

Train to be a Firefighter at Rio Hondo Fire Academy

Michael Archer | March 26, 2008

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For those interested in pursuing a career in the fire service after their hitch in the military, the logical first step is to get trained for the job. Rio Hondo Fire Academy — located in Whittier, Calif., about 20 miles east of Los Angeles — provides an extensive program to help prepare men and women for a rewarding career in one of the most highly regarded jobs out there.

Programs Offered

"Rio Hondo has a fire academy, a wildland fire academy, and an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) program," said Tracy Rickman, the Fire Academy Coordinator, who has been at Rio Hondo for 11 years. "The EMT program is tied to the State Fire Marshall's office; the wildland fire academy works directly with the U.S. Forest Service; and for the fire academy, Santa Fe Springs' Fire Chief Alex Rodriguez has provided lots of support, including access to their training tower."

Community Support

Additionally, other Rio Hondo community members see the value in these programs. "Presbyterian Inter-Community Hospital here in Whittier has a good working relationship with us," Rickman continued. "They host our EMT students."

Fire Departments also work closely with the academy. "Rio Hondo Academy is working with local fire departments to help them out while getting additional training for their cadets," said Rickman. "One example of this is a recent agreement with the U.S. Forest Service in the Los Angeles National Forest. Rio Hondo will provide a Type-2 Handcrew to fight fires anywhere in the continental United States. Students can be gone for up to 14 days at a time fighting wildland fires. LA County is also getting ready to donate four fire engines to our program."

Military Tie-In

Rickman has a good rapport with cadets who are veterans due to his own connection to the military. "I was in the Air Force from 1982 to 1990 as a Firefighter/Fire Captain at Grand Forks, N.D.," he explained. "My son was serving in Iraq last year as a Navy Corpsman with the 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance (LAR) Group out of Camp Pendleton, Calif."

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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Rio Hondo also supports the troops. "We have fund-raisers, like our Books to Boots program where we help our veterans transition to college," Rickman pointed out. "A couple of our cadets, one who was a Marine and another who was in the Navy, will form the honor guard for the event this year."

Online Training

Rio Hondo is one of only a few fire academies to provide courses online. "I [have] two kids who are in Iraq right now who are taking online classes with us from Iraq, which is great," said Rickman. "I had one guy, Anthony Hernandez, who was a Marine who [took] classes online. He finished two classes while he was there, then got into the academy when he got back."

Rio Hondo's Edge

What sets Rio Hondo apart from other fire academies? "In 2001 we were listed by the Department of Education as the 10th largest fire academy in the nation, out of more than 300 colleges that have fire-related programs," Rickman replied. "Another thing is that we have EMT, wildland and firefighter programs all under one roof. We have all of our Public Safety classes — police academy, prison corrections officers, forensics program, and our fire/EMS programs — grouped under one dean. The advantage to this is that we can do HazMat (Hazardous Materials) training for them, EMS training for them, and they come down to talk to us about how our Paramedics work with SWAT Teams. This is how the federal government wants it to be, with all the public safety groups working together, but it's something that most other academies can't provide. We are now designated as a Homeland Security Regional Training Center, one of only five in LA County."

Cadet Placement

How successful is Rio Hondo in placing cadets? "Right now, I'm hopeful that I will have a couple of cadets get hired at Burbank, Downey and Los Angeles County Fire Department. These cadets have taken the appropriate tests and it's looking real good for these young men to get hired in the near future", said Rickman. "We're maxed out on our EMT program", he continued. "I've got 90 EMT students this semester with a waiting list of 40 more." Visit www.riohondofire.com to find out more.

For More Information

What if someone wants to get more information on fire programs before making a decision? "There's a website for people in the military to check out if they're looking at getting a job as a firefighter", Rickman offered. "This is www.cftda.org, the California Fire Technology Directors Association. It lists all the college fire programs in the state of California." A useful resource for those looking to get into a hot career!

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