

# Cadets converge for fire training

## First blush with a blaze

By LUKE WHITTAKER  
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It starts with spark of interest, and often ends with a career. In June, about 60 high school students from regional Washington state and Oregon schools gathered for the annual fire cadet day at MERTS campus in Astoria. The training was the culmination of months of classroom training.

"We give the experience of the live fire training, the requirements to become a volunteer firefighter. That's really what they're doing here is getting those components completed," Kelso's Cowlitz Two Fire and Rescue Safety Officer Kirk Meller said.

A number of leaders and training officers from fire departments in southwest Washington and northwest Oregon, including James Graham, Kurt Stich, Craig Martinell, Scott Johns, Kurt Donaldson, Mike Karvia and Erik Dearth, led cadets through the training. Pacific County Fire District No. 1 played a major role in the training.

### Full day of fire

The daylong experience covered a variety of fire science and safety topics, including hose-handling, search and rescue and fighting fires. After an orientation led by incident instructor Graham, students divided into battalions. Smaller groups went through rotations, including the field leadership assessment course, or "FLAC." The course simulates situations and obstacles they will encounter in the field, and emphasizes communication skills.

"FLAC simulations are basically team-building exercises," instructor Donaldson said.

After lunch, the training heated up, as students practiced new skills in different live fire scenarios.

"They go from leadership-type training and team cohesion to actually getting dressed up in their bunker gear and dealing with the experience (of live fire)," said firefighter Dave Fisher.

A rehabilitation tent, run by EMTs from Pacific County Fire District No. 1, offered a momentary reprieve to cadets between rotations. The EMTs closely monitored their core temperatures and vital signs during the unseasonably warm afternoon.

### Only at MERTS

Traditionally a two-day training, this year's program was condensed into one eventful day due to scheduling conflicts. Though many cadets were disappointed to have less time at MERTS, cadets and instructors alike agreed that the experience at the occupational training campus was still totally unique, and totally worthwhile.

"You can't teach a kid by sitting in a classroom all day. You've got to have that hands-on application," Meller said, standing in the shadow of the 8,000 square foot Fire Response and Research Center. The three-story structure, built exclusively for fire training, hosts a wide range of computer-controlled live burn props fueled by natural gas.

"They've got four different burn rooms that they're working on. It's the first time they've really seen live fire. We can't really simulate this at each training event," said Meller, who has been working with the students since the beginning of the school year.

Firefighter Josh Raichl triggered the fires, and instructors observed the cadets closely as they worked together to extinguish each blaze. The students learned about directing fire with the hose streams.

"Depending on the streams that they use will determine how the fire plays out," Meller said,



The live fire training was the first opportunity for the cadets to put their training into practice.

Photos by Luke Whittaker/EO Media Group



Cadets put on their gear ahead of live fire training in June at the MERTS campus in Astoria. The hands-on experience was the culmination of months in the classroom.



Dominic Halvorson was among the approximately 60 fire cadets from Oregon and Washington state schools that took part in the training in June at the MERTS campus in Astoria.

while overseeing a group of cadets in action. "That's really what the kids are learning — the different streams and patterns and how to properly put the fire out."

### College credit, important skills

The cadet programs provide a sort of "head start" for kids who want to pursue a career in fire or other emergency services.

"It's a great opportunity for the kids to come out and learn to cooperate and work together as a group. For a lot of them, this is the only live fire they get a chance to do over the course of the school year, kind of their culmination," said Donaldson.

The program also prepares students to volunteer in their own community fire departments — something that is critical in rural areas, where volunteers handle much of the fire protection and emergency response.

In addition to real-world training, many participants earn college credit that helps them save on tuition later on.

"If they do it two years, they get 26 college credits," Meller explained, adding that many will apply it toward degrees at local colleges. A degree for fire science is 90 credits, according to Clatsop Community College's major catalog.

"They get almost a third of it paid by doing the program. It saves them over \$5,000 in college fees,

they get a heap of savings for it," Meller said.

### Preparing good citizens

Even students who don't ultimately choose a career in emergency services still benefit from the cadet programs, leaders said.

"They learn not just firefighting skills, but how to be a better citizen. If they never pick up another hose, as long as they can contribute to society later on, that's what we're looking for. They all have community service hours that they do," Meller said.

The experience is a rewarding one for instructors as well.

"It's really a highlight for us, a chance to see the next generation of the fire service and work with them," Donaldson explained. "Every year it gets a little better. It's pretty neat."



**9-1-WHAT?**  
THE BEST OF THE WORST CALLS TO ASTORIA 911 DISPATCH

## Chicken at large

We tried to ignore it as long as possible, but there is no escaping the chicken patrolling downtown near the U.S. Bank parking lot. The bird is obviously up to something.

Some brave soul finally called 911: "Report of a chicken at large walking toward The Daily Astorian."

Follow reporter Kyle Spurr on his 9-1-What? Twitter watch, where a few of the sometimes head-scratching calls to area dispatch take center stage. The full feed is at [www.twitter.com/9\\_1\\_WHAT](http://www.twitter.com/9_1_WHAT).

9-1-WHAT? @9\_1\_WHAT Following

{7/2 @ 11:57 a.m.} Report of a chicken at large walking toward The Daily Astorian. #Astoria

RETWEET 1 LIKE 1

9:18 AM - 5 Jul 2016

9-1-WHAT? @9\_1\_WHAT Following

{7/6 @ 4:14 p.m.} A suspicious man dug an extremely large hole near the Peter Iredale shipwreck. #Hammond

8:28 AM - 13 Jul 2016

9-1-WHAT? @9\_1\_WHAT Following

{7/10 @ 5:30 p.m.} Caller reported a transient busting open a beehive outside a building. It was the property owner cleaning up. #Astoria

LIKE 1

9-1-WHAT? @9\_1\_WHAT Following

{7/12 @ 12:13 p.m.} A man on Christmas Tree Road reported loggers in his neighborhood. He thinks they're going to cut down his trees. #Elsie

8:08 AM - 13 Jul 2016

9-1-WHAT? @9\_1\_WHAT Following

{7/10 @ 5:34 p.m.} Caller reported a neighbor making obscene gestures at him and his family. #Astoria

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