

Firefighters travel, compete and improve skills

The Puyallup Fire Extrication Team raises money to cover expenses for slated competitions

BY KARI PLOG
of The Herald

Firefighters from the Puyallup Fire Extrication Team took a break from responding to calls to respond to hunger last week when they took over Sparks Firehouse Deli in Puyallup.

The team hosted the fundraiser to raise money for upcoming international competitions.

"We took orders, cooked food and bused tables all night," Captain Jeff Pugh of Central Pierce Fire and Rescue said.

The firefighters hosted a silent auction to raise funds and the restaurant owner donated

20 percent of the proceeds from all food sales between 6 and 9 p.m. Tuesday Aug. 17.

The Puyallup Fire Extrication Team (PXT) is a non-profit educational group that instructs departments on auto extrication. The team competes in various regional and national competitions to improve upon techniques in extricating victims from vehicles in auto accidents. Pugh said the purpose of the team is improvement and education, not competition.

Marc Beal, a Central Pierce paramedic and PXT team member, said constant advancements in the auto industry construction and materials present a constant challenge to firefighters in auto extrication.

"It's a constant work in motion," Beal said. "Cars aren't built like they used to be."

Beal said all team members have extensive experience in auto extrication and all of them combine that experience to find a more efficient and safe way to save victims.

"We have all been a part of

calls that could have gone better," he said.

The funds from last week's fundraiser will help the team when they travel to Cork, Ireland, from Sept. 2 to 5 to compete in the World Extrication Challenge. They will be the only United States team represented on the world stage of auto extrication.

"For us to represent the U.S. is a pretty big deal," Pugh said.

Pugh said the team qualified for the competition the last three years but couldn't afford to go in the past.

Immediately following the world competition, PXT will travel to Calgary, Alberta, Canada, to compete in the International Extrication Challenge and teach an extrication course from Sept. 19 to 25.

The team is made up of 13 firefighters from four local departments and has been instructing techniques in auto extrication since 2000. The team has traveled to Chicago and back teaching auto extrication to departments around

the country, Pugh said.

"Through our efforts over the past 10 years we have been instrumental in helping fire teams get started," Pugh said. "This is all about learning. The competition is fun but it's not the main focus."

Todd Maglioeca, technical rescue lead for Tacoma Fire, said he has taken several courses through PXT. Firefighters who attended the courses took the skills learned back to the department and taught them internally.

"These guys have the ability to deliver material in a way that makes them giants in the field," Maglioeca said. "They are certainly one of the best (teams) in the country. Their performance speaks for itself."

A majority of the team is made up of members from Central Pierce Fire and Rescue. Other members come from Tacoma Fire, Lakewood Fire and South King Fire and Rescue. Competing in the World Extrication Challenge is a cumulative effort from years of quali-

fyng and excelling in national competitions, Pugh said.

"It's a learning symposium," Pugh said. "Competition is designed to hone your skills. You bring back information to improve tools and skills for your department."

Competitions consist of different scenarios. Pugh said the teams are sequestered and thrown immediately into a test scenario simulating a severe auto accident with just 20 minutes to come up with a plan and save the victim with various tools and techniques.

Judges monitor each scenario and have criteria sheets that score teams based on safety, communication, patient care, methods and other related categories.

Competing in challenges like these offer opportunities for growth to learn, perfect and teach the techniques seen from other teams, Pugh said.

"It is interesting to see (other team's) techniques and tools," he said.

Pugh said the benefit of trav-

eling internationally is seeing the different ways that teams execute extrication in different countries.

"The exposure to European tools and methods of extrication is pretty unique," he said. "You pick up so much from watching those teams compete."

One of the most important things that teams take away from competition, Pugh said, is improving upon their techniques that are already great.

"You don't know what you don't know," he said. "It's like anything else. Practice makes perfect."

Pugh said the teams all bring their "good ways" of extrication to the table and blend them to make "the best way." He said the key is to increase the "golden hour," which is the time it takes to get a trauma patient from the scene to an operating table.

"That's the ticket," Pugh said. "It's all based around patient care."