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Our 159th Year

Firefighters try to meet the challenge



With the clock ticking and under the watchful eyes of an official, Janesville firefighter Rob Calhoon drags a 170-pound mannequin down a 100-foot-long track in the Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge on Saturday in the parking lot of the Home Depot in Janesville. Top finishers at Saturday's competition earn the right to compete in the national finals in Las Vegas in November.



Bill Olmsted/Gazette Staff

Teams from more than 100 fire stations around the country competed in the Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge Saturday in Janesville.

Above left: Janesville firefighter Matt Diehls sports a smile after a dramatic come-from-behind victory in a heat of the challenge.

Above right: Nine-year-old Hayley Diehls, right, and her cousin Sydney Warrenburg, 11, cheer Saturday for Diehls' father, Matt, as he participates in the challenge

Combat challenge draws firefighters from across U.S.

By Danielle Letenyel
Gazette Staff

It's important for firefighters to keep in shape.

The job requires them to pull heavy hoses, climb stairs and drag victims from burning buildings. It can be a real challenge.

The Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge, held Saturday in the Home Depot parking lot in Janesville, turns the trials of the job into a competition where firefighters across the country can hone their skills and have fun doing it.

"To be Challenge-ready is a step beyond what you normally do," Janesville firefighter Matt Diehls said.

Diehls and four other Janesville firefighters competed with more than 100 other teams from fire stations across the country. Milton firefighters were the only other Rock County station to join in the games.

"It helps up focus on our fitness level," Milton Fire Chief Chris Lukas said.

The Challenge grew out of a 1975 project by the faculty at the University of Maryland's Sports Medicine Center to create a physical ability test for a Maryland fire department. The test was designed to see if potential firefighters had the physical capabilities needed to perform essential functions of the job, said Paul Davis, who was on the faculty at the time and worked on the

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In 1991, Davis took the idea one step further and turned the test into a competition rather than training tool. Thus the Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge was born.

Competing as individuals, teams and in relays, wearing all of their gear, participants had to:

- Climb to the top of a five-story tower carrying a 42-pound hose pack.

- Hoist a 42-pound roll of hose to the top of the tower.

- Run back down the stairs without missing a step, and drive a 160-pound steel beam 5 feet down a track using a 9-pound shot mallet.

- Run an obstacle course. Grab a fully charged fire hose and shoot at a target.

- Drag a 175-pound dummy known as "Rescue Randy" 100-feet walking backwards to the finish line.

At least 18 challenges are held each year at different locations. Winners are announced at each event. Firefighters and teams can also qualify for the finals that will be held

Nov. 9 through 13 in Las Vegas. The finals are broadcast on ESPN.

Eligibility for the finals is based on times, Davis said. Individuals under the age of 40 and relay teams that finish the course under two minutes are eligible. Firefighters age 40 to 50 must have a time below three minutes. Those over 50 years old must have a time below 4:45 minutes.

Female firefighters participating need a time less than six minutes to go to the finals.

Davis estimated that about half of those participating Saturday will be eligible to go to the finals.

The Milton Fire Department's relay team qualified to go to the Vegas games, Fire Chief Chris Lukas said. The team had a time of 1 minute, 54 seconds in the relay race.

It is the second year in a row that Milton earned the opportunity to go to the finals, Lukas said. Last year, the team chose not to go, even though it was eligible, Lukas said. He's not sure if the team will go this year.

CORPORATE CHALLENGE

Local businesses got their chance to do the firefighter challenge on Friday night at the Corporate Cup Challenge.

The winner will have a donation made in their name to the Wisconsin Safety Alliance Burn camp.



Bill Olmsted/Gazette Staff

Firefighter Rob Calhoun takes aim at the target with a stream of water during a heat of the Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge in Janesville on Saturday.



Bill Olmsted/Gazette Staff

Using a mallet, Janesville firefighter Joe Kuntz forces a weight down a track as part of the Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge.