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City firefighters take challenge

Five compete in grueling event that tests their professional skills

By **PAUL NELSON**, Staff writer
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First published: Thursday, September 27, 2007

SCHENECTADY -- A team of city firefighters is back at work training hard in hopes of improving on their fourth place showing at a recent firefighter competition.

For three of the five men, the Maryland event on Sept. 15 marked their first time competing in the grueling five-event competition that incorporates several aspects of firefighting.

Schenectady's ranking is based on the team members' individual times.

Six teams competed in the event, which also featured relay and tandem team competitions.

Clad in their turnout gear, which weighs between 50 and 75 pounds, participants climbed a tower, hoisted a hose, shot water from the hose at a

target, and dragged a mannequin in a test of physical and mental toughness.

The rookie competitors for Schenectady -- William Rhodes, Patrick Sena and Jeremy Matson -- were joined by fellow firefighters Tommy Favata and Assistant Fire Chief Michael Della Rocco.

Della Rocco believes the competition has several benefits for his guys.

"As far as firefighting goes, physical fitness comes down to being a safety issue because if you're in shape, you'll be quicker to recover, less likely to get injured and plus it builds your confidence," said Della Rocco, 56.

The competition also familiarizes firefighters with their equipment, said the assistant fire chief.

Favata, who has 14 years with the department, has been participating in the challenges for the past three years. His goal going into the meet was to finish the course under three minutes. He also enjoys meeting other firefighters during the mostly friendly competitions, said Favata.

He believes firefighting is a lifestyle.

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"Firefighting is not something you hang your hat and leave," said Favata, 42. "It's a supplement to the training we get on the job."

The team will be competing again next year, said Della Rocco.

Nelson can be reached at 454-5347 or by e-mail at pnelson@timesunion.com.

Test of skills

The Firefighter Combat Challenge consists of five events:

1. Carry a hose pack to the top of the five-story tower and put it in the box.
2. Remain at the top of the tower and hoist a 45-pound roll of hose using a rope, then place the roll in a square and descend down the stairs holding the railing.
3. From the base of the tower, walk to a machine where you use a 9-pound mallet to advance a 160 pound I-beam 5 feet horizontally. Walk 140 feet to the next task.
4. Grab a charged hose and move it 75 feet, open the nozzle, and hit the target. Close the nozzle and place it in the marked box. Proceed 30 feet to the final activity.
5. Drag a 175-pound "victim" 100 feet

Source: Schenectady Fire Department

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