

LOCAL FIREFIGHTER TRAINING



SCOTT MASON/The Winchester Star

Blue Ridge Volunteer Fire and Rescue Chief Jason Burns (from left) directs Enders volunteer firefighters Zayna Elhady and Shawna Massie and North Mountain volunteer Allyson Fagga during Firefighter 1 training Wednesday at the boat landing on the Shenandoah River below Harry Byrd Highway (Va. 7).

Intense course readies volunteer firefighters

By VAL VAN METER
The Winchester Star

PINE GROVE — It sounds like a recipe for success: Instant firefighter. Just add water.

There was plenty of water on Wednesday, as 18 students assembled under the Harry Byrd Highway (Va. 7) bridge in Clarke County next to the Shenandoah River to learn the skills needed to fight fires.

The day was part of a 2½-week course to earn the Firefighter I certification. It was organized by Clarke County fire officials.

Earning the certification can take a local volunteer firefighter six months, according to Jason Burns, chief of the Blue Ridge Volunteer Fire and Rescue Company in

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Volunteers learn the proper way to offload water from a tanker truck into a portable tank.

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Clarke County.

"We're turning them out in three weeks," Burns said.

But it requires commitment from the volunteers, he said. The condensed course starts at 8 a.m. and runs until late in the day.

"It is so intense," said Shawna Massie, 28, a volunteer with John H. Enders Volunteer Fire and Rescue Company in Berryville. "It's physically exhausting and it's mentally exhausting, but you get it knocked out in two weeks."

By the end of the second day, "They realize they are not in high school," Burns said. "They handle it very well. This is a very disciplined class."

Many of the students, like Brady Childs, 18, are looking to the future.

"I'd like to make it into a career," Childs said of firefighting.

Burns said Childs and the other students will be able to use their certifications immediately to help volunteer fire and rescue companies fight fires.

While some fire companies will allow those over the age of 18 to fight fires without the training, "Blue Ridge doesn't allow it," Burns said.

During the intensive course, students cover "everything," said Allen F. "Frank" Davis, director of Clarke County's Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services.

"They learn how to protect themselves, how to stay safe, how to make a good fire attack, how to rescue citizens and everything in between," Davis said.

On Friday, the class was headed to Leesburg, where the Loudoun County Training Center was offering the use of its "flashover" simulator for student training.

"That's going to be the first thing that's a little nerve-wracking," said Childs.

A flashover, Burns said, describes what happens when firefighters enter a room in a house



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Volunteers Michael Flagg (left), of Boyce Volunteer Fire Company, and Joseph Alger, of Enders Volunteer Fire Company, use a deck gun from the top of a fire engine Wednesday during training.

and everything in the room ignites at once.

So the students were going to be taught how to use their water stream to kill the flashover and make sure they are safe.

The training has made it clear just how dangerous fires can be, Massie said.

The possibility of being stuck in a burning building is scary, she added.

But Wednesday's hands-on lesson was "cooler."

The students learned how to set up a collapsible plastic pool, siphon water into a tanker truck from tubing thrown into the river, load the pool and pull the water from it into another truck and spray it on a fire.

Speed and efficiency were the

keys, Burns told the students.

The pool holds 3,000 gallons of water.

"If I'm pumping 500 gallons of water a minute," Burns said, "I've got six minutes of firefighting."

Keeping the water flowing is vitally important, he said.

It's also important not to back a tanker into the pool or get run over by it.

A tanker truck weighs 65,000 pounds, Burns said. "(The driver's) not even going to feel you when he runs over you," he warned.

The students also "ran" out hoses, switched nozzles and fired off the water gun on top of Blue Ridge's pumper truck.

Of the 18 students, four were women, and most were high

school age. Two were from the town of Stanley and two were from North Mountain Volunteer Fire and Rescue Company in Frederick County. Blue Ridge had three students, Boyce had one and Enders had 10.

Burns said he was pleased with how quickly the students came together and began to work as a team.

This is the second time Clarke County has hosted a firefighter certification class.

One was organized two years ago, and Bobby Faulk took it then.

He was back this year to help teach.

Faulk, who is Ender's rescue captain, joined the company a dozen years ago as an emergency



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— Shawna Massie

Volunteer with John H. Enders Volunteer Fire and Rescue

medical technician.

He decided to take the firefighter training two years ago, so he could serve as a driver-pump operator.

The short course was perfect for him, he said, because he was able to get time off from work to take it.

At the end of the course, the students will take an examination from the state Fire Programs agency, and those who pass will be certified and ready to work in their communities.

Davis praised Burns for organizing the fire academy. State funds paid for the cost.

Davis hopes to see another academy offered next year.

"I'll do everything in my power to make that happen," he said.

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