and based with 1st Marine Tank Battalion at Da Nang. "We're a little longer and more intense than other academies. We've taken it a couple of steps forward by offering courses like auto extrication and fire control."

## ABOUT MICHAEL ARCHER



Michael Archer is a wildfire consultant and writer. He has written articles for *Home and Fire Magazine*, *Wildland Firefighter Magazine*, and other publications, lectured to many groups about fire issues, been quoted by Associated Press and USA Today reporters, and also appeared on cable and network TV discussing wildfire issues. Currently, he is acting as webmaster and technical consultant to Wildfire Research Network ([www.wildfireresearch.org](http://www.wildfireresearch.org)), a Los Angeles-based citizens' action group that promotes firefighting issues involving the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI).

His "Firebombers Incorporated" series of novels gives readers an intriguing "what-if" scenario on how 21st century technology could modernize the wildland firefighting force. His novel "Firestorm," received excellent reviews from *Writers Digest*, *The Nashville News*, *The VVA Veteran* (Vietnam Veterans of America's magazine) and firefighting professionals across the United States. His company, Firebomber Publications, donates 50 percent of net profits to organizations that support the families of injured and fallen firefighters.



You can visit his website at: [www.firebomberpublications.com](http://www.firebomberpublications.com)

Firestorm can be purchased at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)

Comments can be sent to: [marcher47@firebomberpublications.com](mailto:marcher47@firebomberpublications.com)

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Additionally, other fire departments notice who has had the extra training. "When I was a fireman hiring people, when you bring them on you can tell the difference between someone from SAC, who had 560 hours, versus graduates of other academies," says Chidester. "You could tell they had a little bit more training."

**Good Career Move**

So how did Chidester, an ex-Marine, end up as a firefighter? "A friend got me interested in the fire service," he recalls. "Initially I took it just because it was a good job, but I learned to love the challenge and found it interesting. I started out as a rookie firefighter with Fullerton Fire Department, and went on to become fire chief."

**Military Vets Welcome**

Typically, the SAC Fire Academy has veterans in every class. This year there are at least five in among the recruits. "Vets bring esprit de corps, knowledge of marching, and an understanding of the chain-of-command. Almost always our Class Captain is a vet," Chidester says.

"Somebody coming out of the military who likes that structure and discipline should consider the fire service, which is a paramilitary organization ... If they like that black-and-white, right-angle approach where it's not the same every day, it's different, it's a rewarding career," he adds.

"Being a military person myself, I like people out of the military," he continues. "We've had classes with Navy SEALs, Army Rangers, we have a couple of Marines in the current class, and very few of the military people who have come through here were duds. Most of them did a pretty good job and you wanted to hire them right away."

**For More Information**

If Santa Ana College Basic Fire Academy sounds like a place you want to check out, contact info is at the following weblink:  
[www.sac.edu/faculty\\_staff/academic\\_progs/departments/fire](http://www.sac.edu/faculty_staff/academic_progs/departments/fire)

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