

Verdugo Fire Academy: Your Ticket to the Big Leagues

Michael Archer | June 25, 2008

Ever thought of working in some of the best communities in Southern California, such as San Marino, Arcadia, Glendale, or Sierra Madre? These neighborhoods are nestled in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, with manicured lawns, well-to-do residents, and low crime rates. Verdugo Fire Academy in Glendale, Calif., trains cadets who may have an edge getting into the fire departments in these communities. Sound interesting? Read on.

Training Advantage

Like other fire academies in California, Verdugo Fire Academy provides the basic classes required by the state fire marshal to acquire a firefighter-one credential, the ticket to becoming a full-time firefighter. But Verdugo offers something that some academies don't – the chance to train with firefighters from neighboring communities. "What's different from our academy versus other fire academies is that we involve all of the 11 cities in our area (Area C), so we get engine companies and instructors from all over this area," explains Sam DiGiovanna, Verdugo academy chief coordinator and retired fire chief for Monrovia Fire Department. "This gives cadets a wide range of experience and knowledge."

Cadets will work closely with personnel in those departments, which can be a key to getting that all-important interview when the graduate goes job hunting.

Not only does a Verdugo Academy graduate get to work with the firefighters from the adjacent group of cities, they also have the opportunity to expand their horizons beyond Area C. "US Forest Service, Los Angeles City Fire Department, and Los Angeles County Fire Department all come to do training exercises with us," DiGiovanna added. "We really do have a variety of resources, personnel, and specialized equipment to draw from." This widens the prospects of any graduate, as he or she may make valuable contacts with these very large departments in the course of their training, so if the foothill communities are not your interest area, you can consider fighting fires in LA, the county, or across the country with USFS.

Instructors and Staff

Verdugo Fire Academy instructors and staff hail from many of the fire departments in Southern California (Burbank, Glendale, Pasadena, Arcadia, Sierra Madre, Monrovia, San Gabriel, San Marino, Alhambra, Monterey Park, and South Pasadena). What's more, at least one veteran is featured on the instructor webpage. "We have some of the best-qualified staff and instructors," DiGiovanna added. "We work with USFS and LA County on wildland firefighter training. We are under the California Master Mutual Aid Plan, so we send strike teams to go fight wildfires. In fact, we have strike teams fighting wildland fires up north right now."

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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But slackers need not apply. "We put in longer hours and are more physical than most academies," DiGiovanna emphasized. "We're very disciplined and not afraid to cut those loose who need to be cut loose."

A Veteran's Edge

What do Verdugo Fire Academy instructors think about veterans? "We've had military cadets come through the academy and found that they are well-organized, honest, have good integrity, know about teamwork, and possess the mental state needed to do the job," said DiGiovanna. "They provide good role models because they're well-disciplined personnel. Remember, the fire service is a para-military organization, which makes this a walk in the park for veterans due to their regimented routine."

"Veterans are in pretty good shape physically," added DiGiovanna. "This is important because whether it's the military or the fire department, the job can be very physically demanding." In other words, keep up that PT!

And what does the head of the Verdugo Fire Academy think of veterans? "To the people who are in the military, I'd like to say 'thank you' for serving our country and for what you do for us," said DiGiovanna. "We definitely appreciate them and all that they do. I have the utmost respect for the military, for anyone serving our country."

Now's The Time

Timing is everything, and it appears that this is the ideal time to consider a fire service career. "There's a great opportunity over the next few years because there's a big baby-boomer population out there that's getting ready to retire and we need replacements," DiGiovanna pointed out. To find out more, visit the Verdugo Fire Academy website: www.glendale.edu/fire

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