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Local firefighters qualify for world Firefighter Combat Challenge



Independent/Scott Kingsley

Firefighter Jason Schliep demonstrates the Keiser sled event in the Firefighter Combat Challenge. Schliep and four of his teammates qualified to attend the World Firefighter Combat Challenge relay competition in Las Vegas in November.

By Sarah Schulz
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If the idea of running up five flights of stairs, pulling a firefighters' hose 75 feet or dragging a 175-pound dummy the length of a football field sounds difficult, try doing it in full bunker gear in less than two minutes.

Five members of the Grand Island Fire Department can do all that and more in just over a minute and 45 seconds while wearing 50 pounds of bunker gear and a 19-pound air tank.

Their time at the regional Firefighter Combat Challenge in Omaha earned them a spot at the world contest in Las Vegas Nov. 4-8.

Jason Schliep, Jared Stockwell, Jeff Engberg, Cameron Calleroz and Phil Brown will be competing on Vegas' Fremont Street as a relay team and may even be seen on ESPN when the show airs.

Jim Hale and Bradley Jerman also went to the regional event in Omaha. Hale didn't compete due to an injury and Jerman only participated in the individual event.

The Firefighter Combat Challenge was first conducted in 1991 and usually attracts more than 650 fire departments for the United States and Canada.

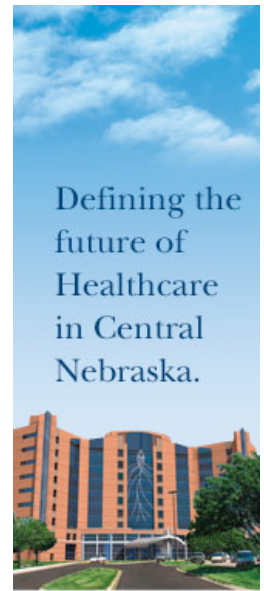
More than 3,000 men and women compete every year at the 18 regional events, one national event and one world showdown, according to information from Jerman.

The relay and the individual events involve the same challenges, only in the relay each thing is done by a different person.

The firefighters begin by running up the 63 steps of a five-story tower while carrying a pack

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weighing 42 pounds. After depositing the pack in a box, they have to hoist a 42-pound roll up to the top of the tower before running down the tower stairs to the beam drive. Each person then uses a 9-pound mallet to drive the 160-pound beam five feet.

The next obstacle involves weaving in and out of cones for 140 feet before dragging a hose, with a resistance of between 140 and 240 pounds, 75 feet.

The final challenge is to drag the 175-pound "Rescue Randy" dummy backward for 106 feet.

According to Jerman's information, the average time for the overall challenge is three minutes and three seconds.

Grand Island got involved in the challenge last year after Paul Davis Restoration became a national sponsor of the event. The group said five firefighters competed in both the individual and team events last year in Sioux City, Iowa. This year there were 10 members, three of whom couldn't attend the regional because of scheduling conflicts.

Stockwell said the men have gotten competitive with each other and their own times.

Calleroz put a course together at Station 4 for practice. However, the department lacks a five-story tower so the men have to run up and down a regular flight of stairs to condition for that particular event.

When one considers the relay team hadn't even practiced together prior to competing in Omaha last month, the fact they made it to Las Vegas is even more impressive. Calleroz said the men work different shifts and it was nearly impossible to get everyone together to train.

Jerman said as the interest in the competition has grown within the department, the subject of hosting a challenge in Grand Island has come up. It would cost between \$25,000 and \$30,000 to be a host city.

But for now the men are concentrating on improving their time for the world competition and on raising the \$3,000 needed for travel and hotel expenses. Jerman said the team plans to have some fundraisers and is seeking sponsorships, in addition to Paul Davis, to defray costs.

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