

## **A Day in the Life of the Newport Beach Fire Department**

By: Caroline Leedom

So there I was on my way to the Newport Beach Fire Station #3, located at 868 Santa Barbara Drive, wondering why I put myself into these situations. I had just agreed to a drive along with the Newport Beach Fire Station in Fashion Island for the purpose of writing this story and I am deathly afraid of fires. I mean, they're nice to look at when they're safely contained in a campfire fire pit... but being in the presence of a wild fire burning out of control... um, no thank you. Still, I had somehow agreed to spend a whole day with a bunch of firemen and by golly, I was going to keep my word.

My only solace was the fact that it was raining that morning and so maybe there would be no fires that day... because, you know, rain. As I was pulling up to the fire station, I see a gentleman taking down the flag as not to let it fly in the rain. How respectful, I thought.

After parking, I walk up the pathway through the rain puddles to the fire station and wonder if my little ballet flats were the right shoes to wear that day after all. Fire fighter, Brendan Keyes looks up and extends a hand to welcome me. I am immediately introduced to all the crew there. My, what a polite group of men, I think, as I am brought to the Fire Chief's office. Fire Chief, Chris Fanti, a veteran fire fighter of 15 years, is a man full of information. In fact, after about 10 minutes of hearing interesting fact after fact, I realized I probably should be recording it.

Firefighter, Keyes gave me a quick tour of the firehouse, which included a stop into their kitchen, which was huge and included at least 4 refrigerators. There was a small pile of boxes of fruit and cookies that had been delivered by residents who recently had a visit by some of the firefighters and who just wanted to say "thank you." I had a peek into their television room, which included a row of large leather lazy boy chairs and spurred a conversation about whether the crew watches the Super Bowl together.

After the tour, the day started with a training session for Keyes, who is a new addition to the Newport Beach Fire Department or NBFD for short. We head to the fire truck and Fire Engineer, Adam Davenport, politely opens the door for me. I can't tell you how excited I was to hop into the seat of a shiny red fire truck and put those headphones on like a real professional firefighter. Our destination was Firehouse #7, located at 20401 SW Acacia Street, and only a few minutes away. This is where much of the training is done. There is a 2-story structure that the NBFD erected specifically for training use. It's to simulate a 2-story home. Inside, is a Houdini's dream. There is contraption after contraption of devices to test one's agility. One contraption is to test your ability to get out of a tight space, one is to test your ability to get out of a very high window, one is to test your ability to get out of a space that has literally fallen down on top of you and yet one more space tests your ability to

crawl through an area with hundreds of fallen fires (the point being not to get yourself and your gear tangled up in them.) What happens when the firefighters successfully pass all these tests? They go back to see if they can do it all over again, but this time with a 60 lb dummy doll. Captain Fanti said, "Oh it's really fun when you have to do these exercises with a 225 lb dummy doll". The fire fighters all have to do these exercises. After all, they have to be ready at a moment's notice to be able to do these things in the real world.

Even I got into the mix when they asked if I wanted to aim and shoot the water hose. Not only can you change the diameter of the water coming out but you can change the pressure. Water is obviously aimed directly at fires to put them out. Additionally, water can be used to create a "water blanket" that can help protect surrounding structures from flames. I learned about the firefighting foam that is mixed in with the water. It's purpose is to coat the fuel and to cool the fire, preventing its contact with oxygen, resulting in suppression of the fire. Since all citizens have to be respectful of run off, which goes into the sea, the Nbfd responsibly uses environmentally friendly biodegradable foam.

I have to be honest. I was a bit in awe of how easily the firefighters were able to pick up the hoses filled with water... as they were HEAVY. I certainly tried and could barely move them. No wonder firefighters are so buff.

After leaving the training site, we all realize we were starving and decide to grab some lunch. We decide on grabbing a bite at Fashion Island and on our way there, we get a call that an 88 year old female fell in her home and cannot get up. Captain Fanti asks, "You wanna go on this call?!" Not sure if he was asking me or his fellow crew mates, but I immediately yell out an enthusiastic "Yes!" The location, after all, was only a couple minutes away. After a confusing description on how to find the spare key to enter the home, we discover that the back door was unlocked and announce "Newport Beach Fire Dept." before entering the home to hear "Yes, over here!" Inside, the elderly woman was found sitting on the floor, trying to get up. With a little help from the agile firemen, she was lifted up. The men asked countless times if she was ok, if anything was hurting her and she assured them she was feeling fine. Then they asked if she needed anything else before they left & she said, with a smile, "Well, can you please move these papers?" To which, they immediately obliged. She also mentioned that she hadn't heard from her husband all morning, which made us all nervous. Unsure of what he was going to find, Captain Fanti went upstairs to go find him. A few moments later, he came back down to let her know that her husband was fine and that he was just taking a shower, however, unaware that his wife had fallen and the fire department had come to rescue her up off the floor.

I have to say, that one of the most impressive things that stood out for me from the whole day wasn't some grandiose gesture or life saving rescue, but the compassion and respect I saw towards this woman by the Nbfd. Once more asking if she felt OK and if there was anything else they could do for her before they left, the men asked if

they could bring in her newspaper and after doing so, went back to bring in her mail!

Once the call was completed, we decide to commence with our original lunch plans. We pointed the red fire truck in the direction of Fashion Island and set off for Hopdoddy, for some burgers. I fully embraced the one time I would be able to pull up to a red fire lane curb, and it being totally legal, as we all walk away from the red fire fighting machine.

After we grabbed our burgers to go and were back at the fire truck, I once again experienced the chivalry of the Newport Beach Fire Department. Davenport, made sure he shielded me from oncoming traffic as well as making sure he opened my door for me.

Back at the fire station, we ate our lunch and I got to know these men more. I was told stories of some their most memorable calls to the moment they each knew they wanted to be a fire fighter. I learned that thousands of men and woman vie to be a firefighter each year and only a few are chosen. I was told stories of how they camped out for days to be able to have a shot at the academy. Thousands of men and women apply to be a firefighter and only 500 applications are accepted a year. From those 500 applications, only a few are accepted into the Fire Academy and fewer, still are offered a position. There are 120 firefighters spanning the 8 fire stations in Newport Beach. That's an average of 15 firefighters per station.

After lunch, Captain Fanti continues Keye's training by having him explain to me how to use a defibulator. Did you know those defibulator boxes walk you step-by-step through the process of how to use them? Check for pulse, apply electrodes to bare chest & voila! Finally! I am now no longer unsure of how to use one of those defibulator boxes!

Then, I was asked if I wanted to climb the ladder of the fire truck. I have learned in my life to say yes to opportunities that I may not otherwise ever get the chance to do so again. So, while I am not fond of heights, I said "Heck Yeah!" and was given a pair of tennis shoes to wear (because, yep, my ballet flats weren't going to cut it). So there I was, with a pair of loaned socks and some surprisingly well fitting pair of loaned tennis shoes on my feet, not to mention a yellow fire fighter helmet. I was ready to climb the 100 foot ladder to the very top. The fire truck was backed up carefully into their outdoor parking lot and the ladder was slowly raised up. I noticed the ladder went so high, it almost seemed to disappear into the clouds, or at the very least, into the tops of the high coconut trees the line the back perimeter of the fire station. The Hawaiian in me, of course, had a goal of trying to pick a coconut off the tree and bring it back down with me. All suited up in my harness, yellow helmet and loaned tennis shoes, I climbed the rungs, with firefighter, Brendan Keyes, right behind me, in case, God forbid, I fell. Climbing the ladder to the top and back down again, I'm proud to say that while I didn't come back down with a coconut, the ladder adventure was completed with no casualties, unless you want to count the muscles in my thighs that I felt for the next few days. Ouch!

After all of this excitement, I realized it was nearing the end of my day with them and just as I was exclaiming how I'd love to be able to go on another call with everyone before I go, the lights started to flash and there was a call for the crew of the Nbfd #3 to head back to Fashion Island, this time to come to the aid of a woman who was found unconscious in Macy's. I found myself running to the fire truck, for fear of being the last one holding any of them up, throwing the head set on and buckling my seat belt. And we were off.

We found the lady, now awake, amidst a small group of concerned shoppers and immediately, the Nbfd took the reigns taking her vitals, etc. As I observed the firemen at work, I once again was impressed with their patience and compassion. The woman was weak and shaken and about to lie down on a pile of clothes when Captain Fanti convinced her to lay down in the gurney instead. When she became emotional about whether or not she should tell her husband (who was waiting for her outside the store, unaware of all the commotion inside) and how her husband might react to finding out about her accident, Capt. Fanti assured her it was the right thing to do and that he would gently do so with compassion. Once she gave us a description of her husband and where we could find him, I accompanied the Captain down the three flights of escalators and out of the department store to find a gentleman with his description. He was thankful we told him what had happened and that they were able to help his wife. Then, we accompanied him back to the fire truck to await the return of his beloved wife. Once she was cleared to go and she and her husband were reunited, we set off back to the firehouse.

Once back at the station, it was time to say goodbye. After saying our farewells, I get back into my car and reflect on the day. Not only did I gain a deeper appreciation for the men and women of the fire fighting profession, I gained a newfound respect for the Newport Beach Fire Department. My biggest take away was how impressed I was with the crews' compassion towards the community and dedication to their profession.

The one quality that each fire fighter told me the Newport Beach Fire Department stresses is customer service and I, as an observer, can honestly say that is a quality that the Newport Beach fire department exceeds in tenfold. The fire fighters truly love what they do and it shows. One can also tell they care for the residents of Newport Beach and have a strong desire to keep them safe. Throughout the year, the Nbfd sponsors events and classes for the community to learn about what the Nbfd does as well as residents to learn basic skills to help keep them safe.

The Newport Beach Fire Department is holding a Fire Ops 101 event on Feb. 25, 2017 for local city employees, council members and civil engineer board members in order to expose them to the various skills required of a firefighter. The event takes place over an entire day. It includes live fire, hose evolutions, search and rescue and EMS. The last time the Nbfd did this, the participants were able to extinguish a fire, participate in a simulated medical call and they also pulled a hose as well as complete various search and rescue drills.

The Newport Beach Fire Department also invites residents to join the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program to learn how to help their neighborhoods following unexpected disasters. The CERT program is available free of charge to Newport Beach residents and \$40 for non-residents. there will be two separate CERT program series held for spring 2017. All classes are held at Newport Beach Fire Station #7 (20401 Acacia). To register, applicants must complete a CERT program application. Applications are available at: [www.nbcert.org](http://www.nbcert.org) or by calling (949) 644-3112.