

CAL FIRE Looking for a Few Good Vets

Michael Archer | September 24, 2009

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Veterans who want to work in the fire service career should consider the Riverside County Fire Department, a division of CAL FIRE. This firefighting force of more than 2,000 members responds not only to traditional firefighting and medical emergency calls in 16 cities throughout Southern California's Inland Empire, but they're also called upon to battle wildland fires both on the ground and from the air. Captain Fernando Herrera, the Public Information Officer, took time out from a busy schedule to talk about his department.

East is East, and West is West

Variety is the spice of life, and Riverside County Fire Department. "We have our municipal side, including firetrucks, medical units, etc.," Herrera explains, "and then we have the CAL FIRE side which is our wildland firefighting group."

"The western side of the county is more populated than the eastern side, but there are also more wildland fires on the western side of the county," he added.

Statewide Reach

As part of the state's fire service, members have distinct advantages over standard county or municipal firefighting jobs. "Being CAL FIRE employees means being state employees," said Herrera. "I could work here in Riverside County for a few years, and then transfer to someplace else, like Northern California and work there instead."

"If you work for a municipal fire department and then wanted to transfer to a fire department in another part of the state, you would have to retrain and go through a probation period at that new department, but by being part of CAL FIRE, no retraining is required if you transfer to another part of the state."

Air Force

CAL FIRE boasts something else no other city or county fire department has - a sizeable air force. "We also have a CAL FIRE air base, Hemet-Ryan Air Base, which houses a full-time helicopter, and two airtankers which can fly out of there for all our wildland firefighting capabilities," Herrera said proudly. "Not only can you work at the air bases as a mechanic, a pilot or an air captain, directing firefighting on the ground from the air, but there are opportunities at different bases throughout the state."

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), 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

Firestorm can be purchased at Amazon.com

Comments can be sent to: marcher47@firebomberpublications.com

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Experience, Credentials and Education

So how does someone get into this department? "There are a couple of ways one can prepare, such as being a reserve or volunteer firefighter at a station, which is probably the best way to get in because the volunteer or reserve positions offer the same training as a paid firefighter for free," explained Herrera. "There is also the entry-level seasonal firefighter program, which makes up the bulk of the manpower on the wildland side of CAL FIRE."

"The more experience you have as a seasonal firefighter, the better the chance of being hired on as a full-time, permanent firefighter based on a matrix of requirements that include experience, training, and education: the more categories you complete, the better chance you have of being hired on as a permanent firefighter."

As with any job, education and credentials are important. "Any fire science education or credentials, such as EMT or paramedic, are very valuable," Herrera asserted, "and a paramedic credential is gold because 82 percent of our calls are medical emergencies."

Veteran's Edge

Like the best of the municipal fire departments, Riverside County offers Veteran's Points. "There are Veteran's Points given in the hiring process by CAL FIRE (between five and 15) which are applied to the overall test score," said Herrera.

"The written exam is composed of basic math, English, mechanical aptitude, there may be some basic firefighting questions, like a simple civil service exam," Herrera continued. "Candidates who successfully pass the written test will go on to interview, which can weigh as much as 50 percent of the testing process, so you have to be able to speak well, articulate your thoughts, and summarize why you're a good candidate for a firefighter job."

But keep in shape. "Firefighting is a physically demanding profession, so military veterans should continue to work out," Herrera agreed. "The fire service is a high stress environment, something which military people are already familiar with."

"The fire service is a paramilitary organization, so they understand the chain of command, know about respect for officers and high-ranking officials, the work ethic, and teamwork," Herrera continued. "We do want military folks to apply and look favorably on them as candidates because they fit in our organization very well."

Last Words

"You're compensated very well for your job, you have great benefits, great retirement, and a lot of days off per month," Herrera concluded. "Veterans can always look at our website to research how to get hired by CAL FIRE."

To get more information about career opportunities in fire fighting, visit Military.com's [Veteran Job Board](#).

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