

FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH JANUARY 2021

RANDALL YSLAS, CAPTAIN II **FIRE STATION 48, SAN PEDRO**

“It’s time. I’m ready to ride off into the sunset,” teased Captain II Randall Yslas. After 34 years of dedicated service with the LAFD, Captain Yslas is retiring. Yslas has spent the last six years as the Task Force Commander assigned to Fire Station 48 in San Pedro, just blocks away from the busiest seaport in the U.S.

In addition to the typical fires and medical emergencies seen all over the city, Fire Station 48 also responds to a myriad of maritime-related emergencies – like daring water and cliff rescues, tending to injured cruise ship passengers, and even wharf fires fed by volatile boat fuels.

Over the course of the past three decades, Yslas humbly joked that he’s seen just about every type of incident, no matter how severe, obscure, or infrequent. The harbor was the last area Yslas hoped to check off on his list. After half a dozen years at Station 48, he believes he’s left his mark and is ready to transition into life as a civilian.

“I became a firefighter shortly after graduating from high school,” shared Captain Yslas. “I knew I wanted a job where I would help others and be of service. After 34 years with the LAFD, I feel like I’ve followed through on my commitment. I’m glad as I was able to help save a few lives, and hopefully I was able to impart some of my experience on those around me.”

The Firefighter of the Month award is rarely bestowed upon retiring members. However, as word of Captain Yslas’ retirement spread, his fellow firefighters turned out in droves to voice their support for his nomination. “He is an exceptional leader and a true hero,” said Deputy Chief Ronnie Villanueva. “Captain Yslas has always led by example. We could rely on him to keep a calm, level head under pressure, even under the most challenging incident conditions. He has been a friend and mentor to countless members of this department. I cannot think of anyone more deserving of this award.”

For many, Yslas’ retirement is bittersweet. “When he started talking, you stopped to listen,” remarked Captain I Cesar Garcia, one of Captain Yslas’ station mates at 48s. “He has such an incredible wealth of knowledge, and special gift for how to share his experience. We’re losing a great leader. Once he’s gone, that presence cannot be replaced.”

For others, like Apparatus Operator Travis Hill, Yslas’ departure resonates deeper. “I’m happy for him, but selfishly I’m bummed,” explained AO Hill. “His guidance and leadership are the reason I put in for a transfer to Station 48. He is like a father figure to so many of us, and he’ll definitely be missed.”

Although Captain Yslas’ final shift is around the corner, his legacy will carry on through those he has led and mentored. “Whatever station I’ve gone to, I always tried to give something back, leave it a little better than I found it. I encourage my teams to be confident, be competent, and do the right thing. Have the courage to do what’s right and you’ll leave a positive impact,” explained Yslas. Judging by the outpouring of feedback from his colleagues and superiors, Captain Randall Yslas truly served with courage, integrity and pride.





FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH FEBRUARY 2021

AFARA LALAIND, FIREFIGHTER/PARAMEDIC COVID DIVISION/FIRE STATION 65

After nearly a year, the life-threatening effects of the pandemic continue to be disproportionately felt throughout L.A.'s underserved communities. Firefighter/Paramedic Afara Lalaind is at the forefront of combating this trend. Lalaind is technically assigned to Fire Station 65 in Watts, but for the past year, she has been detailed to the LAFD's COVID Division.

From March of 2020 through December, she was an integral part of the LAFD's mobile testing team, working in some of L.A.'s hardest-hit communities. During the holiday season, she switched over to a special assignment – helping to administer the vaccine to the city's dependent and homebound population, comprised mainly of elderly and disabled persons without access to vaccine sites.

Similar to the mobile testing program, Lalaind and her teammates identify communities with high infection rates, and work to establish a way to curb the spread. In some cases, that means establishing a “pop-up” site with outreach and transportation services provided by other community partners. In other cases, it means taking the operation directly to local Housing and Urban Development sites.

“We vaccinated 42 seniors on our first day of the pilot program,” explained Lalaind. “These are Phase 1 folks that otherwise would not have access to the vaccine. It may not seem like much, but every day, we hope to see our progress grow. The goal is to help vaccinate 73,000 individuals.”

Lalaind is a Bay Area native who grew up dedicating her time to community causes like volunteering at homeless shelters, food banks, and the local women's shelter. After taking an introduction to fire service class in college, Afara was certain she had found her calling. She credits her college instructor, and her older sister, who at the time was a member of the San Jose Fire Department, with guiding her journey.

Joining the LAFD is a testament to Afara's perseverance and relentless work ethic. After nearly three dozen applications to 15 different agencies, Lalaind landed her dream job. It took eight years for the single mother of three to make it. That was in 2016, and she claims she is just getting started.

“I never doubted myself. I knew this was what I wanted and it was only a matter of time and effort,” expressed Lalaind. “I committed to becoming a firefighter - for myself, and for my kids. There were definitely some challenging times, but I knew I needed to see this through to send the right message and set an example for my children.”

According to Battalion Chief Kris Larson, COVID Testing Section Commander, Afara's hard work continues to make a remarkable impact. “Firefighter/Paramedic Lalaind is a tremendous asset to this [COVID] Division, and to our entire Department,” shared Chief Larson. “Her sound judgment, professionalism, and unmistakable passion for helping others are why she is ideally suited to help guide the vaccination outreach process for our at-risk communities. We are fortunate to have her on the team, and she is most deserving of receiving Firefighter of the Month.”

Lalaind dedicates what little free time she has towards her children and family. She looks forward to rounding the curve on the pandemic so she can resume her carpentry and woodworking hobbies. Before COVID struck, Afara could most likely be found in her woodshop or making renovations to her new home. “I had to shelve most of my projects because there just aren't enough hours in the day to fight the pandemic, be a mom, and rebuild my fireplace mantle,” joked Lalaind.

FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH

MARCH 2021

BRIAN QUINN, INSPECTOR

FIRE PREVENTION BUREAU

“I certainly get my exercise if I don’t take the elevators,” joked Inspector Brian Quinn. “Most of the time, the management or building engineers aren’t too thrilled with the idea of avoiding the elevators, since they are generally tasked with accompanying me during an inspection.”

Quinn is in his fifth year as an inspector with the LAFD’s Fire Prevention Bureau, and two years into his current assignment with the High Rise Unit. Quinn is one of just a handful of inspectors responsible for covering the hundreds of buildings across Los Angeles with seven or more floors.



His job involves working with engineers, contractors, and building managers to ensure high-rise buildings are adhering to fire codes. Each day, he conducts walkthroughs at various buildings from the Mid-Wilshire district, to LAX, and all the way down to the harbor. His purpose is to search for potential life hazards, fire risks, and other inhibitors that could potentially affect how a building’s occupants would evacuate in the event of an emergency.

“Sometimes we’re seen as nitpickers, and it’s understandable. Our job is literally to walk through every square foot of a building and point out potential problems,” explained Quinn. “I get that, so I try to paint a picture for my hosts using real-life examples of how and why the fire codes help save lives and property.”

Quinn’s top responsibility is ensuring every high rise under his jurisdiction is inspected annually, including confirming its fire protection equipment and systems (sprinklers, alarms, fire extinguishers, etc.) are in working order.

“Most building owners and managers see the importance in what we’re trying to accomplish. Every now and then, you encounter someone that needs a little bit of extra motivation to get up to code,” shared Quinn. “Instead of jumping straight to the enforcement steps, I try to strike a balance with encouragement and education. Yes, keeping up to code can be costly, but there is nothing more valuable than protecting the lives of your tenants and occupants.”

Thanks to Quinn’s years as a firefighter/paramedic, he has a wealth of knowledge and incident experience to draw upon to help educate his audience. Quinn has been a member of the LAFD for a little over 20 years.

Prior to joining the Fire Prevention Bureau, Brian was assigned to Fire Station 43 in Palms, on the Westside of Los Angeles. “My current role is far different from working at a fire station,” explained Quinn. “I don’t get the same tangible chance to make a difference like I would if I were responding to a fire or a medical emergency. However, this role is still extremely fulfilling, knowing that if I and my colleagues weren’t out there conducting these inspections, there’s a high probability L.A. would see a lot more life hazards.”

“Inspector Quinn is exceptionally organized and detail-oriented. He has impeccable follow-through and professionalism,” shared Captain Ryon Jones, of the Fire Prevention Bureau’s Legal Unit. “In a role that is all about rules and regulations, Inspector Quinn does a remarkable job making his findings relatable. He truly cares about making a difference at every building he inspects, and the quality of his work reflects this.”

Inspector Quinn is a husband, and father of two. Off duty, you are likely to find him outdoors, at the beach, or on a hiking trail taking full advantage of L.A.’s weather.



FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH APRIL 2021

KRISHAN VADUKUL, FIREFIGHTER/PARAMEDIC TACTICAL EMERGENCY MEDICAL SUPPORT

Krishan Vadukul is not your average paramedic. He is one of only eight LAFD Tactical Emergency Medical Support (TEMS) unit members. Vadukul and his colleagues assist partner agencies such as the Los Angeles Police Department's Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in dangerous situations.

TEMS members undergo rigorous tactical SWAT training to handle high-pressure incidents like barricaded suspects, hostage situations, and active-shooter scenarios. Krishan and his teammates are entrusted with supporting other first responders

near the hot zone, often near gunfire and other hazardous conditions.

Instead of working 24-hour platoon shifts with their firefighter brethren, TEMS members operate on a 4-10 work schedule (four days, ten hours per day) comparable to their law enforcement counterparts. In addition to riding out on planned events (i.e., serving warrants), Vadukul and his team respond to 2-3 spontaneous events each week. In between high-risk incidents and ongoing training, TEMS members bolster the LAFD Fast Response Vehicle (FRV) program.

The firefighter/paramedics assigned to the FRV program have special clearance from the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services to medically clear certain patients. Krishan and his partner can treat patients experiencing acute behavioral crises or chronic public inebriation and arrange transport to either a Mental Health Urgent Care Center or Sobering Center rather than a traditional hospital emergency room.

"We're kind of like the LAFD's multi-tool. The FRV versatility allows us to run interference for fire and EMS calls in busy districts," explained Vadukul. "We can also attach ourselves to structure fire responses or break-away to extinguish small rubbish fires. Since it is just two of us per FRV, we're always ready to go at a moment's notice when a call comes in from law enforcement."

Vadukul has been a TEMS member for a little over a year. So far, he has loved every minute of it. "Every day is different. Between our typical LAFD responsibilities and working alongside law enforcement, the action is non-stop. Going from a narcotics overdose to a structure fire, and then to a barricaded suspect call, there are some days where it feels like your adrenaline never stops pumping."

As if here were not busy enough with TEMS and FRV duties, Krishan also serves as a base camp manager at the Dodger Stadium vaccination site. In fact, Vadukul has spent nearly as much time on the blacktop at Dodger Stadium as he has as a tactical paramedic. "It's a bummer that this pandemic has dragged on for over a year, but I don't mind much. Whether I'm helping at the vaccine site or riding out to a medical emergency, I see it as my opportunity to help someone. You never know what the day might throw your way. That's part of what makes being a firefighter the greatest job ever."

Vadukul is a Southern California native who loves traveling to beachy destinations and learning about other cultures. He and his wife are currently expecting their first child.

FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH MAY 2021

LINSAY PELLEGRINI, INSPECTOR I FIRE PREVENTION BUREAU, VALLEY PUBLIC SAFETY

Linsay Pellegrini is an Inspector with the LAFD's Fire Prevention Bureau, handling public safety for institutions such as hospitals, convalescent homes, assisted living facilities, and jails in the Western San Fernando Valley.

More specifically, Pellegrini is responsible for evaluating the safety conditions at any facility where people who cannot care for themselves might live for more than 24 hours.

Inspector Pellegrini's top priorities are making sure that the employees, residents, and visitors at these facilities are as safe as possible. This includes checking to ensure fire protection systems are functional (such as sprinklers, lights, and alarms), and evaluating access to emergency exits so that occupants can evacuate safely in an emergency.

Arguably, her most important responsibility is forecasting and mitigating potential risks for fellow firefighters. Pellegrini has to be able to spot safety threats that may arise if/when firefighters are called to a site for any variety of reasons. For example, any chemicals housed on-site must be labeled, stored, and documented accordingly so that in the event of a fire, the responding engine companies know what types of hazards they might encounter.

The lion's share of Pellegrini's workload relates to the hundreds of residential care facilities across the Valley. These are non-medical facilities that provide rooms, meals, housekeeping, supervision, storage and distribution of medication, and personal care assistance, typically for elderly patients.

"I've been in this role for close to five years. The list of facilities to inspect is never-ending," expressed Inspector Pellegrini. "Between following-up on leads from local fire stations and walking every square foot at these facilities, it is an endless sea of safety concerns."

These facilities with six or fewer beds, usually located in residential neighborhoods, are intended to provide less institutional care than more extensive facilities like convalescent homes and hospitals. Pellegrini estimates that close to 75% of her time is consumed tending to these types of facilities.

Common violations include blocked exits, doors that do not function properly, improper storage, and locked doors. "The blocked emergency exits are a big concern. Understandably, these facilities want to stop transients from entering or prevent patients with memory loss from eloping, but we constantly need to reinforce why these exits need to remain clear – it is for everyone's safety," explained Pellegrini.



Pellegrini has been a member of the LAFD for 18 years. She joined the Department because of her desire to become a paramedic. The one-on-one of helping patients was what she enjoyed most during her days at the fire station.

After nearly ten years in the field, Pellegrini's career shifted when she became a mom. "It is definitely very different than working on an ambulance, but I enjoy it," shared Pellegrini. "Working in the Bureau gives me the feeling that I'm still helping people, granted on a broader scale. I feel a sense of responsibility to help our fire stations from a different vantage point."

When Pellegrini is not busy holding down one of the most technical and taxing roles in the Department, she moonlights as a super mom to her son and daughter. She also draws some uncanny comparisons to parenting and firefighting. "I think managing stress and sleep deprivation are aspects that definitely cross over to being a parent," joked Pellegrini.

"Hobbies? Who has time for hobbies?!" exclaimed Pellegrini. "My kids are my life and my hobby. I literally have no time for myself," she said laughingly. "But it's totally worth it. I don't want my daughter or any young woman to think that they have to sacrifice family life for their career. When you love what you do, you find a way to make it work."

Pellegrini is married to LAFD Captain Nick Pellegrini, who is assigned to Station 75 in Mission Hills. "We make a good team," shared the Inspector. "It's fair to say that as a mom, I take the lead with the kids, but on the days that I have inspections, Nick holds down the fort with academics and extracurriculars."

In typical firefighter fashion, Pellegrini showed her LAFD spirit and competitive nature when explaining her home dynamic. "Sometimes people are surprised to learn that our kids have two parents that are firefighters. But once you get to know us, we're just like most other families... The difference is, I might be an Inspector at work, but at home, everyone knows I'm the B.C. (Battalion Chief)."



FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH MAY 2021

DOUG VAN NORDEN, FIREFIGHTER III FIRE STATION 3, DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES

“Always wear your seatbelt,” says the man responsible for cutting crash victims free from car wreckage. Firefighter III Doug Van Norden is one of six “Swampers” entrusted with operating the Los Angeles Fire Department’s (LAFD) Heavy Rescue apparatus.

The Heavy Rescue, essentially a giant-sized tow truck, is a one-of-a-kind behemoth fondly referred to as “the Hook.” Van Norden and his fellow Swampers use this apparatus in a wide variety of life hazard situations, including righting overturned big rigs, separating crushed vehicles, pulling vehicles from the river or wash, and lifting heavy objects. Swampers also moonlight as emergency tire repair specialists for LAFD apparatus after normal business hours.

In addition to the winches, cables, chains, and cache of lifting equipment, the Heavy Rescue is also outfitted with industrial-grade chainsaws, drills, cutters, spreaders, airbags, and rams. “They call it the Heavy Rescue because everything on it is so darn heavy,” joked Van Norden.

Although Swampers see fewer daily calls than the rest of their firefighter counterparts, the emergencies they respond to tend to be of a more severe and shocking nature. “We don’t get called out to your average fender benders,” explained Van Norden. “The Heavy Rescue rolls out when there are serious life hazards involved, and our team needs some extra resources.”

“The majority of our calls are vehicle extractions when every minute counts. That could mean a car wedged under a big rig, an SUV that’s gone over the side of the freeway, or a nasty vehicle rollover. But we also see our fair share of construction accidents and physical limb extractions,” said Van Norden.

Becoming a Swamper is no easy feat. On top of earning a Class A driver’s license, Van Norden also underwent close to a year of specialty training to master the ins and outs of operating the Heavy Rescue. If you ask Van Norden, he tells you it was totally worth it.

“I love it. This has to be one of the coolest jobs in the entire Department,” shared Van Norden. “Every day is different. Since we’re responsible for covering the entire city, we may go from Downtown to the harbor, up to the foothills, and then over to the East Side, all in a single day.”

Van Norden joined the LAFD in 2009 after eight years of service in the Marine Corps, which included multiple deployments to Iraq and the Persian Gulf. In addition to his Heavy Rescue duties, he is also a member of the LAFD Urban Search and Rescue crew, the Swift Water Rescue team, FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) California Task Force 1, and the bike medic team.

The Mississippi native now resides in La Habra Heights with his wife and two children. Off the clock, Van Norden enjoys working on his house and road-tripping with the family.

“Firefighter Van Norden is the hardest working guy here,” remarked Captain Tim Roarty of Fire Station 3. “He’s been on the job for over a decade but never stopped running around like a rookie. His attitude and work ethic are outstanding. This honor is well deserved.”

FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH AUGUST 2021

STEVEN MARCZINKO, FIREFIGHTER/PARAMEDIC METROPOLITAN FIRE COMMUNICATIONS, DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES

Firefighter Paramedic Steven Marczinko is a 911 dispatcher for the Los Angeles Fire Department's Metropolitan Fire Communications, more commonly referred to as "Metro" or "MFC." Marczinko and his fellow dispatchers are responsible for processing the nearly 3,000 emergency calls that pour into Metro every 24 hours.

The dispatchers assigned to MFC are either Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) or Firefighter/Paramedics like Marczinko, who have previously served in the field. Marczinko is a 14-year veteran of the Department. He has held his current role for close to seven years.

Those in Los Angeles who have the duty or unfortunate circumstance of having to dial 911 are routed to someone like Marczinko, whose job is to quickly deduce the nature of the caller's emergency and help mobilize the appropriate LAFD resources. Without a doubt, it is one of the most complex and challenging roles within the Department. Lives are literally on the line when Marczinko answers a call.

Each time a call comes in, Marczinko and his fellow dispatchers follow a strict formula. His goal is to get as much information as possible in the shortest amount of time. The task is rarely easy, and no two calls are quite the same. Callers are often frantic, frightened, ill, injured, or some combination thereof. Due to L.A.'s widely diverse population, language barriers are also a frequent challenge.

"As soon as I get on the line, the caller's first instinct is to ask for help and begin telling you what's wrong," explained Marczinko. "There's usually some degree of urgency, desperation, or fear. I try to calm them down a bit and get them to focus on the important details, like the address of the emergency. The first thing we need to figure out is where the help is needed."

After determining the incident address or getting as much locational information as possible, Marczinko proceeds to ask about the type of emergency, how many people need help, what was the cause, is there still a risk to others nearby, and so on. The info Marczinko gathers is input into a program that calculates what resources are needed and notifies the nearest available station or field unit. "As soon as we get the basics – where, who, why – our resources can hit the road," said Marczinko. "We can usually get our crew there before the 911 call is over."

Close to 85% of the LAFD's 911 calls are for medical emergencies. Luckily, Marczinko and his colleagues are all trained medical professionals. Their experience in the field helped prepare them for the barrage of medical calls they handle each day, albeit from a distance. "We go through so much training to become a paramedic, to be able to apply our knowledge and skills to help people," shared Marczinko. "I had no idea that my years as a firefighter and paramedic were actually training me to become a dispatcher."

Marczinko loved working as an LAFD paramedic. However, several years ago, he was in a severe accident that left him with a spinal injury.



Marczinko was in the back of an ambulance while transporting a patient to the hospital when they were t-boned at an intersection. Although strong enough to resume his duties after months of rehabilitation, Marczinko laments that he was "never quite right after the accident."

According to Marczinko, the toughest part of working dispatch is coaxing the necessary information from callers in a state of panic. The most complicated calls, he said, are the medical emergencies involving multiple patients. "In the field, we take for granted how much we actually rely on our senses," explained Marczinko. "Once I joined MFC, I quickly realized how much we depend on sight to process information and make decisions. As a dispatcher, listening becomes our greatest strength, especially when we are relying on the caller to communicate what is happening. We have to listen for specific cues, lead the caller with concise questions, and in some cases, provide the caller with life-saving instructions."

Surprisingly, children are the most adept at answering his questions and following instructions, according to Marczinko. "For the most part, kids do a great job when they're calling in an emergency. They may not have all the specifics or have the benefit of an adult vocabulary, but they do a remarkable job relaying the basics so we can get help there as quickly as possible."

Although Marczinko has handled countless calls over the years, one particular call holds a special place in his heart. About a month into his MFC position, Marczinko fielded a call from a young girl around ten years old. The child dialed 911 because her grandmother had "passed out." The little girl was able to communicate that grandma was in cardiac arrest. She did not know her grandmother's street address, but Marczinko instructed her to run outside to find the nearest street markers. Next, Marczinko coached the young girl on how to perform chest compressions on her grandmother. When paramedics arrived at the house, they found the girl on the line with Marczinko as she was performing CPR. "She was just incredible," recalls Marczinko. "She saved her grandmother's life."

A Southern California native and son of a Los Angeles Police Department officer, Marczinko credits his father for inspiring him to pursue a career in public safety. He now resides in Eastvale, CA, with his wife and black lab, "Dino." Off the clock, Marczinko enjoys boating at Lake Havasu and off-roading in the desert.



FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH OCTOBER 2021

ADAM MARSH, FIREFIGHTER III WILDLAND FUEL MANAGEMENT UNIT

“Most firefighters aspire to drive fire trucks. I fell in love with driving a bulldozer,” remarked Adam Marsh, Firefighter III and Heavy Equipment Operator (HEO). Marsh has been firefighter since 2005, and a member of the LAFD since 2008.

Marsh is currently assigned to the Wildland Fuel Management Unit. His role as an HEO is to drive/operate specialized equipment such as bulldozers, skid steers, loaders, excavators, and of course, tractor trailers.

“Serving as an HEO combines two things I really enjoy - working outdoors, and learning to operate these amazing vehicles,” shared Marsh. “It may not match the exhilaration of fighting structure fires, but we provide an invaluable service, especially in communities with a wildland-urban interface (the line, area or zone where structures and other human development meet or undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels).”

As fire seasons grow longer and more intense, fire departments throughout California are becoming increasingly reliant on specialized heavy equipment and their operators. Weather permitting, brush clearance projects are now a year-round responsibility. Projects range from clearing defensible space around city properties, removing vegetation near vulnerable residential communities, and cutting access roads along the miles of winding slopes of local state parks.

Cutting and grading fire roads is one of Marsh’s most challenging, labor-intensive assignments, but also one he thoroughly enjoys because he gets to drive a variety of his favorite resources. During active incidents, Marsh and his wildland colleagues run the dozers and skid steers to cut contingency lines along ridgetops, so the fire doesn’t crest over and burn back down the next side. Cutting according to the topography the hills requires a high degree of skills, technical expertise, and a strong understanding of the soil, terrain, and habitats they work within.

Marsh and the Wildland Fuel Management Unit can spend between 10-12 hours per shift cutting lines on an active incident. In fact, Marsh was behind the controls of the LAFD’s new D5 dozer during the Palisades Fire in May of this year. The Palisades Fire scorched more than 1,200 acres and was the first major blaze of 2021 season in L.A. Marsh helped cut miles of breaks and contingency line that protected hillside homes until the fire was contained nearly two weeks later.

“After the fire is out, our next priority is fire line rehabilitation,” explained Marsh. “These large, heavy machines are great for helping us control the spread of fires, but they can also have a big impact on the local environments.” Marsh, and avid outdoors enthusiast, spoke of how the LAFD now works to rehabilitate the burn areas. They cut water bars that redirect water to help offset erosion, reintroduce helpful brush and re-seed natural plants to prevent introduction of “As firefighters, we need to respect and preserve the balance of L.A.’s ecosystems, especially when it comes to preserves and indigenous sites so this landscape can be appreciated by future generations,” shared Marsh.

“Firefighter Marsh is most deserving of this recognition,” expressed Captain II Rich Diede, Commander of the LAFD’s Wildland Fuel Management Unit. “He is one of the hardest working members of this department. He approaches every assignment with a positive attitude. He is constantly seeking to learn, improve his knowledge and skills with the heavy equipment, and find opportunities to be of service.”

Before joining the LAFD, Marsh was a wildland firefighter with the Ventura County Fire Department. He is now part of the third generation of Marsh family LAFD members, continuing the legacies of his grandfather, a former LAFD engineer, and his uncle, a retired Captain II.

When Marsh isn’t inside the cab of one of his favorite heavy equipment apparatus, he enjoys spending time with his family outdoors, camping, fishing, and surfing.

FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH NOVEMBER 2021

BRENT STEPHENS, FIREFIGHTER III

FIRE STATION 3, DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES

As far back as he could recall, there was never any doubt. Brent Stephens knew he was destined to become a firefighter. As a young boy, he would often visit his grandfather, who was assigned to the historic Ralph J. Scott, the LAFD's flagship fireboat, which serviced the port of Los Angeles for nearly 80 years.

"The stories my grandfather told about life as a firefighter captivated me and lit the spark that drove me to pursue my dream," shared Stephens. "He was a hero, my hero, and I wanted to be just like him."

At 14, as soon as he became eligible, Stephens joined the local Fire Explorers program in Orange County. After high school, he became an Emergency Medical Technician and volunteered with San Diego County Fire and Cal Fire, striving to gain as much experience as possible.

In 2016, Stephens earned his dream job with the Los Angeles Fire Department. He is now a Firefighter III assigned to Fire Station 3 in Downtown, easily one of the busiest stations in Los Angeles. Station 3 handles many metropolitan incident types such as high-rise fires, apartment fires, transportation accidents, elevator rescues, and a seemingly endless stream of medical emergencies.

Stephens transferred to Station 3 nearly a year ago, during the height of the pandemic. "When I first arrived [at Station 3], Downtown still had that eerie ghost town-vibe," explained Stephens. "Little by little, it's been fascinating to watch this community come back to life."

As downtown traffic and activity inch closer to the pre-pandemic pace, Stephens and his colleagues have witnessed the LAFD's incident rates soar. In fact, Stephens and the Station 3 crew have handled close to 300 more emergency calls than this same time last year.

Stephens' role is affectionately referred to as utility player since he rotates between the engine, ladder truck, and Basic Life Support (BLS) ambulance assignments. His skillset, versatility, and infectious positive attitude make him a valued member of the Station 3 family.

Firefighter III Brent Stephens was selected as Firefighter of the Month for his outstanding service and the compassionate approach he applies to his duties. A firefighter's actions speak loudly, but according to Stephens, sometimes their words leave the most significant impact. "A lot of people are going through tough times lately, so telling someone 'hey, it's okay, it's going to be alright.' That brief connection, that little moment of empathy, might be what helps someone pull through. That's a huge responsibility, but it's also more than that - It's an honor."





FIREFIGHTER OF THE MONTH

DECEMBER 2021

RASHAD BENOIT, FIREFIGHTER III

FIRE STATION 90, VAN NUYS

Rashad Benoit is a Firefighter III assigned to Fire Station 90 in Van Nuys, one of the busiest stations in the San Fernando Valley. In addition to shouldering his conventional firefighting duties, Benoit also serves as a Level I member of LAFD's Helitac crew.

As a Helitac member, Benoit assists with incidents all across the city. These members undergo specialized training to assist with all types of emergencies involving LAFD's helicopters.

Incidents vary from stranded hiker rescues, air ambulance transports of critically ill or injured patients, cliff rescues, high-rise rescues, large animal rescues, brush fires, and all manner of emergencies involving LAFD Air Operations.

Benoit has served in his current role for more than a decade. In his early years as a Helitac member, he was a Level II Helitac who primarily operated on the ground. Now he mainly serves as crew chief, operating the hoist, and working from within the helicopter to guide pilots and coordinate the actions of those under the aircraft.

"This has to be one of the most exciting roles in our Department. It never gets old," shared Benoit. "Plus, we're lucky in the sense that we get to see more happy endings than our colleagues at most fire stations. Lost hikers and stranded climbers tend to recover rather quickly in comparison to the more severe emergencies we encounter riding on a fire engine."

One of Benoit's primary responsibilities is establishing and managing helispots for brush fire incidents. A helispot is a designated safe area for the LAFD's helicopters to touch down, refuel, refill their water-dropping tanks, and pick up supplies or personnel.

"We have several dozen predetermined sites throughout the city. On sizable brush fires, a helicopter typically flies us in on their way to conduct the air attack. We'll get the helispot up and running within five minutes. After that, we're ready to service [LAFD] aircraft and helicopters from partner fire agencies as long as needed."

As a senior member of the Helitac team, Benoit is responsible for the training and development of newer members and keeping his crew safe. Benoit and his helispot crew have been airlifted to safer ground on more than one occasion when wind-driven wildfires have doubled back towards the helispot. "Although we're typically a quarter to half a mile away from the burn areas, we have to keep a watchful eye on a fire's progression and move our resources accordingly," shared Benoit. "You don't want to risk being in the fire's path with 1,000 gallons of aircraft fuel nearby."

Benoit grew up in a fire service family. His father served with the Los Angeles County Fire Department. As a boy, he recalled being drawn to a firefighting career but also dreamt of becoming a pilot. In high school, Benoit joined the local explorer program and never looked back.

Benoit took a major leap towards achieving his dream when he earned his commercial helicopter pilot's license six years ago. "My job combines two of the things I love most - flying and helping others," shared Benoit. "Soon, I hope to take the next step in my LAFD career and become one of our pilots."

"Firefighter Rashad Benoit is an overachiever with an outstanding work ethic. His stand-up character, positive attitude, and strong leadership qualities make him an invaluable member of the Station 90 family and Helitac crew," expressed Captain II Brett Willis, Benoit's supervisor.