

Veterans Succeed at LACOFD Academy

Michael Archer | September 25, 2008

Los Angeles County Fire Department (LACoFD) — one of the largest in the country — runs its own fire academy to train new recruits in the finer points of becoming a firefighter. Captain Roland Owens, recruit coordinator at their East Regional Training Facility, provides some insight into what it takes to get into (and pass) the course to become a Los Angeles County firefighter.

Entry Requirements

"To apply to our academy, applicants need to have a high-school diploma or GED in order to take our entry-level exam, which consists of a certified physical agility test, which is called a CPAT, a written examination which is pass or fail, and an oral interview, which puts you in a band (one through four)," Explains Owens. "There is also a v-band, which is for veterans, who are given an additional 10 points on top of their oral score."

Besides being a veteran, what else can give a candidate an edge? "A lot of recruits attend junior colleges to get fire science classes that give them knowledge on what the fire service is all about," Owens says. "Some of these colleges may also offer courses that allow them to get their Firefighter One state certificate, which is required by the State Fire Marshall to become a firefighter in California. You don't need this to apply to LACoFD, though."

Academy Sessions

Once a recruit passes the entrance exams, the academy lasts 21 weeks and is split into three sessions. According to Owens, the session is "10 weeks long and is called Combat Training, which is all [about] your manipulative skills, including hose-lays, SCBA, ladders, ropes and knots."

"Session Two is six weeks and is called Advanced Training, which is used when you get out into the field and put all the manipulative skills together to perform vehicle extrication, ventilation, firefighter survival, wildland firefighting, power tools, and search and rescue, including rappelling," Owens continues. "Session Three is EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) and is a five week session that all LACoFD firefighters have to take to be EMT certified."

Prepare for a Workout!

You'll need to be in great shape for this job. "We lift weights on Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays, and we run on Tuesdays and Thursdays, between two to five miles, depending on what portion of training we're in," warns Owens. "If you come in in really good shape, you have a better chance of passing the fire academy because if you come back from a run and begin pulling hose or doing the ladders, if you're in really good shape, you don't get fatigued as much. You're mentally stronger, too, because if you come in fatigued, you start making mental mistakes as well, which means you start losing points on rating/testing days, and you begin to fall behind."

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 USAToday 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

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Many think the CPAT is rough, but Owens disagrees. "Even though the CPAT may seem strenuous, it's really easy compared to the stuff firefighters are doing here day-in and day-out."

How tough is the academy? Owens recalls one example: "We've had recruits who were Airborne Rangers or Navy SEALs tell us that this training was just as hard if not harder than what they had to go through to become a Ranger or SEAL."

The Military Edge

The training is rigorous, but veterans can hack it according to Owens. "Veterans start out with a really good attitude of what it's all about. Military folks do have an edge, the discipline, which is what we like to see here. They understand what we're doing when we're shouting at them — not shouting down to them, but helping them to learn what they need to know."

"The thing about people who serve this country, they care about people, like we do in the fire service, serving the public," he adds.

They're also well-adjusted to para-military life. "The military recruits are generally the ones who lead the cadence [on runs] because they're really good at it," Owens said with a chuckle. "We'll ask whether there are any ex-military recruits in the class and have them lead the cadence."

And lots of military folks have gone through the academy. "We have had about five reservists or retired military vets in each of our last eight classes at the fire academy, on average," he asserts. "They also end up being the leaders of the class and often become the class valedictorian."

Last Words

"The Fire Service is an outstanding, prestigious career, with benefits, and a great, fun job and I'd encourage them to look into doing it," Owens concluded. For more information: <http://www.fire.lacounty.gov/helpwanted/BeAFirefighter.asp>

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