

Firefighting Not Easy, Good Challenge for Vets

Michael Archer | November 02, 2009

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Ventura County, Calif., is often referred to as the Gold Coast, and has a reputation of being one of the safest and most affluent places in the U.S. There is a wide diversity of terrain, ranging from beautiful beaches, to bustling cities, to some of the most unspoiled, rugged and inaccessible wilderness remaining in southern California. Ventura County Fire Department serves this area of 848 square miles with a population of more than 480,000 people. It's composed of 560 men and women who provide fire protection, medical aid, rescue, hazardous materials response, and a variety of other services to both the unincorporated areas of the county and to six of its cities. Recruitment Manager Gerald Chambers, an Air Force veteran, provides us with a look at what it takes to join the team.

Do Your Homework

Don't assume that, just because you've heard firefighting is a good career that it's easy to get into. Chambers explains further: "In fire departments today, there's a lot of competition out there for fire positions, so when a fire department interviews an individual, they're not looking for someone who just woke up one morning and decided 'hey, maybe I could become a firefighter,' they're looking for individuals who've actually taken the time, done the research, and also have taken classes in fire science, fire technology, they have an EMT license and they know about the fire service."

And of course, following on the heels of the homework is the tests — one written, one oral. "Do your research, get some knowledge, so that when you do take the test, and if you do well enough to get interviewed, you know about the fire service ... if you don't do that well (on the oral interview), you aren't going to get that job," Chambers added. "The wrong answer to the question 'What do you know about the fire service?' is 'I don't know.'"

"Try to get in contact with the person who is doing the recruiting for the fire department and find out as much as you can from that person," Chambers continued. "And look into going on ride-alongs."

Preparation and Persistence

So where does one go to prepare? "A lot of junior colleges have fire academies with fire science classes, so I would look into what kinds of fire science programs local colleges offer," Chambers pointed out. "Quite often those programs are less than a year, so they can go ahead and get those sorts of things out of the way."

"EMT training is something you're going to need as well, so if they can get that training done, maybe even become an EMT and get on an emergency response team, that would help them out as well."

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

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And one other thing might be useful to have. "Obviously Paramedic is a little bit harder, takes a bit longer to accomplish, but it's also a feather in their cap," Chambers continued. "Not every firefighter is a Paramedic, but they are all EMTs, and there are only a limited number of paramedics. However, they do get higher pay."

But, even if you have all these things, you may still need to be persistent. "They need to decide if this is something they want to do because getting a job in the fire service is not something that normally happens first time out. Some people have made multiple tries at different departments, taking multiple tests with multiple interviews," warned Chambers.

Veteran's Edge

The fact that you're a veteran may help, but it doesn't mean you're a shoo-in for the job. "If a veteran wants a job in the fire service, there's no way they are going to be able to come in here and get a job just based on military experience," asserted Chambers. "It's a feather in their cap, but it's just one out of many that they're going to need in order to get a job in the fire service."

But to help them along and show appreciation for their service to the country, Chambers highlighted one major advantage for veterans. "The County of Ventura, when it comes to taking the written examination, awards five Veteran's Points. In the past, we've only done oral interviews for people who have scored 90-95 or above on the written test. So it does help out having those five extra points."

And something else is useful. "Now if they've already been in the fire service in the military, that's definitely going to help them out."

But it's certainly worth investigating for those with a sense of public service as well as adventure. "The fire service has a lot of good perks, but it's dangerous at the same time."

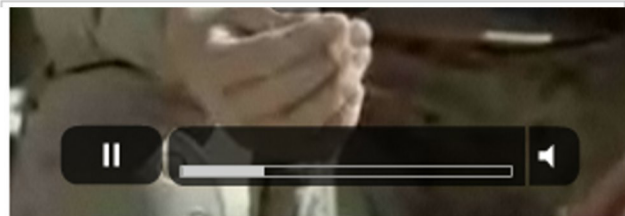
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