

Getting Into the Mt. SAC Fire Academy

Michael Archer | May 22, 2008

Dedication. Integrity. Respect. Loyalty. Honesty. These are the core values taught by Mt. SAC Fire Academy and embodied by their cadets. Their mission statement is to "meet the training and educational needs of fire agencies and the emergency services community by being prepared to provide the skills and career development necessary to save lives, property and the environment."

Wealth of Experience

"Both Chief Austen and myself have 30-plus years of experience," explained Assistant Chief Stephen Shull, Professor of Fire Technology.

Using their wealth of experience, the instructors are passing the baton to a new generation of leaders. "It's an honor for me to serve in the fire service for 32 years, then to be asked to work here and to effect the people who are coming in," said Shull. "I tell classes, 'I retired. I look at all you people as replacing me.'"

Accreditation

"This is a State Fire Marshall's Regionally Approved Academy," Shull pointed out. "The Academy is a 14 unit class, is 14 weeks long and covers 540 hours of instruction." And what does that accreditation provide? "Upon graduation of the academy, the trainees will receive a number of certificates, the primary one being their Firefighter 1 Training Certificate," Shull explained. "That is the ticket they need to be able to apply to the fire departments in California."

"In addition to the FF1 certificate, we offer eight other certificates that include wildland, vehicle rescue, rapid intervention training, and others that provide our graduates with the best possible bundle of certifications when they apply at a fire department. We feel very strongly about the quality of the candidate that we put out here."

Instilling Integrity

The Academy understands that integrity is an important quality in firefighters. "Since Chief Austen and I have come on, we have made very significant changes in the academy structure," Shull continued.

"We start this academy off with leadership, ethics, and core value training. They identify a mission statement that is posted out in the classroom with the core values. They live, eat, and breathe the mission statement and core values, a lot like the military does. They recognize each other throughout their training for exhibition of the core values, for living the life of a firefighter, which is different than the life of a civilian. When you go home and take your uniform off, that badge is still there. You don't turn into a jerk just because you take the uniform off."

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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Military Parallel

Would military personnel find life at the academy familiar? Shull seems to think so. "The fire service is semi-military," he explained. "There's the rank structure here, there's the hierarchy. Cadets elect captains, lieutenants, and the rank structure is built in from day one. They form their statements with 'sir' on the front and 'sir' on the back; they address people by their titles. They stand at attention, they march, they salute our flag, and there are a lot of activities that parallel the military. And that's foreign to many of them, to have to think before they open their mouth. We are shaping young men and women like the military does, to be good citizens, to be good people, to love and honor their country, and to serve people."

Stay Fit!

Once you're out of the military, keep up the PT if you plan to become a cadet. Shull explains why. "Many candidates have had some physical training prior to entering the academy and think they're in pretty good shape, but after starting our program, they begin using a whole different set of muscles lifting ladders, pulling hoses, and doing those types of activities and realize it's a whole different game."

Are you wondering what is required to get into the Academy?

"Candidates require those core classes, an EMT certification, and a certified physical-fitness class," says Shull. "We want to make sure they have that class prior to going into the academy in order to avoid injuries. For example, the current class started with 39, now we're down to 29. We've lost 8 to academics and two to injuries they've sustained."

Once you're in, get ready for some intense days. "In the academy, they're going to take 15 manipulative tests, 25 written exams, plus mid-terms and final exams," Chief Shull asserts. "Their day starts at 5:30 a.m. and ends at 6:00 p.m. or 7:00 p.m., so it's a 10-, 11-, 12-hour day every day, five days a week. When they go home on the weekend, they study to get ready for the next week."

To find out more on how you can apply to Mt. SAC Fire Academy, go to <http://firetech.mtsac.edu>

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