Firefighters train for early wildfire season

By Diane Goble
Correspondent

Fire season will likely start early this year due to the lack of snow over the winter. Property owners in the areas surrounding Sisters should already be clearing the pine needles and trimming back the combustible vegetation surrounding their homes, barns, stables and other structures to create a defensible area.

Meanwhile there are others getting ready to protect us from the flames if they come our way. Young people interested in training to become the firefighters who might save your home were training right here in Sisters over spring break.

About 40 mostly college-age boys and girls were being drilled by Sisters resident Daniel J. Boettner, vice president of fire operations for GFP Enterprises, Inc., who has 37 years in the firefighting business.

GFP is an emergency response company focused on catastrophe management, remote base camps, and fire-suppression solutions. They have a wide range of equipment and expandable resources to meet diverse needs, which are staged around the country to shorten response times to disasters. Crews are on call 24/7/365 and on the road traveling to an incident within 2 hours of dispatch. Advance teams are expected to be on-scene within 24 hours.

GFP currently has more than 450 staff (firefighters, EMTs, security, ex-military) trained within the Incident Command System who are physically qualified to fight wildland fires for the U.S. Forest Service or respond to other catastrophes around the world.

They are always looking for reliable, hard-working firefighters who display the ability to work effectively in teams. Every crewmember is screened for character traits required of emergency responders: a willingness to work hard for long hours in less-than-desirable conditions. Then they hire the ones who complete their missions smiling.

PHOTO BY DIANE GOBLE

Firefighters train in deploying emergency shelters.

In order to be hired for firefighting, individuals must be at least 18 years old, a United States citizen, pass a physical fitness test which includes a three-mile walk in less than 45 minutes wearing a 45-pound pack, and pass the entry-level training course. GFP Enterprises will pay the cost of wildland training courses, as long as the person intends to work for the company.

Trainee Rick from Portland said, "I've learned a lot about the importance of teamwork and following procedures. It's a matter of life or death on the line."

Trainees are introduced to the basic concepts of the fire environment, including how available fuels, topography, and current weather are major influences on fire behavior and the importance of continual monitoring of these factors in an effort to predict when and where the fire is likely to increase in intensity.

Maintaining constant situational awareness, establishing escape routes, and knowing safety zone locations help firefighters remain safe. They practice lighting backfires and deploying their safety bags in case they can't outrun a fire. They are taught fire-line tool use and maintenance, map and compass skills and common wildland fire terminology.

"Above all," says Boettner, "they will learn that effective communication and a commitment to safety is a top priority at all times."

Information about trainings can be found at www.gfpenterprises.com, or call 541-549-8167.

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