Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Fort Drum community members pack fire station for Firefighter for a Day event

FORT DRUM, N.Y. -- Firefighters often say they meet community members on some of their worst days.

And since house fires, traffic accidents and medical emergencies are not ideal venues for a meet-and-greet, firefighters often look for other ways to interact with the people they serve.

Firefighter for a Day was such an opportunity, as Fort Drum community members packed Fire Station 2 on Oct. 11 to meet with Fire and Emergency Services Division personnel and special guests Sparky the Fire Dog and Smokey the Bear.

“This is just a great way to get community members together and teach them about fire safety, and do it in a fun way,” said Fort Drum Assistant Chief of Fire Prevention Steve LaRue. “We want to keep the community safe, and the people who live, work, and recreate here safe. That’s what we all signed up for.”

The event included several interactive activities for hands-on learning. Children were invited to put out a virtual fire using a fire extinguisher simulator, hit a target with a fire hose, and learn how a fire alarm alerts emergency personnel with an interactive alarm system (built by Fort Drum Public Works’ Utilities Branch).

“By emphasizing the importance of fire prevention and fire safety, it keeps both the community at large safe and our responders safe,” LaRue said. “Fires can be high-risk events. As firefighters, we will risk our lives to save a life. But if it can be avoided through public education and activities like this, that benefits everyone.”

Family members also explored the different vehicles and equipment that firefighters use, including a Black River Volunteer Fire Department ladder truck. Children toured the City of Watertown Fire Department’s mobile Captain Jack's Fire Safety Home where they practiced how to feel a door handle for warmth (indicating a possible fire on the other side), then they ducked underneath the smoke and exited through a window into the arms of a Watertown firefighter.

There was no doubt that families – with hands full of souvenir fire hats, goodies, and safety pamphlets – left the station with a better understanding and appreciation for what firefighters do every day.

“It’s definitely a unique dynamic that most people never see,” said Capt. Dan Payne, Fort Drum supervisory firefighter. “In a sense, we are always on response mode. You go through your daily activities, but you must always be ready. And that comes down to training and muscle memory.”

Payne has served as a firefighter for 21 years, beginning his career in the Air Force.

“They chose that career field for me, and I fell in love with it since Day One,” he said.

Fort Drum Fire Chief Jason Brunet said the event was organized with Mountain Community Homes in support of Fire Prevention Week. He said it’s been a busy time for the fire crew, but in a good way.

“We have been going out to all the child development centers on post during Fire Prevention Week, bringing our fire truck and Sparky the Fire Dog to meet the kids and talk about fire safety,” he said.

On Friday, Fort Drum FES personnel will support Black River Volunteer Fire Department’s Fire Prevention Week event for school children, and next week, they will host more than 70 second-grade students from Carthage Elementary School for a fire station tour.

“We have been getting so many requests that we obviously want to support because we want to get our message out there about fire prevention and fire safety,” Brunet said. “And it is great to work with our mutual aid partners from Watertown and Black River on these kinds of events where we can educate children – many of whom are from military families we support at Fort Drum.”

The theme of this year’s Fire Prevention Week is “Cooking Safety,” according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). LaRue said that most house fires nationwide start in the kitchen, due largely to unattended cooking or frying mishaps.

The Mountain Community Homes staff has been informing residents on their social media pages about fire hazards in the home and tips for practicing safe cooking.

For more fire safety tips, visit [www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org) or <https://safety.army.mil>.

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Photo Captions:

Firefighter2 - Fort Drum families experience what it is like to be a firefighter Oct. 11 with a tour of Fire Station 2 and several hands-on activities during the Firefighter for a Day event, hosted by Mountain Community Homes and Fort Drum Fire and Emergency Services Division. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

Firefighter3 - Fort Drum family members try to put out a virtual fire with a fire extinguisher simulator during the Firefighter for a Day event at Fire Station 2. Fort Drum Mountain Community Homes teamed up with Fort Drum Fire and Emergency Services for the Fire Prevention Week event to promote fire safety in the community. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

Firefighter5 - Fort Drum family members tour the City of Watertown Fire Department’s mobile Captain Jack’s Fire Safety Home during the Firefighter for a Day event Oct. 11 inside Fire Station 2. Inside, they practiced how to feel a door handle for warmth – indicating a possible fire on the other side, then they ducked underneath the smoke and exited through a window into the arms of a Watertown firefighter. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)