

## **FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH JANUARY 2022**

### **DARRELL LITTLE, FIREFIGHTER/PARAMEDIC FIRE STATION 57, SOUTH LOS ANGELES**



Last month, as Firefighter/Paramedic Darrell Little and colleagues rode down Florence Avenue, a driver pulled up next to their engine and started vigorously honking. Little peered out the window and saw his sister smiling as she waved excitedly.

Interactions like this are uniquely frequent for Little, who serves the community where he was raised.

Little is assigned to Fire Station 57 in South Los Angeles, mere blocks from his current residence and a few streets away from his childhood home. Surprisingly, he is one of only a handful of active LAFD members who live and work in the neighborhood where they grew up.

Little's current assignment was not coincidental. He requested the opportunity to work here shortly after completing paramedic school three and a half years ago. "Practically every day, I see familiar faces when we're running calls. Plus, my commute is a piece of cake," said Little with a lively grin.

The community served by Station 57 is one of the LAFD's busiest. In 2021, Station 57 responded to more than 12,000 emergency calls. It is also an area plagued by 9-1-1 calls related to violence. Little and his station mates confront a daily reality that tests their stamina, skills, and fortitude.

"It takes a certain type of character to want to work in this area willingly. We see a significant number of incidents that are really disheartening," explained Little. "I've been on calls where it's people I know lost to gun violence or an overdose. It's not easy, not by a long shot. But my roots are here. Many of the people I care about live in these neighborhoods. That's why I asked to come here, so I can make a difference in the lives of the people I love."

Little was a junior in high school when he decided on his dream job. As a multi-sport athlete, he was interested in pursuing a career that allowed him to stay physically active while helping others. "One afternoon, I dropped by Fire Station 94 to ask a few questions about becoming a firefighter. They encouraged me to join the Cadet program, and the rest is history," explained Little.

Little credits his mother (a single parent of four), Firefighter Paul Wingate, and Firefighter/Paramedic Dexter McDaniels (retired) for supporting him on his journey to join the LAFD. All were instrumental in helping Little achieve his dream. "Firefighter Wingate showed me the meaning of hard work. I was an athlete at the time, and working with him at the wildland academy was the first time I ever threw up from physical exertion. It was a real eye-opener, but I fell in love with the challenge."

"Firefighter/Paramedic McDaniels mentored me throughout my interview process. I was a nervous wreck leading up to my interview, but McDaniels was determined to see me succeed. He practiced with me twice a week for hours on end. As we neared my interview date, he once spent 10 hours reviewing material with me, committed to seeing me score 100%."

Thanks to a dedicated support system and an unwavering work ethic, Little joined the LAFD in March 2017. "That was the moment I knew I'd made it, that I'd made something of myself and made my family proud."

Although he is the first in his family to become a firefighter, Little is confident he will not be the last. "I have ten nieces and nephews nearby. I see them every week, and it's my job to be a role model for them, just like the guys at Fire Station 94 were for me," added Little. "The kids are starting to ask a lot of the same questions that I did when my interest peaked, so who knows. Maybe one day soon, I'll get to guide them through the process of becoming a firefighter."

Firefighter/Paramedic Darrell Little was selected as Firefighter of the Month due to his dedication and exemplary service to his community. "Firefighter/Paramedic Little exhibits outstanding professionalism and

a genuine passion for improving the lives of residents in our service area,” expressed Captain Robert Hawkins of Station 57. “He treats every patient with the care and respect of a family member. He represents best of what it means to be part of the Los Angeles City Fire Department.”

## **FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH FEBRUARY 2022**

### **TREY GLENNON, ENGINEER**

**FIRE STATION 63, VENICE**



How do LAFD engineers expertly maneuver through L.A. traffic? The blaring sirens can only help so much. The process requires skill, expert-level focus, and a solid crew of vigilant passengers. Engineers dedicate countless hours studying, training, and simulating the complexities of navigating Los Angeles' congested mishmash of urban thoroughfares, residential streets, construction closures, and major highways.

Sitting behind the wheel of an LAFD fire engine is a privilege that comes with great responsibility. Engineers are tasked with safely transporting their teammates to an incident site. As they cautiously weave through traffic, their heads are constantly on a swivel for pedestrians, cyclists, and unaware drivers. "Sometimes, it can be a bit nerve-wracking trying to get to the scene of an accident without getting into an accident," expressed Engineer Trey Glennon.

Firefighters train to handle a seemingly endless variety of life-threatening incidents and scenarios. According to Glennon, expectations of LAFD members are starkly higher than in some other departments. "As soon as you step on that truck or engine, you have to know your role backward and forwards. But you also have to know the duties of those next to you – kind of like a well-rehearsed sports play," explained Glennon.

Glennon was promoted to Engineer nearly five years ago. His primary role is to drive the fire engine, establish a water supply at the scene of a fire, and provide support to his team members during non-fire-related emergencies. He is also responsible for the preventative maintenance of the engine, its mechanical components, tools, and equipment.

"I was a firefighter and paramedic for close to 10 years," shared Glennon. "It was incredibly fulfilling, but nothing quite like the excitement, pressure, and thrill of being an engineer. Personally, it completely shifted my perspective on what it means to be part of the LAFD. It's kind of like being the locker room leader for your team. You help set the tone and mindset for your teammates."

Glennon will celebrate his 15-year anniversary with the LAFD this March. His journey has been wild, rewarding, and unpredictable, much like the types of incidents he responds to in his role at Fire Station 63 in Venice.

Engineer Glennon is an integral member of the working group mentoring future generations of engineers. On his days off, he can often be found at the In-Service Training Division (ISTS), volunteering to refresh and revise the training materials that help LAFD personnel develop safe driving habits. In fact, Glennon is working on the finishing touches of a year-long project producing a driving safety video for the entire Department. The video's emphasis is on preventing accidents and civilian casualties.

With any remaining spare time, Glennon is helping develop a Battalion Driver Instructor program, which everyone in the Department will undergo. He is also part of the ETP (employee testing program) that assists members in obtaining and maintaining their commercial driver's license.

During his training to become an engineer, Glennon developed an appreciation for the effort others invested in helping him succeed. "I had some great mentors, my captains and the engineers at Station 13 and 33, and the practical instructors that helped prep me for the engineer's exam," shared Glennon. "I knew then and there that I wanted to do the same for others coming up the ranks. Committing to your teammates is the only way we all get better."

Glennon is married to Christina, a decorated Army veteran who now works as an executive for an iconic, California-based clothing company (revered for their denim goods). He and his wife are parents to two young boys. The Glennon family loves camping, bike rides, and beach trips.

On top of being a father, husband, LAFD engineer, a (nearly) full-time volunteer with the ISTS Division, and a Driving Program practical instructor, Glennon also carves out time to volunteer with the Department's Peer

Support Program to anonymously aid colleagues in coping with PTSD, depression, addiction, family struggles, and other challenging life experiences.

“Several years back, I went through a rough patch that left me feeling like I was sinking, spiraling, struggling to keep it together,” revealed Glennon. “The [peer support] program helped me press the reset button, helped me see there was no shame in seeking help. If I can possibly do the same for a colleague, I have an obligation to help. That’s why we’re here, right? That’s why we joined the LAFD.”

## **FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH MARCH 2022**

### **KEVIN DAVIS, CAPTAIN I**

#### **MEDICAL LIAISON UNIT, DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES**



Captain Kevin Davis is a man on a mission. He is a serial overachiever with a kind, courteous demeanor akin to a favorite elementary school teacher or youth sports coach. His reluctance to discuss his accomplishments and scope of responsibilities underscores the immeasurable value he brings to the Department.

This month marks Captain Davis' two-year special duty anniversary with the LAFD's Medical Liaison Unit (MLU) in Downtown Los Angeles.

He reported to work on March 1, 2020, expecting to handle a sizable load of processing on-duty injury and illness-related medical cases. Davis and the three other MLU Captains would process approximately 100 cases involving shoulder, hip, knee, and foot injuries in a typical month. Six days later, everything shifted when the LAFD recorded its first internal positive COVID case.

"Later that week, the Fire Chief summoned [MLU] to a meeting. He wanted to hear our plan for how we were going to handle positive cases amongst our personnel," recounted Davis. "As it turns out, there were no plans for this. Considering how thorough and meticulous the LAFD is, there was nothing comparable to build upon. COVID was way different. No one, no other agency or entity had prepared for a scenario like this."

Immediately after the Chief's meeting, the MLU team set to work developing the plan to test, track, report, and, if needed, support COVID-positive members. "The biggest challenge was creating an effective system for managing all the moving parts. We had to flesh all this out amid surging caseloads - the policies, communications, metrics, treatment options, and even selecting what software platforms and tech applications to use. As it turned out, this was just the beginning."

In November of 2020, the LAFD logged its 300th COVID case. By mid-January of 2021, the total soared to more than 700. "At one point, I was calling more than 50 members per day to notify them that they needed to quarantine," recalled Davis. "From drill tower recruits to deputy chiefs, I was responsible for breaking the tough news to our positive members. For those that needed it, I also helped them manage their medical care." Overall, Davis manually processed more than 2,200 positive COVID cases.

Barely two months into his MLU role, while also leading the COVID tracking and reporting process, Davis was thrust into the aftermath of the Boyd Street explosion, a massive structure fire in which 12 members were injured, 11 of them with devastating burns. Davis was tapped to manage the medical cases for the 11 burned members. He would drive to the Grossman Burn Center each week, bringing pizza to the members and their families as they worked through their recovery. "Before the Boyd St. incident, I had never met any of the injured members," shared Davis. "But after two years of guiding them through surgeries, skin grafts, physical therapy, counseling, and their worker's compensation claims, I have become best friends with some of these members. If there were anything close to a silver lining in this tragedy, I would say it's the friendships I formed with those guys."

In addition to managing his expected medical caseload, running the internal COVID tracking program, and assisting the injured Boyd Street members in their recovery, Davis also had the rigorous task of tracking all of the LAFD's COVID-positive patient transports. Anytime the LAFD transported a potential covid patient to a hospital, the case was categorized as a possible exposure Per Cal OSHA (California's Division of Occupational Safety and Health), and he was required to notify the respective members that

Being the overachiever he is, Davis also returned to school to pursue his bachelor's degree while juggling the many facets of his job. In just under ten months, Davis completed 17 college courses to earn his degree in Business Administration. "I guess it sounds like a lot when you look back at everything over the past few years," said Davis as he chuckled. "But you can accomplish anything if you put your mind to it. You just can't

do it alone. One person may get the credit, but everything is done as a team. I have an outstanding team at [MLU] and a great family at home. That's what makes it possible."

March is full of milestones for Davis, who also marks his 20-year anniversary with the LAFD this spring. According to Davis, "it's been a wild ride, and I am grateful for every day of it."

## **FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH**

**APRIL 2022**

**DANIEL TORRES,  
FIREFIGHTER**

**FIRE STATION 29, KOREATOWN/HANCOCK PARK**



Firefighter Daniel Torres is assigned to Fire Station 29, serving the communities of Koreatown, Hancock Park, and Wilshire Park. Ask Torres about what life is like as a member of the LAFD, and he will tell you, “there’s no better job in the world for someone like me. When you love what you do, it doesn’t really feel like work.”

The long hours. The grind of little to no sleep. With the constant demand of being pulled in different directions – Torres proclaims to love every minute. Those who get to know Torres come to quickly witness that his passion for his career is endearing and genuine. His appearance belies his kind, modest nature.

Torres grew up in Maywood, a relatively small unincorporated city within Los Angeles County. When he speaks of his upbringing, he does so with pride, sincerity, and humility. Life and its many blessings, especially familial bonds, are sacred to Torres. His family has been his support system and a major motivating factor in his drive to succeed. Torres lost his father when he was only 10 years old. As a result, his mother was forced to work two jobs to make ends meet for Daniel and his four siblings.

“After my dad passed, life completely changed, and we all had to grow up a little faster,” expressed Torres. “I remember working as hard as I could in school. I knew I had to push myself to make my dad proud and help my mother as much as possible.”

Torres participated in a fire service cadet program in high school that catalyzed his LAFD career. “I remember being in high school and feeling lost in life. I was working just as hard, or harder than everyone else just to get by,” expressed Torres. “I was ashamed of how I spoke [English], and I lacked self-confidence.”

Torres recalled that a chance encounter with one of the program leaders, Captain Selwyn Lloyd, served as the reality check that sparked a fire within him. “Captain Lloyd pulled me aside and asked me why I joined the cadet program. I told him I wanted to be a firefighter. I wanted to make my family proud and help people,” recounted Torres. “I must not have been very convincing because he got in my face, corrected my words, and said repeat after me, ‘I will be an L.A. City firefighter!’ I recited it over and over until I believed it. I even wrote it on my bedroom wall. It was the first thing I saw when I woke up and the last thing I thought about before going to bed.”

According to Torres, Captain Lloyd’s mentorship unlocked his self-confidence, taught him how to study, and allowed his training to flourish. After high school, Torres became a reserve firefighter for the City of Vernon and an ambulance driver for the City of Hermosa Beach. All the while, he kept working towards his goal of joining the LAFD.

Torres graduated from the LAFD Drill Tower in March of 2018. It was the happiest day of his life up until that point. “I was just ecstatic. I cried. My mother really cried, but they were happy tears, of course. I just felt like I’d made it. I had become something that would make my dad proud, that would honor his legacy and his work ethic,” shared Torres. “And it was all because of four little words – ‘I believe in you.’ That’s what I needed to hear from my mentor as a 16-year-old kid in order to become the person I am today.”

Nowadays, Torres tries to plant seeds of confidence wherever he goes. “Whenever we’re in the community, or even in my free time if I’ve got my gear with me, I offer little kids a chance to try on my helmet and coat. I tell them all about how I have the greatest job in the world. Whether they want to be a firefighter or not, I tell them anything is possible when they work hard and follow their dreams.”

## **FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH MAY 2022**

### **TANYA CRABBE, FIREFIGHTER/PARAMEDIC FIRE STATION 68, WEST ADAMS**



Firefighter/Paramedic Tanya Crabbe is in her second year of service at Fire Station 68, near Lafayette Square and the West Adams community. Crabbe and her ambulance partner typically respond to more than 15 emergency calls each day.

Crabbe's career with the LAFD is a testament to the benefits of perseverance, dedication, grit, and grace. "I traveled an unconventional road to get here," shared Crabbe. "From a very young age, I knew I wanted to be a firefighter. I just didn't realize I had it in me to pursue my dreams until later in life."

Childhood adversity and a need to help support her household led Crabbe to a construction career. The jobs were tough. It required working early mornings, long hours, and plenty of grueling manual labor under harsh heat or chilling cold.

"I enjoyed the work, but I was totally unfulfilled. I knew I was meant for a more meaningful career." Then, one evening during family dinner, everything changed. A conversation with her older brother (a member of the Ontario Fire Department), and her husband (a member of the Los Angeles Police Department), pushed Crabbe to follow her heart.

Crabbe explained how her brother's encouragement validated her potential. "It sounds silly to say it out loud, but I did not think I had it in me to pursue my dream, for many reasons, but mainly because I did not have the confidence."

Crabbe re-enrolled in school and began working towards her EMT (emergency medical technician) certification. She juggled a full-time career and parenting duties while studying.

After six years of working for a private ambulance contractor, Crabbe worked in the Emergency Room at Los Alamitos Medical Center, hoping this would help improve her odds of becoming a firefighter. While at the hospital, Crabbe became pregnant with her third child.

"Having a third child was a blessing and a major reality check," revealed Crabbe. "I was 35, working full time, still taking classes, and doing my best to raise a family. I was exhausted. I questioned the plausibility of my goals and gave a lot of serious consideration to hanging up my dream." One of her Fire Science instructors, who had become a friend and mentor, revitalized Crabbe's confidence. "She told me I had come too far to give up. She reminded me that I had everything I needed to keep working towards my dream."

As the years rolled past, Tanya's hopes of becoming a firefighter waned. Then, while planning her daughter's high school graduation party, Crabbe received the phone call informing her that she was admitted into the LAFD's Drill Tower Academy. "It took me a solid minute to catch my breath. I thought, 'I'm too old for this now. But then I remembered I'm a stubborn old woman - I can do this.'"

In September of 2008, at 39 years of age, Tanya Crabbe officially became a member of the LAFD. Ten years later, she became a Paramedic. Her colleagues describe her as a trusted, dedicated teammate with a heart of gold and an unmatched work ethic.

In her spare time, she dedicates herself to volunteering with various youth programs that help girls and young women explore career opportunities in the fire service. Crabbe has served as a volunteer instructor at girl's camps up and down the west coast, from San Diego to Alaska.

"Nothing compares to bringing a little bit of light to people in their times of need. People trust us with the lives of their loved ones, and you can see that trust in their eyes. The patch on our uniform sleeve truly means something, and I would like to think I am helping to validate our department's reputation every time I am on a run."



This past April, Crabbe celebrated another milestone moment when her eldest son, Shane, graduated from the LAFD Drill Tower. "Seeing Shane receive his badge was one of my proudest moments. I hope his LAFD journey brings him as much joy and fulfillment as it has for me," shared Crabbe. "Maybe one day soon, our paths will cross on an incident call, and we will have a chance to do something good for our community together."

## **FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH**

**JUNE 2022**

### **KENNETH CORDARO, CAPTAIN I**

**FIRE STATION 21, SOUTH LOS ANGELES**

Captain Kenneth Cordaro is a 21-year veteran of the LAFD, coincidentally assigned to Fire Station 21 in South Los Angeles. Cordaro has served in his current role for nearly six months and was also recently elected to join the Haz Mat Task Force.

Cordaro and his Haz Mat crew members provide 24-hour emergency services for incidents involving chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive (CBRNE) threats to our community and national security.

Before his assignment at Station 21, Cordaro represented the LAFD at the Joint Regional Intelligence Center (JRIC), a collaborative effort between federal, state, and local law enforcement and public safety agencies to integrate criminal and terrorism threat intelligence. There, Cordaro helped detect, deter, and defend against terrorist attacks and major criminal threats in Los Angeles and throughout Southern California.

Cordaro is also a First Sergeant in the U.S. Army Reserve. He joined the Reserves in 1998 after graduating from UCLA with a degree in Political Science. Since then, he has seen multiple domestic and overseas active-duty deployments. Had it not been for a well-timed phone call from the LAFD, Cordaro likely would have pursued a full-fledged military career.

According to Cordaro, there are more than a few parallels between working as a firefighter and serving in the military. "From the tiered command structure to the immersive training, to constantly looking out for your teammates, being a soldier helped prepare me for life as a firefighter," expressed Cordaro. On the other hand, the experience of working for the LAFD, working under pressure on high-stress incidents, and responding to severe trauma [medical] calls definitely helps prepare someone for the realities of life in a combat zone."

"Either way, I'm wearing a uniform that brings me pride. The biggest difference is that combat adds another level of life-safety risks not commonly associated with our role as first responders."

In 2004, Cordaro undertook a two-year tour in Iraq. "The deployment to Iraq came as a big surprise," expressed Cordaro. "My family and I thought we were moving to upstate New York while I back-filled an administrative role," shared Cordaro. "A few days before I was set to ship out, I learned I was slated for deployment to Kuwait. This was ten days after learning my wife was pregnant. Needless to say, we had to make a few life adjustments."

Once he landed in Kuwait, Cordaro saw his name on a roster slated for Fallujah, a city roughly 40 miles west of Baghdad known for frequent and intense conflict with insurgent forces. "I remember asking if there was a training center outside Fallujah, but nope. I was going straight into active combat alongside the Iraqi Army."

Cordaro was one of 10 U.S. members assigned to a battalion of 350 members of the Iraqi Army. His mission was to advise, train, and mentor Iraq's NCO (noncommissioned officer) corps - essentially the backbone of the Iraqi security forces at the time.

By the time Cordaro returned home to his family, his twins were close to four months old. Less than a week after returning state-side, Cordaro was back to work at the fire station. "Reacclimating to my LAFD role was the easy part. In some ways, it felt like not much had changed. Adjusting to life as a father turned out to be the bigger shock. Each time I return from a deployment, my LAFD friends and colleagues do a great job helping me settle back in. You get the 'hey, it's good to have you back, now let's get to work,' and we pick up where we left off. It doesn't matter if it has been two weeks or two years."

Cordaro became an LAFD Captain in 2014. He credits his military experience for shaping his leadership approach at the fire station. The combat situations he encountered helped Cordaro embrace a team-first mentality where everyone is respected, heard, and valued. "Passionate, opinionated firefighters aren't



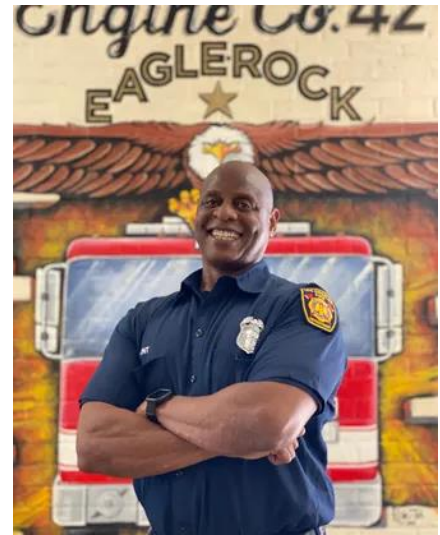
always going to see eye to eye on certain subjects," expressed Cordaro. "I remind the team to focus on our shared interests and remember that there's one common goal – for everyone to come home safely."

Cordaro and his wife have five children, ages 17 (twins), 15, 11, and eight. His two youngest have expressed interest in pursuing firefighting careers. Cordaro spends his free time tending to the animals on his family ranch in Temecula or on the occasional fishing excursion. He remains an active reservist assigned to Camp Pendleton, just north of Oceanside, California.

Others occasionally ask Cordaro if he regrets not picking one career over the other. He responds by saying he has loved both. "I always tell people aside from being a rock star or professional athlete, I feel like I have two of the greatest jobs in the world. I get phenomenal job satisfaction. There are endless opportunities to grow. Most importantly, I meet and work with so many exceptional people with fascinating stories. The best part of my job is sharing those stories with my kids and seeing their faces light up."

## FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH JULY 2022

### MARTIN BLOUNT, FIREFIGHTER/PARAMEDIC FIRE STATION 42, EAGLE ROCK



Firefighter Paramedic Martin Blount is a 32-year veteran of the LAFD with no plans for slowing down yet. Blount is currently assigned to Fire Station 42 in Eagle Rock, where he has served for the past four years.

Over the past three decades, Blount has worked on, or been involved in some of the most high-profile emergencies in Los Angeles - from the race riots of 1992 and the 1994 Northridge earthquake to a striking number of celebrity-involved incidents.

As a rookie, Blount received the medal of VALOR, the LAFD's most prestigious award for members who exhibit extraordinary courage, performing above and beyond the call of duty. His selfless actions during a flash flood rescue in the Sepulveda basin helped save the lives of dozens of civilians and a firefighter colleague in neck-high storm waters.

Blount's tendency to be drawn into unusual or sensational incidents affectionately earned him the nickname Mr. Excitement. "I don't mind the nickname and the ribbing that comes with it," shared Blount. "I'm just surprised it's stuck for so long," he added.

Blount is also a military veteran, having served a decade in the United States Navy and Naval Reserves. In fact, the inspiration to become a firefighter struck Blount while he was conducting shipboard firefighter training in San Diego. In 1985, Blount transitioned from active duty to a reserve role and set his sights on becoming a firefighter.

In 1990, Blount entered the LAFD drill tower academy. However, two months into the program, his training was cut short. "We had just finished ladder skills training. I knew something was up when the captain called me in the front office. I thought this couldn't be a good sign," shared Blount.

**"When I walked in, the captain handed me the phone. The voice on the other end said this is not a drill. You have been reactivated to active duty. You have been activated to Operation Desert Storm. It was a surreal moment," recalled Blount. "Everything I worked for, the life I was preparing for, was up in the air. Suddenly, something that felt like the next chapter in my life was replaced with total uncertainty."**

Blount spent the next six months on an aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf. After returning to Los Angeles, he was reinstated into the drill tower the following year. Although he was required to start the training process over entirely, Blount applied the skills and knowledge he had previously acquired to become the leader of his graduating class.

Years later, a tragic incident prompted Blount to shift his career focus. He was in the process of studying to become an inspector when his brother suffered a massive heart attack. "My brother's death was a turning point," expressed Blount. "There's a chance things would have turned out differently if he had received proper care."

Blount became an LAFD paramedic in 2000 to honor his brother's passing. "The paramedic test was the last test I took. As far as I'm concerned, this is my life's work. I am not interested in promotions or doing anything else except helping to prevent other families from experiencing what my family endured," shared Blount.

During a 2010 high-rise fire response, Blount felt a sudden tingling sensation in his chest, which then emanated down to his toes. By the following day at the station, Blount's hands and feet had gone numb. He was sent home to rest and follow up with his doctor.

After multiple tests and medical visits over the ensuing month, Blount received inauspicious news – a diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis (MS), a potentially disabling disease of the brain and spinal cord (central nervous system) in which the immune system eats away at the protective covering of nerves. "It was a big

hit to hear those words, but it also gave me something definitive. As long as I have a fighting chance, I knew I wouldn't let this beat me," expressed Blount.

About a month after being sent home sick, Blount was back at the fire station running emergency calls. He secretly battled fluctuating symptoms for a year and a half before reaching remission. He credits his fitness regimen and healthy diet as his two greatest MS countermeasures.

"It is jarring for me when I have [an emergency call] involving a patient with MS, and that person is bed-ridden, in a wheelchair, or has significant issues with their quality of life," remarked Blount. "Those calls are a reality check, but they are also a type of motivation because here I am, 12 years later, still working, not taking anything for granted, and living symptom-free."

Blount is a fitness enthusiast and avid traveler. In between trips, workouts, and helping to save lives on the ambulance, he can also be seen carrying the stars and stripes as a proud member of the LAFD Honor Guard.

## **FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH AUGUST 2022**

**OLIVER FRY,  
ENGINEER**

**DRILL TOWER 81, PANORAMA CITY**



Engineer Oliver Fry is an instructor at Drill Tower 81 in Panorama City. For the past five years, he has dedicated himself to teaching LAFD Academy recruits and mentoring incoming generations of firefighters.

Fry is one of 26 academy instructors, yet he is the only engineer amidst the cadre of seasoned captains. His work ethic, vast incident experience, in-depth technical knowledge, and enthusiastic demeanor helped him earn his current assignment.

A typical workday begins at 5:45 AM when Fry arrives at the Drill Tower and prepares the yard with the tools, teaching equipment, and safety gear for the day's instruction. Fry helps teach the recruits about a wide range of topics, from hose lays and fittings to driver's training and water systems found in various types of buildings.

Fry and his fellow instructors spend several days familiarizing recruits with a particular subject before testing their competency and certifying their abilities. Then, it's on to the next focus area. Over the 14 weeks of Academy training, Fry's goal is to prime recruits for the realities of life as an LAFD firefighter.

"No amount of training will perfectly prepare our recruits for everything they might encounter in the field," explained Fry. "Given the scope of everything the LAFD handles daily, it's just not possible. We strive for the next best option. Beyond the protocols and procedures, we try to simulate the stress and pressure as best we can, caution them on what to watch out for, and share real-life examples of what we [as instructors] have encountered in the field."

While Fry thoroughly enjoys every aspect of his current role, he admitted that he did not initially love the idea of being an instructor. "Years ago, I got roped into working on one of the [LAFD] youth programs in the Valley. It was a long, hot weekend assignment, and I was not looking forward to it. In fact, I was dreading it," revealed Fry. "Looking back, that experience changed my life and shifted the entire scope of my career. Something I foolishly expected to be a drag turned out to be a total blast."

Over the years, Fry has seen multiple youth program participants, young men and women he helped mentor, graduate from the Academy. "It's hard to match the pride and fulfillment you feel when a graduate thanks you and tells you that you've helped them attain their dream of joining the LAFD," shared Fry.

As a recruit, Fry recalled struggling through his time at the Drill Tower. "It didn't come easy to me. Some folks have natural physical talents or great instincts under pressure. I had to work a little harder, or in some cases, a lot harder to absorb the material," expressed Fry. "I think that's what helps me to be an effective instructor because my struggles forced me to problem solve from different perspectives. My failures, my challenges now help me better relate to recruits when they don't pass a challenge on the first try."

Engineer Fry is a 22-year veteran of the LAFD. He joined the Department because he loved the idea of helping others and because of the respect and admiration the community bestows on its firefighters. He became an instructor in hopes that his successes and failures might help strengthen the skills of future firefighters. "One of the craziest parts of this role is that I sometimes work alongside the young men and women I taught. We'll cross paths on an incident or work side by side at a station and laugh about our time in the tower. It's fantastic," expressed Fry.

Fry's commitment to public safety extends well beyond the Drill Tower. His passion to serve was passed on to his daughter, a member of the Los Angeles Police Department, and his teenage son, who recently enrolled in EMT school and hopes to join the LAFD.

Off duty, Fry dedicates his free time to his wife and children, and enjoys the occasional round of golf.

## FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH SEPTEMBER 2022

### HECTOR ESTRADA, ENGINEER

#### **FIRE STATION 47, EL SERENO (ROSE HILLS)**

Engineer Hector Estrada is assigned to Fire Station 47 in El Sereno. Although he is only one year into his current assignment, he has dedicated the past 28 years to serving the LAFD.

While not necessarily the busiest of stations, Fire Station 47 is situated near the Easternmost boundary of the LAFD's service area. The rolling hills and mix of residential and commercial properties lead to an interesting mix of incident types for Engineer Estrada and his crew.

"You never know what the day might bring," expressed Estrada. "We might roll out to a warehouse fire, and on our way back to the station, we get redirected to a brush incident. So, we have to be ready for whatever this area will throw at us."

According to Estrada, one of the lesser-known benefits of life at station 47s is the opportunity to collaborate with neighboring fire agencies on different incidents. "Over nearly 30 years, I've seen just about every type of emergency through an LAFD-focused lens," explained Estrada. "It's neat to work alongside other departments sometimes and see how they operate. Obviously, there are many similarities in how we go about our duties, but sometimes there are subtle differences in how we think and operate. The observations make for good meal-time discussions."

Estrada grew up in Boyle Heights, just a few blocks from Fire Station 25. He recalls a conversation he had at 18 years old that sparked his interest in becoming a firefighter. "The LAFD had responded to an incident across the street from my house. When the commotion died down, I walked over and struck up a conversation with the guys from Engine 25," recounted Estrada. "That quick little conversation turned into an invitation for a station visit, and the rest is history. I knew then and there that I was meant to become a firefighter."

Despite doubters and obstacles, Estrada was undeterred in his pursuit to join the LAFD. "Back then, there weren't a lot of firefighters coming out of Boyle Heights," Estrada shared. "Maybe it was isolated to my community, but folks in the neighborhood weren't all that supportive of my goal. People I grew up with would make their jokes or sarcastic digs about my chances of making it. Looking back, it's kind of a bummer because you can see how someone's hopes can be shot down."

Thankfully, Estrada's family provided the strength and support to counter his detractors. "It took six years for me to get onto the [LAFD]. In all that time, my parents and my siblings never stopped supporting me."

Estrada's first day in the Drill Tower was on the one-year anniversary of his mother's passing. He claims that getting through the Academy was the hardest thing he's ever done. "People sometimes ask if it's worth it, worth all the time, energy, effort, and struggles. I tell them YES, without a doubt. This job isn't easy, but I owe a lot of the good in my life to my time in the LAFD."

According to Estrada, not a day passes that he doesn't look back on his first ride-along. "I'm grateful to be where I am, knowing that our work makes a difference for our community."

Off duty, Estrada dedicates his time to Adriana, his lovely wife of 23 years, his three children, Justin, Ryan, and Jessica, and his Goldendoodle puppy, "Duner." They enjoy off-roading excursions and desert camping trips.



## **FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH WINTER 2022**

### **JOHN LIN, FIREFIGHTER/PARAMEDIC FIRE STATION 11, WESTLAKE**

John Lin is a Firefighter Paramedic assigned to the A-Shift at Fire Station 11 in L.A.'s Westlake neighborhood, adjacent to MacArthur Park. For the last seven years, he has served in this community, easily one of the LAFD's busiest areas.

Lin is constantly on the go as a Paramedic in a service area with a sizable unhoused population. He and his fellow paramedics have responded to more than 10,800 medical emergencies this year – our roughly 32 EMS runs each day.

"Many of the calls we respond to are medical emergencies indicative of life on the streets," explained Lin. "It's tough sometimes to transport the same patient multiple times, for the same type of calls, knowing that there's a strong possibility that this person will be back on the sidewalk after they're released from the hospital."

Lin laments that the barrage of substance abuse and mental health-related calls can take its toll throughout back-to-back shifts. "These types of assignments aren't for everyone. It takes a little extra effort sometimes. But the calls that make it worth it are totally worth pushing through the other 99%," said Lin.

"When you least expect it, you have that one patient interaction that validates why we do this. The story might not always have a happy ending, but you know you did your best to help someone through a bad situation – These are the calls that keep you going at Fire Station 11."

FF/PM Lin describes his path to joining the LAFD as unconventional, yet he proclaims he would not have done it any other way. After graduating from Cal State Long Beach with a finance degree, he enjoyed a lucrative career in investment banking until the historic market crash of 2008.

"The crash was an eye-opener that pushed me to look for something new, something different," shared Lin. "As a kid, I was always interested in a career in medicine, so I enrolled in EMT (emergency medical technician) school as a precursor to medical school."

After earning his EMT certification, Lin worked as an ambulance contractor with the Huntington Beach Fire Department. Then, while in Paramedic School, he secured an internship at Fire Station 4 in Downtown L.A. "The internship at Fire Station 4 sealed the deal. Seeing the crew in action helped me realize where I was meant to be," he said.

Lin joined the LAFD in January 2014 and counted it as a professional and personal turning point. "I gained a whole new, extended family when I became a firefighter. Some of my greatest memories involve holidays and birthdays at the station," shared Lin. "With the worst of the pandemic hopefully behind us, we can celebrate special occasions properly. I'll be working through Christmas, but my brother will be able to come by the station. I'm thankful I'll get to hang with him and my LAFD family like we used to."

John resides in Downtown L.A. with Vernibeth, his wife of five years. He credits his wife as a source of strength and support, and the two enjoy traveling when John is off-duty.

"John is one of the finest paramedics I have ever had the pleasure of working with," Expressed Captain II Robert Hinojosa, Fire Station 11. "He is a respected leader, an incredibly hard worker, and he has a great attitude towards helping those around him. You can tell he cares about making a difference and he is most deserving of the Firefighter of the Month recognition."

