

in first with combined times of 5:04.94. Team Horry County (S.C.) earned the first-place position in the relay competition, 15 seconds ahead of the second-place team, Wright Patt (Wright Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio).

Horry County will also play host to the 19th World Challenge in Myrtle Beach, S.C., in early November.

The Firefighter Combat Challenge has seven more events scheduled in its regular season, followed by the national competition in Kissimmee, Fla., this month, then the Worlds.

Michael DeGrandpre lives in Washington, D.C., and works for the Firefighter Combat Challenge handling creative content, including photos, video and writing.

I Training I

Funding Future Firefighters

Financial aid returns for training California Fire Explorers

By Jane Jerrard

Future firefighters in California can get a financial boost on training now that the dormant California Fire Exploring Scholarship has been resurrected to help the state's young adult fire explorers and cadets pay for fire education and training.

FIRE EXPLORER 411

With support from the Boy Scouts of America, fire explorers are young volunteers—typically between ages 14 and 20—who sign up with a local fire department to get hands-on training and an insider's look at the fire service.

"It's the best entry-level or learning position a young adult can come into," says Brett Boukather, a former fire explorer turned professional firefighter, currently working for the State of California. "They can come into the department, wear a uniform, get training and eventually do ride-alongs—at no cost. It's a great chance to find out if this is a career they're interested in."

Participating fire departments benefit too. More than free labor for tasks like traffic control, a department's fire explorers are trained to that department's standards, resulting in excellent recruits once they come of age. "Departments are basically grooming future employees. That's what the Orange County program did for me," Boukather says. "And for the departments, it's a terrific way to do outreach. They can reach out to their community and offer services to youth."

THE SCHOLARSHIP RETURNS

Education and training is a large part of any explorer program—and California Explorers have been, and are once again, able to use a scholarship to help pay for targeted training.

Captain Mike Van Bibber of the Orange County Fire Department (now Authority) started the California Fire Exploring Scholarship in the mid-1980s in honor of Orange County Fire Explorer Armond Minogue, who was killed in an auto accident. That program, which gave \$100 each year to a fire explorer, lasted through 1991, when Captain Van Bibber retired.

When Van Bibber passed away in May

2009, it sparked Boukather—a recipient of the scholarship in 1987—to pick up the torch. “I originally decided to give away \$100 of my own money every year,” he says. “But it’s really grown.” After registering the scholarship as a 501(c)(3) charity, setting up a board of directors and developing a website, Boukather’s new California Fire Exploring Scholarship raised \$3,000, half of it from local casinos owned by Native American tribes. “The LA City Firemen’s Credit Union was very generous too,” Boukather says. So the charity was able to give \$200 to four fire explorers in its first year.

Explorers apply for the annual scholarship by submitting an essay, and the scholarship’s board of directors selects the winners. “They can spend the money on any career-enhancing endeavor,” Boukather explains.

ATTENDING THE ACADEMY

All of the 2010 scholarship recipients used their funds to attend the California Fire Explorer Association’s Explorer Academy. The Academy takes place once a year over spring break, and is hosted by a different fire department each year—sometimes in Southern California and sometimes farther north.

“It’s an intensive week,” says Jason Weber, president of the California Fire Explorers Association (www.cfea.net). “The kids have a 5 a.m. start, and they’re on the bus to the training by 6. After dinner they have classroom training and that goes until 10 or 11 at night.” Over 5 days, explorers get hands-on training in wildland fires, structure fires (working on buildings acquired by the host fire department), auto extrication, flammable liquids and basic rescue skills—and go home with various state certifications.

Academy attendance is limited to 175 explorers and 100 advisors. The advisors are instructors from throughout California, many of whom volunteer their personal time. Weber explains that the association works with the host agency, which is responsible for finding a high school where explorers will eat, sleep and get classroom training.

The academy is open to all current fire explorers in the state of California with at least 6 months of service in their respective post—but the limited number of slots has resulted in a lottery system for entry. Applications for 2011 will be available Dec. 1 and are due by mid-January.

Visit www.cfescholarship.org to learn more about the California Fire Exploring Scholarship. 🌐

Jane Jerrard lives in Chicago and writes regularly for *FireRescue* magazine.



2010 scholarship recipient Adam Delaney stands with Vista (Calif.) Fire Department Chief Officer Don Shellhammer.

PHOTO CITY OF VISTA FIRE DEPARTMENT