

FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH JANUARY 2019

THOMAS HENZGEN, CAPTAIN I URBAN SEARCH & RESCUE/STATION 88, SHERMAN OAKS

Have you ever heard of the fire department term, “first in?” This phrase refers to a geographical area that a specific fire station will respond to incidents first because they are the closest resource. For Captain I Thomas Henzgen and the LAFD’s Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team, the entire City of Los Angeles is their “first in.”

“We are dispatched to every technical rescue, physical rescue and large structure fire no matter where it’s located,” Henzgen said. “At a moment’s notice we’re ready to respond and solve a difficult puzzle to help rescue someone...it’s an exciting challenge.”

Henzgen serves as one of the captains on USAR 88, a specially designed apparatus tailored to the USAR team’s needs based out of Fire Station 88. He oversees USAR responses to situations such as: confined space, cliff, tower crane, storm drain, river, collapsed structure, mudslide, collapsed trench, flooding and many other technical rescue incidents.

“The things we respond to require a lot of thought about how best to approach them,” Henzgen said. “A collapsed structure, for example, might need shoring to support it before, during and after the actual rescue. Every situation is unique.”

Henzgen’s technical rescue knowledge stems from more than 20 years of professional experience including his tenure with the LAFD as well as his time as a structural engineer and general contractor. His public service interest began with a ski patrol and includes time with mountain rescue and law enforcement agencies. Henzgen’s path to join the LAFD took more than nine years and became a reality in September of 1998.

Since that first day he put on an LAFD badge Henzgen has explored other areas in the department. He is currently the coordinator of the LAFD’s Swift Water Rescue team and is a State Fire Training Certified Instructor in various USAR disciplines. He has also been deployed to aid the recovery efforts across the nation following six different hurricanes.

“No matter where I go, the best reward is just offering assistance in a time of need,” Henzgen said. “Having that opportunity to go help, I don’t need anything more than that.”





FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH FEBRUARY 2019

DAVID NORDQUIST, PILOT **AIR OPERATIONS**

Pilot David Nordquist has always loved aviation. He was 5-years-old when he went on his first flight at the Van Nuys Airport. Little did Nordquist know that years later he would be saving lives by flying LAFD helicopters out of the same airport.

“I was flying airplanes before and after joining the department in my spare time, but never thought I would connect the two,” Nordquist said. “When I was approached about joining Air Operations, I learned this is the ultimate multi-tasking job because you’re a firefighter and pilot at the same time.”

Nordquist had already served as a firefighter and engineer for a combined 23 years when he joined the Air Operations unit in 2004. As a trainee, he worked as a crew chief, hoist operator, safety member and rescuer before becoming a pilot.

The Air Operations unit responds to situations like brush fires, hoist rescues and can be used as an air ambulance. Other scenarios Nordquist has personally flown include the transportation of a SWAT team to Big Bear, airlifting someone off Catalina Island and rescuing large animals. Of all these experiences, a rescue made during last year’s Woolsey Fire will always stand out in his mind.

“We had just made a water drop when the call came in that some folks on Castro Peak were trapped,” Nordquist said. “We were getting low on fuel but knew we were the only way those people we’re getting out of there.”

After Nordquist skillfully landed the helicopter on the rugged hilltop, fellow Pilot Joel Smith jumped out and led the three individuals and their two dogs to the aircraft. As Nordquist lifted the helicopter back into the air with everyone safely aboard, he was able to see that the flames had only been a single hilltop away. For their heroic actions, both Nordquist and Smith received a Certificate of Recognition in January 2019 from the LA City Council.

Nordquist has been a member of the LAFD for a total of 38 years and will be retiring this spring with more than 3,200 flight hours. He enjoys hiking, traveling, building model airplanes and spending time with his wife and children.

FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH MARCH 2019

AMY BASTMAN, CAPTAIN I FIRE STATION 52, HOLLYWOOD

Imagine being the voice of the largest fire department on the west coast each time you come to work. For two years Amy Bastman served in this capacity in her role as a Public Service Officer (PSO).

“I learned more about this department than I ever would have because of this position,” Bastman said. “Having the chance to share all the different things we do each day reminds me that I get to work for the best, the LAFD.”



Bastman is one of three PSO's based at the department's 911-call dispatch center. Some of her duties include answering public phone calls, serving as a spokesperson during incidents, crafting safety messages and managing the LAFD's ever growing social media presence.

“The PSO position is critical to telling the LAFD's story on all platforms,” Bastman said. “I am able to see people's reactions to our work from across the globe in real time.”

Bastman's time as a PSO occurred during one of the most challenging fire seasons in recent history. In December of 2017 she reported on the LAFD's efforts in simultaneously battling the Creek and Skirball wildfires. She gave dozens of live interviews and provided information on social media. Bastman also assisted in the creation and distribution of incident maps for both fires viewed approximately 4 million times. She would later be awarded a Notice of Commendation by the LAFD for her exceptional efforts during this time.

Besides her public relations skills, Bastman is a certified paramedic, urban search and rescue technician and hazardous materials specialist. In her 11-year career with the LAFD, she has served out of fire stations across the city and been part of responses for Hurricanes Harvey and Irma.

Outside her LAFD work, Bastman is a Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation mentor who provides guidance for parents whose child has recently been diagnosed with the disease. She enjoys playing on the LAFD's ice hockey team, outdoor activities and spending time with her wife and three children.

The LAFD Foundation congratulates Captain Bastman on her promotion to the rank of Captain I and wishes her well at her new assignment at Fire Station 52.



FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH APRIL 2019

DEXTER MCDANIEL, FIREFIGHTER/PARAMEDIC FIRE STATION 79, HARBOR GATEWAY

For almost 30 years Firefighter/Paramedic Dexter McDaniel has done more than help people on the job as a firefighter. He also donates his personal time to teach people how to prepare for an interview with the LAFD.

“We often talk about ourselves in a way that fits into a standard model,” McDaniel said. “The first thing I tell anyone is that there is no one better to tell your story than you.”

The LAFD employs a comprehensive oral interview during its hiring process. McDaniel knew candidates often fall back on habits like speaking chronologically and answering questions with limited information. To combat this he created a way to help people discover how to use their personal strengths, traits and experiences by outlining them similar to the floor plan of a house.

“You can walk into your house from any direction and still know where each room is,” McDaniel said. “The same applies here. We fill your house with everything that makes you stand out so that no matter what question is asked, you can choose any room to walk into and find the answer you need.”

His method quickly became popular. McDaniel’s phone began receiving calls from people across California, New Mexico, Texas, Georgia and even New York. No matter the distance, McDaniel always asks for the same three things from each person he helps. A classmate t-shirt, a promise that they will work to help others and that they never forget that someone spent time to help them.

McDaniel estimates that he’s spent more than 2,000 hours helping over 500 individuals since he joined the LAFD. If someone is unable to meet at his fire station or talk over the phone, he opens the door to his own home for meetings.

When not working at Fire Station 79 or helping someone prepare for an interview, McDaniel enjoys traveling, camping and glamping with his wife, Judy.

FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH MAY 2019

CYNTHIA SATO, FIREFIGHTER/PARAMEDIC FIRE STATION 4, METRO FIRE COMMUNICATIONS

When Firefighter Cynthia Sato finishes her work as a 9-1-1 call dispatcher for the day she steps into her other role with the LAFD; being a Search and Rescue K-9 handler.

“Having a K-9 is kind of like having a kid and a roommate at the same time,” Sato said. “She’s an employee of the department just like me, but also my best friend.”

Sato’s interest in the LAFD began when she was a 17-year-old explorer (now called cadets). After pretending to be a victim during a K-9 search and rescue simulation as part of her cadet post, her desire to become a handler immediately sparked. Sato joined the LAFD in 2006 and worked at numerous fire stations before becoming a certified paramedic. Later, she pursued her ultimate desire and was paired with “Roxie,” her current K-9 partner, by the Search Dog Foundation.

Sato and Roxie have been deployed three times, with the most recent being to the Montecito mudslides in early 2018. During their six-day deployment, Roxie searched through the carnage looking for anyone who could be trapped in the mud, damaged structures and other debris.

“I didn’t think I’d ever see anything like that,” Sato said. “Deployments like that are what we train for. Seeing Roxie put that training into action was rewarding.”

Her desire to broaden her skills into areas such as being a K-9 handler also led Sato to her current position as a 911 call dispatcher. She handles emergency calls that range from a simple headache to a patient not breathing. As both a firefighter and paramedic, Sato uses her experience to quickly diagnose a situation and deploy the best resources to a caller’s aid.

Sato is excited to continue her partnership with Roxie. She is also in the process of joining the LAFD’s Arson/Counter Terrorism Section as an Arson Investigator.





FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH JUNE 2019

OMAR FUENTES, FIREFIGHTER/PARAMEDIC FIRE STATION 34, CRENSHAW

The success of the LAFD's cadet youth program is best told through stories such as Firefighter / Paramedic Omar Fuentes. His passion to join the fire service sparked after a visit to Fire Station 34 in Crenshaw where he became a cadet. Years later, Fuentes can still be found at Fire Station 34, where he now serves his community as an LAFD firefighter.

"This is the station where I discovered that I wanted to be a firefighter," Fuentes said. "Having the chance to work here now, wearing a badge, it makes me smile all the time."

Following his time as a cadet, which introduces teens to a career in the fire service, Fuentes served as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) for five years. He then paid his way through school to become a Paramedic. After serving four years as a Paramedic for a private ambulance company, he joined LAFD in 2016. Fuentes knew that with 85% of the LAFD's responses being emergency medical service-related, his training would be put to the test every day.

The difference between an EMT and a Paramedic is the level of care each provides. EMT's can provide patients oxygen, administer antibiotics, and assist with treatments for asthma attacks or allergic reactions. Paramedics are qualified to provide these same treatments and more including administering medications via needles, intravenous lines, providing advanced airway support and can resuscitate a patient having significant problems like a heart attack.

"It could feel like the worst day of someone's life and I get to go and comfort them," Fuentes said. "Being a paramedic is a self-rewarding job, I love it."

Fuentes doesn't limit his passion of helping only patients; he also provides mentorship to his fellow LAFD members any time he can. Even during the busiest of days at the station Fuentes always makes time to sit down with new members and explain the various procedures.

When not working at the fire station, Fuentes enjoys spending time with his daughter and girlfriend, along with working on projects around his house.

FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH JULY 2019

RUTHIE BERNAL, INSPECTOR/PARAMEDIC BRUSH CLEARANCE UNIT

LAFD firefighters and paramedics are known for responding to emergencies after they have begun. Inspector/Paramedic Ruthie Bernal's job is to prevent some of those emergencies from ever happening.

"The next brush fire might be inevitable, but it does not have to be a catastrophe for a community," said Bernal. "My job is to work with the public to keep that from happening the best we can."



Bernal serves as an Inspector in the LAFD's Brush Clearance Unit (BCU). She oversees parcels of land in the communities of Sylmar, Sunland and Tujunga that are part of the 133 square-miles of Los Angeles that have fire high fire hazard zones. Her duties include inspecting properties, issuing notices and educating the community about simple ways brush clearance can save lives. To manage the 10,000 parcels assigned to her, Bernal uses technology that she helped design.

After serving in the BCU for three years, Bernal heard that the digital program for tracking inspections was severely outdated. Having an extensive amount of administrative knowledge of the unit, she was selected to represent the BCU during the development of the new program: Vegetation Management System (VMS) 2. This inevitably laid the foundation for the LAFD's current software program, VMS 3, which utilizes GPS data and allows Inspectors to photograph, document and manage any potential property notices.

"I found being a part of the development of VMS 2 was a lot of fun," Bernal said. "It was an honor to be chosen as the lead from for my unit to help create such an important program."

Bernal has been with the LAFD for 28 years with time as a Paramedic before joining the BCU in 2001. Besides her roles in the creation of VMS 2 and VMS 3, she also streamlined the informational card that is mailed to residents living in extreme fire hazard areas. These exceptional contributions earned her the Michael P. Reedy Award, one of three Annual Fire Marshal's Awards.

Outside her LAFD work, Bernal enjoys traveling, anything outdoors and spending time with her husband and two boys.



FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2019

DAVID DANIELSON, FIREFIGHTER/PARAMEDIC FIRE STATION 81, PANORAMA CITY

Firefighter/Paramedic David Danielson serves as the eye in the sky for the LAFD, but he is not your conventional fire department pilot.

After 26 years as a naval aviator, including three tours in Iraq, Sr. Chief Petty Officer Danielson retired from his role as a medic and helicopter crew chief to join the LAFD. Now he's the Co-lead Pilot for the Unmanned Aerial Systems Program (UAS), and one of six pilots pioneering the department's testing and deployment of UAS technology.

UAS are unmanned, remote piloted aircraft commonly referred to as drones. Once seen as disruptive technology, UAS have evolved into force-multiplying tools that fortify safe deployment of resources.

Although still in its infancy, the UAS Program has quickly proven to be an invaluable resource for the LAFD. To date, the program has logged nearly 200 incident-related missions. Back in 2017 when the program launched, Danielson recalls working to help narrow the gap between helicopters and firefighters on the ground.

"In three short years, we've accomplished far more than originally intended. What we've actually done is add a whole other perspective that allows incident commanders to handle life-saving situations faster and more effectively than ever before," expressed Danielson.

UAS are deployed for use across a variety of incidents, including hot-spot identification, aerial mapping to help wildfire containment, swift water rescues, hazmat operations, and search and rescue missions. According to Battalion Chief Richard Fields who oversees the UAS Program, "If picture is worth a thousand words, imagine the value of the real-time video and thermal imaging data this technology adds when it comes to protecting homes and saving lives."

Members of the UAS Program train rigorously to achieve their FAA Part 107 Remote Pilot's License and log a minimum of 20 flights hours before receiving their initial certification. Today, the UAS Program is bolstered by Co-Lead FF Derrick Ward, Engineer Robert Smith, Inspector Art Rodriguez, Inspector Steven Hamilton, and Inspector Kurt Corral.

Danielson and his fellow pilots drill constantly, sharpening their skills to drive the program forward. The team's curiosity and innovative spirit lead to expanded deployment capabilities and implementation of lifesaving tech.

Previews of the new UAS features were on display at a recent Public Safety exhibition where Danielson remote piloted a state-of-the-art UAS valued at more than \$50,000. He masterfully demonstrated how UAS pilots might assist with a Swift Water Rescue by air-dropping flotation devices to those in danger.

"It's equal parts exciting and challenging," remarks Danielson when asked about the fun-factor of piloting the aircraft. "It takes a tremendous amount of skill, patience, and discipline, but there's also definitely a sense of enjoyment, especially when our involvement adds value to real-time decision making.

Danielson humbly accepted the honor of Firefighter of the Month on behalf of the entire UAS Program team. He and the crew are excited to apply the \$500 sponsorship towards new UAS equipment.

FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH NOVEMBER 2019

SEAN BAKER, FIREFIGHTER III FIRE STATION 10, DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES

Firefighter III (FF) Sean Baker is the LAFD's rising star in the boxing ring. Part of the small, but mighty LAFD Boxing Club, Baker is one of seven active fighters representing the department on the public safety boxing circuit.

Baker and his teammates compete against fighters from across the country, and around the globe. While the league is recreational in nature, the competition level can be insanely tough.



In his last bout, Baker bested his opponent from the West Midlands Police of Birmingham, England. Baker had trained for nearly three months and dropped more than 30 pounds to reach his desired weight class.

If you ask Baker, the sacrifice was well worth it. The LAFD team went on to win the international tournament, winning 10 out of the 12 matches.

Boxers compete for much more than belts and bragging rights. Proceeds from each fight are typically donated or used to raise awareness for specific charities.

"I love that we when we step in the ring, we're also doing something positive for a great cause," shared Baker. "I'll be dedicating my next fight to my academy classmate and fellow firefighter, Eric Stevens, who was recently diagnosed with ALS," he added.

Baker has been an avid martial arts enthusiast and student since childhood. At age seven, he was introduced to the Korean art of tang soo do. Baker is now a seasoned fighter, and is proficient in several other forms including karate, jiu jitsu, and mui thai.

Surprisingly, he did not try his hand at boxing until 2018, nearly three years into his LAFD career. He took to it immediately, noting that "it felt like the natural progression of my training and fighting interests."

Baker begins training for his competitions three months in advance. The training rigors produce an additional benefit by ensuring that Baker is in peak physical condition for his firefighting duties.

"I love every minute of it. Pushing myself to the limit and hitting that 'runner's high' after every session. It's just incredible," shared Baker. "Plus, boxing has opened so many other doors and led me to build new friendships with boxers from different agencies and other countries."

Baker is off to an impressive 3-0 start, putting the rest of the Cruiserweight class (junior heavyweight) on notice. His next fight is tentatively scheduled for April 2020.

Until then, expect to find Baker with the rest of his Fire Station 10 crew serving the downtown L.A. area, and training to add another victory to his name.



FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH DECEMBER 2019

EDWARD HECHANOVA, FIREFIGHTER/PARAMEDIC FIRE STATION 55, EAGLE ROCK

The holiday season is Firefighter/Paramedic Edward Hechanova's favorite time of the year. He's partly joking, partly serious when he divulges that he loves Black Friday because it's the day he gets to break out the lights and decorations.

Hechanova laments that this is also one of the hardest times of the year to be a firefighter due to the emotional wear-and-tear of responding to holiday-related tragedies. Traditionally, fire departments all across the country see home fires, traffic incidents, and other medical emergencies surge throughout the holiday season.

"I love every part of being a firefighter and paramedic," shared Hechanova. "Every part except breaking bad news to families during the holidays. The flip side is, you also get to see some of these tragedies bring out the best in people, and it can bring entire communities together. That's the stuff that'll melt any firefighter's heart," he said.

One incident in particular stands out for Hechanova. It was mid-December, approximately five years ago. He and his team responded to an emergency call near Occidental College. A young man had fallen out of a second-story window. The victim was badly injured, unresponsive and had no pulse when Hechanova arrived. They immediately began CPR and transported him to a nearby hospital. After completing the hospital handoff, Hechanova and his colleagues never heard what happened to the victim.

Several years passed, then seemingly out of the blue, Hechanova received a Christmas card in the mail from a name he did not recognize. In the card was a note from the mother of the young man who had fallen from the window. The mother graciously praised Hechanova and credited him with saving her son's life. The note explained that the young man was able to make a full recovery, had returned to school, and graduated with his classmates... all because of Hechanova and his colleagues.

Looking back on the outcome, Hechanova cannot help but draw similarities to his own experience. He wasn't much younger than the victim when a harrowing personal tragedy sparked his interest in becoming a firefighter.

When he was a teen, Hechanova and his family experienced a terrible home fire. He recalls being awestruck by the firefighters that rescued his family, and he knew right then and there what he would grow up to become.

"Hech," as he's referred to by his colleagues, has been an LAFD firefighter and paramedic for 25 years. He is currently assigned to Fire Station 55 in Highland Park, where he serves the neighboring communities of Eagle Rock, Glassell Park, and Mt. Washington. On top of his assigned duties, he also assists local residents with brush clearance projects. As a result, Hechanova has developed strong ties to this local community he's called his second home for the past 11 years.

"I've known Edward for 23 years. He is a person of the highest integrity, and the paramedic I'd want my family to be treated by if they were ever in need," expressed Battalion Chief David Spence. "FF/PM Hechanova is one of those guys that makes us proud, and he delivers outstanding service, above and beyond all standards."

FF/PM Hechanova humbly accepted this recognition and insisted on sharing the honor with the entire crew at 55's. He and his colleagues are excited to make good use of their \$500 sponsorship from Marathon Petroleum Corporation.