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Our 159th Year

Firefighter fitness



Dan Lassiter/Gazette Staff

Janesville firefighter Matthew Diehls scales the stairs of a four-story tower in full gear while carrying a 45-pound hose pack during his training for the firefighters challenge. The challenge duplicates skills firefighters use on the job.

Competition training keeps rescuers on top of their game

By Catherine W. Idzerda
Gazette Staff

In 60 days, some intrepid Janesville firefighters, laden with more than 100 pounds of gear, will sprint up a five-story tower.

Moments later they'll have to drag a 175-pound guy named Randy across 100 feet of pavement.

It will take everything they have to make it through.

No, it's not the fire of the century.

TO HELP

Janesville firefighters are looking for volunteers to help them run the Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge. If you're interested in helping, call Matthew Diehls at (608) 931-3325.

It's the Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge—an event ESPN dubbed “the toughest two minutes in sports.”

Home Depot, Charter Communication, Fudruckers and dozens

of other local businesses are sponsoring the event, which will be July 17 in the Home Depot parking lot in Janesville.

Along with the firefighter challenge, the day also will feature a “Crawl, Drag and Squirt” mini challenge for children and a tent with health and safety information from local vendors such as the Red Cross and Mercy Hospital.

On Sunday, Janesville firefighter/paramedic Matthew Diehls, egged on by firefighter/paramedic Kevin Murray, trained for the event at Station



Matthew Diehls uses a 9-pound mallet to drive a 160-pound beam down a track while training for the firefighter challenge to be held July 17.

Challenge/Firefighters in training

Continued from 1A
No. 1 on Milton Avenue.

Diehls ran up the four-story tower, dragged heavy mannequins around, ran carrying a hose under pressure and hit a big steel beam with a mallet.

His breath came in rasps through the rubber and plastic firefighters mask that covered his whole face.

"I'm a little bit dry," he said, after finishing a trip up the tower.

As Diehls guzzled water, Murray explained the event requires both agility and strength—but mostly strength.

"The event uses all the muscle groups," Murray said. "Legs, upper body and back, abdomen."

Here's what firefighters have to do at the challenge:

■ Wearing 65 pounds of gear, including face mask and air tank, run up a five-story tower carrying a 45-pound hose pack. The tower has 63 steps that go up 44 feet at a 39-degree incline.

■ At the top of the tower, haul up a 45-pound doughnut roll of hose that's dangling by a rope.

■ Run back down the tower, touching all the stairs. Then, using a 9-pound shot mallet, drive a 160-pound steel beam 5 feet down a

FAST FACT

Firefighters call the gear they wear to a fire their "business suit."

track. Firefighters stand over the beam and drive it into the track between their legs.

■ Run through a 100-foot obstacle course. Then, drag a fully charged, 1¾-inch hose 100 feet. "Fully-charged" means the hose is full of water under pressure. Then, using a stream of water, hit a 9-inch square target.

■ Drag a 175-pound mannequin named "Rescue Randy" 100 feet in the other direction.

Don't try any of that stuff at home.

Now here's the kicker: To advance in the competition, firefighters 40 and younger must finish the course in 2 minutes. Those 40 and older, get 3 minutes.

Why participate in such craziness?

"All the events are designed to imitate fire ground specific activities," explained Diehls, who is helping to organize the event.

That means the event imitates what firefighters have to do on the

job. For example, pounding a 160-pound beam down the track mimics chopping a ventilation hole in the roof of a building.

Diehls started training for the event after a fire at GM in February 1999. It was a bitterly cold day, and firefighters had to haul hose up several flights of stairs on the outside of the building.

"I was sucking wind. It inspired me to look at my own fitness level," said Diehls, who is now built like a small truck.

The event is definitely not for the marginally fit.

"Last year a couple of young guys came to the Janesville event and weren't prepared for it," said Murray, who also is training for the challenge. "They ended up with heat exhaustion."

Last year at the Rockford, Ill., event, the temperature on the course was 102 degrees and the air temperature was 94 degrees, Diehls said.

Diehls and Murray will be joined by Matt Patridge, Chad Hansen, Bob Gabbey, Patrick Kilbane and other Janesville firefighters and paramedics.

Teams from Milton and other areas of Rock County also are participating.