



SIRENS

Summer 2025

News & Information for Albemarle County Fire Rescue



Recruit School 25

Recruit school 25 began their journey with Albemarle County Fire Rescue in July of 2024 with the initial application process. After completing months of onboarding, recruit school 25's first day with ACFR was January 13th, 2025. After six long months of recruit school, they have earned the endorsement of the instructor cadre to graduate and become rookie firefighters for Albemarle County Fire Rescue. We are honored to recognize this accomplishment.

Grads

Berner, Connor
Bland, Kristopher
Broaddus, Casey
Brown, Grant
Bunner, Michael
Chambless, Michael
Chasse, Samantha
Dennison, Charles
Ford, James
Frye, Logan
Harper, Tyler

Harpin, Zachary
Hodyno, Matthew
Humbles, Hunter
Jackson, Alexis
Lloyd, Carter
Matt -Beal, Austin
Meehan, Joshua
Price, Anthony
Schumacher, Ivy
Siler, Robert
Stone, Dakota

NEWS BRIEFS

Firefighter/EMT Recruit Hiring

Albemarle County Fire Rescue will be accepting applications for its next class of firefighters from July 14 - August 16. Those selected will join a paid, full-time recruit school where you'll gain the skills, training, and support needed to thrive as a firefighter/EMT. Starting salary is \$54,631. Learn more and apply by August 16 at WorkforACFR.com

Calls for Service

January 1 - June 30, 2025

EMS	5,935
Fire.....	1,514
HM	28
Rescue	549
Other	246
Grand Total	8,272



In This Issue

- Recruit School 25..... 1
- Letter From the Chief 2
- What is PHI? 2
- Response Distribution..... 3
- CPSE Accreditation 4
- Celebrations/Releases .. 5
- What is HART? 5
- Career Spotlight..... 6
- Station 4..... 7
- Smoke Diver..... 8



Letter From the Chief

AIn June Chief James led our department in Safety Stand Down 2025, focusing on a topic that reaches every member of our organization — behavioral health. This year's theme, Break the Stigma: Behavioral Health RESET, was designed to spark honest conversations, challenge outdated attitudes, and equip our people with tools to better care for themselves and their crews. Through daily topics like Recognize, Educate, Strategies, Empower, and Training, we asked each crew and battalion to pause during their shifts

and reflect on the unique challenges this profession places on our mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. The conversations that took place — and the feedback we received — reaffirmed that this isn't a side issue for fire and EMS services. It's a fundamental part of operational readiness, crew safety, and personal resilience.

Behavioral health impacts everything from performance and decision-making to relationships at home and long-term career sustainability. That's why, over the past several years, we've prioritized initiatives like peer support programs, an embedded clinician, resiliency training, and sleep health education. These programs aren't about checking a box — they're about protecting the people behind the uniform.

The focus areas of this year's Stand Down served as a reminder that:

- We must recognize the signs of stress, trauma, and burnout in ourselves and others.
- We need to educate ourselves about mental health so we can open doors for honest dialogue.

- We must learn what strategies and resources are available, both inside and outside the department.
- We should feel empowered to speak up, seek help, and support one another without fear or stigma.
- And we must continue to make training in this area as routine and valued as any operational skill.

I encourage every member of Albemarle County Fire Rescue to keep these conversations alive. Behavioral health isn't a one-week initiative — it's a daily commitment. Take the time to check in on your crew, familiarize yourself with our department's resources, and remember that strength in this profession isn't just measured by what you can carry or endure — it's also measured by the courage to ask for help and to be there when others need you.

Thank you for all you do to serve this community and to look out for one another. Take care of yourselves, and take care of each other.

—Chief Dan Eggleston

What is PHI?

Protected Health Information (PHI) is any information within a medical record that can be used to identify a patient, including the patient's health, treatment, and payment information.

The following is a list of PHI identifiers that could lead to a breach if it lands in the wrong hands (or email, ears, eyes... you get the gist.)

- **Names:** This includes first name, middle name, and last name, BUT it also includes only first and last names. Standing alone as just a name and no other info is not a violation, but let's not take the chance!
- **Address:** Basically, anything geographically smaller than the state, including city, street, county, and zip code.
- **Dates:** Birthdate? Yep. Transfer date? Yep. Date of death? Yep. Age? Yep, age, too! If you tell me that Little Johnny is 10 and is celebrating his birthday on July 5th, I can deduce that he was born in 2015.
- **Contact Info:** Home, cell, and fax numbers are considered PHI. Did you know that work numbers can also be PHI if it is



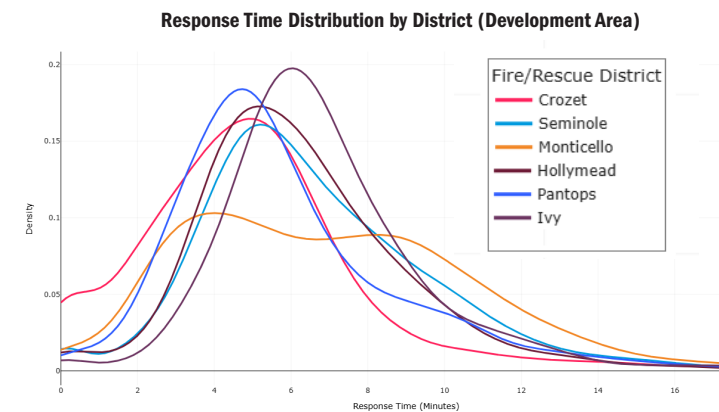
directly linked to the patient or individual? Email addresses and IP addresses are also PHI identifiers.

- **Social Security Numbers:** All 9 digits or just the last 4 digits of the SSN are considered PHI.
- **Other Numbers:** Medical record numbers, account numbers, and car license plate numbers are all PHI.

To put it simply, just don't share it. Use discretion when working with a patient and their information. Protect the patient's PHI as you would your own.

Monticello's Response Distribution

BY BRANDON AKARD

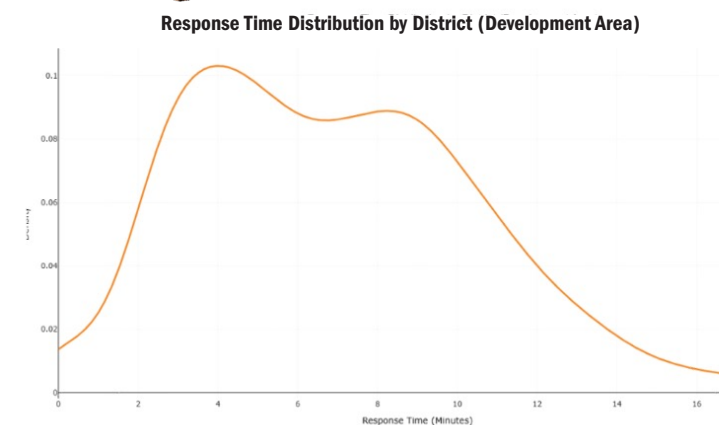


The graph above is a density distribution of response times. Each response area is represented by a line, and the height of the line represents the total response times at each time on the X Axis. If you took any form of statistics in high school or college, you may remember ways to describe these distributions such as normal (one central peak that tapers off evenly on both sides), skewed (the peak is obviously left or right of the center), and right or left tailed (where one of the ends of the line taper off less quickly).

The ideal distribution in terms of our performance is something that is right-skewed with a slim right tail that drops off very quickly. The thicker the right tail is, the more responses are occurring beyond our goal. Remember the 90th % response time from previous articles? We want 90% of the area under the curve to be to the left of the response goal. In this case, that's 8 minutes for our development area. In other words, only 10% of responses should exceed our 8-minute goal.



Let's talk about one of the more interesting call outs from the chart above - can you see anything that resembles this gentleman? You spotted it: it's Monticello's bimodal distribution!



Monticello's response time distribution has two clear humps! Why is that? Let's take a closer look at its geography.



Monticello's response area is divided by Biscuit Run, with the Old Lynchburg area on the west side, and the Monticello and Mill Creek neighborhoods to the east. Although just across the creek, the best route from ACFR's closest station, Station 11, is over I-64 and through 5th Street Station, a popular shopping outlet with notorious traffic issues that stem from a choke point at the bridge over Biscuit Run. Finally, the route goes back over I-64 and into the neighborhood. Calls from further out on Redlands Road add several more minutes.

As a result, the two separate areas of Monticello's district have very different service delivery results. On our distribution graph, the left hump is mostly representative of the responses to the east neighborhoods, and the right hump is for the west neighborhoods. From the charts, we can deduce that the typical response time to the Old Lynchburg area is anywhere from 2-6 minutes slower, depending on how far the call is from Old Lynchburg Road. In the Fire and EMS world, we know that every minute it takes to respond equates to a higher risk of harm to people and property.

What can be done about this geographic challenge? While geography and distance are to blame, one contributing factor is the choke point I mentioned over Biscuit Run. The main issue stems from two sets of traffic lights that get frequently jammed up with no possible way for emergency vehicles to pass. The lights are both governed by the City of Charlottesville. A coordinated effort to get these lights synced and controlled by an emergency vehicle preemption system like Opticom has been discussed and progress is ongoing.

Other solutions exist, such as the extension to Southern Parkway, which would link Old Lynchburg to the Mill Creek area with a bridge over Biscuit Run. This extension would likely be both costly and could adversely affect the Biscuit Run natural area. Another solution that has been discussed is to add an on-ramp to I-64 West at Avon Street. This would allow Station 11 to drastically reduce response time by eliminating a large portion of the overall distance and completely avoid the 5th Street Station choke point. Finally, the obvious but perhaps most costly solution, is the construction of a new station near the 5th Street County Office building.

These solutions would solve the underlying geographic problem. Monticello's bimodal distribution is an example of how we use data to tell a story about the barriers our crews face, while weighing the benefits of action against the risk of inaction.

What CPSE Accreditation Means for ACFR BY EMILY PELLICCIA

In today's evolving public safety landscape, fire departments are being asked to do more than respond to emergencies; they're expected to serve as pillars of community trust, innovation, and accountability. One powerful way to meet this expectation is by seeking accreditation through the Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE). Our department has proudly embarked on this journey, and we want to share what CPSE Accreditation is, why it matters, and how it shapes our future.

What Is CPSE Accreditation? CPSE Accreditation is a comprehensive self-assessment and peer review program designed for fire and emergency services agencies. It is a rigorous, data-driven process that evaluates every aspect of a department's operations. The process is managed by the Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI), a branch of CPSE. Accreditation is not mandatory, it's voluntary, which is what makes it so meaningful. It signals a department's commitment to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.

The accreditation process involves a deep dive into ten performance categories, ranging from governance and administration to risk reduction, emergency response, financial management, and training. It requires a fire department to produce three major deliverables:

- 1. Community Risk Assessment and Standards of Cover (CRA/SOC)** – This document identifies the specific risks in our community and details how we align our resources to meet them.
- 2. Self-Assessment Manual (SAM)** – This is a 250+ criteria evaluation of every operational and administrative function within the department, measuring against established best practices and industry standards.
- 3. Strategic Plan** – A structured, community-driven plan that includes our vision, mission, core values, goals, objectives, and measurable strategies to guide decision-making, resource allocation, and performance monitoring over the next 3 to 5 years. All three products are evaluated during

an on-site peer review and presented to the CFAI for final accreditation.

Why It Matters Accreditation is not just a plaque for the wall—it's a roadmap for excellence. Here are just a few reasons it's important for our department and our community:

- **Enhanced Community Trust:** Accreditation demonstrates that we are transparent, responsible stewards of public resources who are committed to delivering top-tier service.
- **Operational Effectiveness:** The rigorous self-assessment process forces us to examine our policies, procedures, and performance data with a critical eye. It helps identify what we're doing well and where we need to improve.
- **Strategic Alignment:** By grounding decisions in community risk data, we ensure that staffing, deployment, and service delivery are aligned with what our community actually needs—not what's always been done.
- **Professional Development:** Accreditation encourages a culture of continuous learning and growth. It engages personnel at all levels of the department and strengthens leadership development and succession planning.
- **Competitive Advantage:** In a world of limited resources and growing service demands, accredited departments often stand out when applying for grants or forming partnerships.

The Journey to Accreditation Our journey officially began in June of 2024 when we registered with CPSE, but the seeds were planted long before that. We've always strived to be better—to adapt, learn, and grow as professionals. The CPSE Accreditation process simply formalizes that mindset.

The process is both challenging and rewarding. It requires collaboration across every division and rank. It means pulling data, reviewing SOPs, engaging with community stakeholders, and conducting honest evaluations of our strengths and weaknesses.

To stay on track, we've established a timeline to complete the CRA/SOC and SAM, with internal milestones and lead personnel assigned to each of the

ten categories. It's a true team effort, and the process is already sparking innovation, clarity, and stronger internal communication.

What's Next? We anticipate completing all three deliverables this fall. After that, we'll undergo a mock peer review by assessors from around Virginia in November with a goal of submitting our final package in early January. Once our package is accepted a team of fire service professionals from across the country will be assigned to review our materials. If they deem our materials sufficient to proceed, they will schedule a site visit in the spring of 2025 to verify and validate our materials in person.

If successful, our department will join a select group of accredited agencies nationwide. Less than 1% of all fire departments in North America (only 326!) hold this distinction.

But more than the title, it's the process that holds the most value. Accreditation is not a one-time event. It's a cycle of continuous improvement. Once accredited, we'll enter a five-year renewal cycle that includes annual compliance reports and periodic updates to our CRA/SOC and SAM.

How You Can Get Involved Everyone in the department has a role to play in this process. Whether you're a frontline firefighter, officer, or administrative staff, your experience and insight matter. We will be soliciting volunteers for various work groups and encourage you to participate, provide feedback on draft documents, and help us identify areas for improvement.

The more voices we include, the stronger and more accurate our self-assessment will be.

In Closing CPSE Accreditation is more than a goal—it's a commitment to excellence, accountability, and service to our community. It's a chance to measure ourselves not just against national standards, but against our own potential.

We're proud to be on this journey and grateful for the dedication each of you brings to the mission every day. Together, we'll make our department stronger, smarter, and more resilient—for today and for the future.

Releases

CARS Releases in 2025

Jacob Schaum	Paramedic
Forrest Feaser	BLS
Joshua Kim	BLS
Lauren Rylander.....	BLS
Maya Saucerman	BLS

Crozet Releases in 2025

Eden Ratliff.....	FF
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East Rivanna Releases in 2025

Leila Jamali	BLS
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ACFR Releases in 2025

James Williams.....	Driver Aerial Operator
Terrence Jordan	Driver Pump Operator
Chris Oakley	Driver Aerial Operator
Dylan Quinones	Driver Pump Operator
Chris Knight.....	Driver Aerial Operator
Jacob Donacik	ALS
Matt Gagne	ALS
Garbriel Gallarzo-Flores.....	ALS
Michael Gramando.....	ALS
Drew Gunnell	ALS
Alec McKee	ALS
Nicholas Russell	ALS
Jordan Vitt.....	ALS
Justin Lacey.....	Driver Aerial Operator

ACFR Promotions in 2025

Dan Spearin	Battalion Chief
Jake Yerly	Captain
Zachary Emery.....	Lieutenant
Jason Wilson	Lieutenant
Justin Spanka.....	Fire Technician 1
Chris Hein	Fire Technician 1
Eric Sadlon.....	Fire Technician 1
Jon Fields.....	Fire Technician 1
Wagitci Gear	Fire Technician 1
James Stuart.....	Fire Technician 2
Titus Castens	Fire Technician 2
James Williams.....	Fire Technician 1
Jordon Pouzar	Fire Technician 1
Tanner Amburgey.....	Fire Technician 1
John Taravelle	Fire Technician 1
Justin Lloyd	Fire Technician 1

ACFR Celebrations in 2025

Phil Caudle	20 YOS
Gerald Perry.....	20 YOS
Howard Lagomarsino.....	retired/20 YOS

What is HART? BY KEVIN FREIER

I was asked a similar question during my initial interview for the team and quite frankly wasn't sure how to answer it. Granted, I knew it had something to do with helping those in crisis, but outside of that I was largely in the dark. And something tells me that I am not the only one in this department who is just as clueless when it comes to the county's newest venture. So, it begs the question: what the heck is HART?

What are we? HART, which stands for Human Services Alternative Response Team, is a group of specially trained Albemarle County firefighters, paramedics, police officers, human services staff, and mental health professionals that respond to mental health and substance abuse related incidents throughout the county. Born out of a statewide police accountability report that called for alternative means of handling mental health emergencies, it is designed to offer a more therapeutic and non-invasive means of treating individuals in crisis. Outside of acute mental health care, the team also aims to help provide individuals with long-term treatment resources as well as alleviate some of the stress placed on our police, fire, and EMS systems.

Who are we? Part of ACFR's Community Risk and Resilience (CR&R) division, the team consists of myself, Captain Gilbert Monroe, Deputy Chief Emily Pelliccia, and civilian employee Virginia Leavell. Outside of ACFR, the team also consists of Officer Brian Miller and Officer Rachel Martin of ACPD, Stephen Hitchcock and Latasha Edwards of Albemarle County's Department of Human Services, and Sue Hess and Larissa Rivera with Partner for Mental Health.

What do we do? As I had previously mentioned, our main focus is to respond to mental health and substance abuse related emergencies. As of right now we are active on a "daylight" basis (Monday-Friday: 0800-1700) and self-dispatch ourselves to both fire and police calls, though we certainly welcome being added by ACFR and ACPD personnel as well. Our official goals are to: de-escalate and support residents who are in crisis (in place, reducing the need for force through alternative methods), utilize crisis stabilization services (in an effort to divert individuals away from the emergency department and/or jail), connect to community and mainstream resources through direct advocacy and referral, and to support education regarding alternative responses (both internally within departments and throughout the community). In layman's terms, we are here to offer a gentler and more psychologically minded approach to individuals exhibiting mental health and substance abuse related emergencies so you all and our brothers and sisters in blue don't have to.

How can we help you? Non-medical "frequent flyers"? Add us. People struggling with suicidal ideations? Add us. Unruly patients? Add us. Chronic drug users? Add us. Psych patients? Add us. Really anyone that could possibly benefit from a more trauma-informed and human centered approach, add us. The only caveat, of course, being that we cannot transport. We are happy to support you in any way that we can, but if there is any chance the patient will need to be transported, please do not just blindly add us and cancel yourselves because we will most likely just end up adding you back later if we need to transport. But in all seriousness, we are here to help and would love to be as much of an asset as we can. Do not hesitate to reach out to anyone of us directly or ask ECC to "add HART" on your next relevant call. I look forward to seeing y'all out in the field.



Career

Alex Rodriguez
FF/EMT, Station 15, A shift

Q. How did you come to work for ACFR?

A. My wife grew up in Earlysville, and we moved here in 2011, while she took her master's degree at UVA. I had long been interested in firefighting - as I have family who are career firefighters in Miami, and my native Rochester, NY - so I joined EVFC. At this time, I also began my career in the brewing industry, starting at South Street and Starr Hill breweries. We later moved to San Diego, where I worked as a Senior Brewer at Stone Brewing, the US's seventh largest craft brewery, and my wife began her PhD at UCLA. The last LA brewery I worked at was part-owned by George Lopez, and Gene Simmons from Kiss - and I got to serve my beer backstage at Kiss' last show in LA.

When Covid hit, I was working for an industrial beverage machinery company putting together and taking apart beverage and brewery plants,



which meant I was constantly flying all over the country, so we moved back to Charlottesville, where I rejoined Station 4 and continued my work flying out of CHO. I wanted an interesting job with a steady schedule that didn't require me to travel two weeks a month, so I applied to ACFR as I really liked its work culture and was excited that I got hired.

Q. How do you see your role in ACFR evolving?

A. I'm just happy to be here - It's a great job where every shift and call

are both different and interesting, and I have a great crew I get to work with every day. I have no master plan, I'm just going to take it day by day and progress as I go. Having worked for years in industrial beverage facilities, I have a lot of experience with hazardous chemicals; so, I got my Haz-Mat Tech certification, and I am stationed at Station 15 where our hazmat team is based.

Q. Are you still brewing in your spare time?

A. Absolutely! I got into homebrew in college and considered making a career of it in my senior year. When I moved back to Charlottesville, I had a business plan to open a brewery and taco restaurant - I learned what great tacos were in Los Angeles and San Diego and wanted to bring a little bit of that back to Virginia. However, it seems that owning a brewery is the new American Dream, and the industry is now oversaturated. I now work part-time, brewing the beer at Mount Ida Reserve on Blenheim Rd. in Scottsville. It's a very cool place to work; as well as a brewery, it is also a winery, restaurant, and wedding venue. It has beautiful views of the Blue Ridge Mountains, which I get to admire while I'm brewing - and I get to brew a lot of the beer that I want to brew, which is something I really appreciate. I also still work with Beverage Equipment Traders, doing machinery moving, installation, and dismantling in breweries and beverage facilities.

Station 4

In this issue of Sirens, we continue our tour of Albemarle County's stations with a look at Earlysville Volunteer Fire Company (EVFC). Station 4 is on Reas Ford Road just west of the closest thing Earlysville has to a downtown and was founded in 1966, meaning it celebrates its 60th anniversary next year.

Today

The station is staffed through the combination volunteer-career model favored by many of the county's volunteer stations, with Captain Alex Cathey leading the daytime ACFR crew after Captain Tom Sullivan's return to 24-hr shifts, while Chief Todd Richardson - an ECC employee for 29 years - leads the volunteer crews. Station 4's first due covers about 78 square miles of Albemarle County and stretches from Free Union and Boonesville in the west, the Greene County line in the North, Woodlands-Garth Road in the south, and Advance Mills in the east. Station 4 responds to approximately 700 calls annually.

History

Back in the early 1960s, Route 29 was a plain two lane road to NOVA, the city stopped just past the university, and the paint was still drying on the city's new airport. As new homes started to be built in Earlysville, and the community transformed from a place to grow things into a place to live and work, the local branch of the Ruritan Club recognized the need for a fire department and set about raising money to fund one. After being formally chartered in 1966, the Earlysville Volunteer Fire Company began operations the following year from a two-bay station on Route 660 with a 1953 Ford Pumper donated by Albemarle County, which had been previously used by the city. The land for the station was donated - along with the water supply and a 24-hour telephone answering service - by the Murray Corporation, across from what is now the Earlysville Business Park. Back then, most of the firefighters worked at the Murray Plant and were paged over the factory PA system.

In 1983, the Charlottesville-Albemarle Rescue Squad trained the EVFC's first batch of EMTs, so it could better serve



the needs of those living in the north of the county. In 1985, the Company moved to its current home a little further along Reas Ford Road, into a new, purpose-built, four-bay fire house with two bunk rooms an office and a kitchen. The station would host local events and fundraisers in its engine bay; the addition of the banquet hall and commercial kitchen in 2005 meant we could continue to offer this key local meeting place without having to move all of the equipment out into the parking lot.

New Members

Like all of the county's volunteer stations, the EVFC has tapped into UVA students as a staffing resource. As the station has an ambulance, we have become popular with pre-med students, keen to bolster their upcoming medical school applications with some real-world experience and patient contact. Recently, our ambulance release pipeline has faltered due to the graduations of several key members, meaning we need to up our training regime, as well as expand our recruitment to include more townies. On the fire side, we have long provided an established path from junior member through to career firefighter-EMT, with many EVFC alum now working as professional first responders for the county, the city, Spotsylvania, Augusta, Greene, Richmond, and beyond.

Community

Station 4 continues to proudly provide a space for VFW Post 2044 to meet on the second Tuesday of each month. Our volunteers also help them set up their annual Memorial Day service, where they commemorate their brothers and sisters in arms outside the Rivanna Community Church in the center of Earlysville. With a nearly new engine and a box-fresh brush truck, our apparatus are always busy

during parade season. We also provide apparatus and, of course, the H2O, for the Broadus Wood Elementary School's Field Day, as well as supporting ACFR with fire safety education.

In addition to offering an affordable venue for locals to celebrate life events - such as wedding receptions, rehearsal dinners, parties, and quinceañeras - the EVFC banquet hall also provides a convenient space for groups, churches, clubs, health groups, and homeowners' associations to meet. Station 4 continues to host Kids' birthday parties, which offer both a staple revenue stream as well as planting seeds to inspire the next generation of local firefighters. At weekends and during the lighter summer evenings, we are also the start-finish line to numerous cycle groups, keen to compete in their own personal Tour D'Earlysville as they pedal up and down the region's twisting mountain roads, making it the perfect place to spot local MAMILs (Middle-Aged Men in Lycra).

Looking Forward

Like most things born in the 80s, our station is starting to show its age. After a prolonged consultation process, we have finally settled on a design for a rebuild and are now at the fundraising and procurement stage. Purchased in 2021, new E45 is a Pierce Velocity and is one of the county's newest, and arguably best looking engines (no bias!); it was joined last year by a new Brush 43; a Ford 559, which sports a CET fire pump and can hold 300 gallons of water with foam. The old Brush 43 has not been put out to pasture and is now living out its retirement as part of the county's fleet of spare apparatus. Rescue 40 remains the county's only volunteer fire company-staffed ambulance; while Tanker 49, Engine 41, Brush 46, and Cars 40 & 41 complete our fleet.



CARS UVA Grad Members

Left ambulance, from left to right: Jenn Sachs, Jonathan Moore, Shishir Sriramaju, Kaley Dawson, Simon Alexander, Mariana Buenaventura

Right ambulance, top row, from left to right: Savaira Zaib, Gurleen Bhathal, Ria Raval

Right ambulance, bottom row, from left to right: Ryan Kenyon, Mandy Lee, Allie Zaffuts, Neha Pai

Smoke Diver—The Fallout

My arms wouldn't work. No matter how hard I strained, that stupid four-inch hose wouldn't budge.

I hauled it up toward the second story of the training tower, the rope sliding past my palms, slipping through my fingers. "If that rope slips another inch, you're doing it again!" the instructor barked.

He stood above me, a towering Texas fireman who looked like he'd eaten a smaller fireman for breakfast, before heading to the top of the training tower to ruin my morning. His voice echoed off the concrete. But none of that mattered, because my arms still didn't work.

Thud. The hose hit the ground for the final time.

I stared at it, my hands burning, my breath trapped behind the fogged lens of my SCBA mask. I didn't need to be told—I knew I was done. The instructors knew it too. There's a name for it: DOP "Dropped on Performance."

This was morning three of the six-day Oklahoma Smoke Diver program, and my "smoke buddy," Justin Spanka, and I had just failed. We weren't even halfway through.

"I'm sorry!" I blurted, my voice muffled inside my mask. I didn't know who I was apologizing to—Spanka, the instructors, my pregnant wife back home in Virginia? Maybe it was all of them. Maybe it was just the weight of disappointment trying to claw its way out of me.

I said it again. And again. The next hour passed in a kind of fog. I walked down from the tower and hung up my webbing signaling I was out. No longer a part of the class. I sat in a line of other sniffling fireman whose morning had looked a lot like mine. One by one, we got our vitals checked and met with instructors for the formal processing out.

"Were any instructors unprofessional toward you?"

"Do you feel you adequately prepared for the course?"

I answered these questions while trying not to cry in front of another grown man. I was unsuccessful at that as well. "Come back better prepared," they said. "A lot of guys have to try multiple years. Doesn't mean you're any less of a fireman."

I nodded, but it didn't land. This wasn't how it was supposed to go. Not for Spanka and me. We were college-educated, fitness-focused, all-in firemen. We trained hard. We were into the job. The Oklahoma Smoke Diver program was supposed to be right in our wheelhouse.

A course that replicates the extreme demands that may be placed on a firefighter at any incident. The program accomplishes this through pre-fatigue during PT, hands on training with some of the most proficient firemen in the country, and high intensity scenarios to put it all together. We'd waited a year for this. And it had chewed us



up and spit us out before we even saw the halfway mark.

As we drove our dirty gear and bruised egos home, clarity started to arise. I finally understood why I'd kept saying I was sorry. I was sorry I hadn't been living my life to a higher standard; sorry that I hadn't oriented my training and my fitness to be what I knew now it could be. I'd let myself believe I was already there—when I wasn't.

I turned to Spanka, still riding shotgun,

"If we want this," I said quietly, "we can get this."

—BY CALEB SHETLER

SIRENS is the official newsletter of Albemarle County Fire Rescue and is published three times yearly.

Newsletter is available online at albemarle.org/government/fire-rescue with hardcopies distributed to each station.

SUBMISSIONS: Articles, feature stories, cartoons, photographs, upcoming training, station news, and station events and functions are welcome at any time and can be submitted to ACFRSirens@albemarle.org.

