

Published November 29th, 2017

## ConFire recruit training covers a lot of ground

By Nick Marnell



Recruits discuss strategy with Capt. Xon Burris, right, at the ConFire training center. Photo Nick Marnell

disoriented into a smoky, confined space and have to find their way out. "They cannot panic in that situation," Goetsch said.

Nearly every imaginable rescue operation is practiced during recruit training, from disentanglement to sewer rescue. A hosed-down skid pad is used for practice in pulling a fire engine out of a skid. Goetsch said that the most dangerous calls for firefighters are those on the freeways, and the firefighters at stations 15 and 17 in Lafayette respond to a number of calls on Highway 24. As such, a simulated highway, complete with donated wrecked cars on which the recruits practice extraction, lies at the rear of the center.

The academy lasts 20 weeks, into February, after which the 28 recruits become probationary firefighters for one year and are assigned to an engine company. "We expose them to different people and different areas," Goetsch said. "Five months with one captain, five with another. Maybe five months at Station 15 in Lafayette, then five at Station 88 in Antioch."

After 10 months, their skills and knowledge are evaluated. The firefighters have two months to catch up in areas they are weak. "Probationary firefighters can be released without cause. But we invest an enormous amount of time, energy and expense in them to be sure they make it to the field. About \$40,000 per recruit," Goetsch said.

Some firefighters fail because they cannot perform the physical tasks. Some cannot handle the academics. Others cannot deal with the pressure. "In training, everything is simulated," Goetsch said. "When they see the realities of what the firefighters have to deal with - from seeing serious injuries, the lack of sleep, the stress of being away from their families - some drop out."

Responding to many of the challenges unique to the Lafayette area is practiced outside the training site, most notably wildland training. For that, ConFire trains on East Bay Regional Park land, and some private property owners allow wildland training with the Type 3 engines - smaller, more nimble four-wheel drive vehicles.

"We do driver training on fire trails around Lafayette - near the ridge and the reservoir. The trail between Rossmoor and Lafayette we use for hose lays and to practice mobile attacks on a wildfire," Goetsch said.

ConFire responds to BART emergencies at the stations, on the tracks and in the tunnels, and the districts train together in the Lafayette-to-Walnut Creek tunnel. "In the middle of the night, when the trains aren't running, we train on rescue cars. Evacuation training is the key. People are stuck in a train, we send a rescue train, park it parallel and set up bridges for evacuation," Goetsch said.

The district is the closest responder to incidents at the Lafayette Reservoir, where ConFire coordinates with the regional park district. Goetsch said that fire stations 15 and 17 in Lafayette both house Type 3 engines for use on the trails around the reservoir.

As for a dam breach? "We respond to pretty much any emergency," Goetsch said. "But that type of emergency would be difficult to respond to."

The new training chief oozes passion for his new position. "I love it," Goetsch said. "I get to lead, advise,

support and influence the future generation of ConFire firefighters."

Reach the reporter at: [nick@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:nick@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA