



Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection

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New Firefighter Credits Her Training at Fire Academy After Dramatic Rescue

Just weeks on the job as the first female career firefighter for the City of West Haven Fire Department-Allingtown, Samantha Trayer was waiting for that all-important call: her first real fire.

On the afternoon of Feb. 28, Trayer got that call – and a lot more, when she was part of a team of three firefighters that rescued an unresponsive victim trapped in a burning home.

“You recall all of your training,” Trayer said of those first tense moments when she arrived at the burning house. “It’s repetitive. You have procedures and steps. I had been through it thousands of times at the academy.”

“You could see the fire. And then it’s like it’s a structure fire. I said to myself, this is it this is my first fire. I remember getting out of the truck. I put my helmet on. I grabbed the hose. I stretched it to the front door,” she said. “All I can remember it felt like I was back at the academy.”

As she entered the smoke-filled house, Samantha said “for some reason I was almost inherently calm. I knew the skills I had learned at the Connecticut Fire Academy.”

Trayer’s just-doing-my-job outlook represents more than helping to save a life. She stands for the kind of top-quality firefighter training that too often isn’t appreciated enough, said Michael R. Terenzio, Fire Chief for the City of West Haven Fire Department-Allingtown.

“What’s special about this is we have Sam, a new recruit, and it didn’t matter whether she was male or female,” said Terenzio. “Samantha found the victim. She then was given the line and she knew exactly what to do. She took the nozzle and started to hold the fire back so they could do the rescue.”

“The important thing about this is that she knew what to do without any significant direction. It happened like clockwork,” he said. The victim, rescued from the burning home by firefighters, was resuscitated by EMS personnel at the scene and transported to the hospital.

Amid an overall shortage of young firefighters, just 5 percent of career firefighters are female nationally, according to the U.S. Fire Administration. The current class at the Connecticut Fire Academy has one woman enrolled.

“As we celebrate Women’s History Month, Samantha’s story is an important one for us all to pay attention to,” said Ronnell A. Higgins, Interim Commissioner of the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, which includes the Connecticut Fire Academy.

“We desperately need more firefighters, and this is a career path wide open for women,” Higgins said.

State Fire Administrator Jeffrey J. Morrisette said during the 15-week academy program students gradually take on more responsibilities, building up skills and learning to work together. Before starting at the academy, recruit applicants must pass a physical ability test that includes carrying up to 75 pounds of added weight.

“They develop as individuals to working within the team environment, which is the fire service,” Morrisette said.

P.J. Norwood, Director of Training at the Connecticut Fire Academy in Windsor Locks, said students who are physically fit get the support they need to complete the rigorous program.

“We pride ourselves making themselves ‘jump seat ready.’ They are ready to function in any department in the state. We provide them with the basic foundation that they need,” Norwood said. “We need firefighters that are representative of our communities.”

Trayer finished her academy training last December and early this year joined West Haven’s Allingtown Fire Station, making the switch from her job as a marriage and family therapist for a firefighting career.

“The first day I started I remember thinking there is no way I am going to be able to do this,” she recalled of when she started at the academy.

“But from the first day I was told at the fire academy that just do your job and you will be fine. Don’t be afraid to step out of your comfort zone,” said Trayer, who is 32. “You hear firefighter and you think male. But there is not one skill here that I can’t do.”

“People ask me how do we get more women, but for me it’s how do you attract the right mentality. It’s not running toward the danger. It’s running toward the people you are going help.”

For more information, Michael R. Terenzio, Fire Chief, City of West Haven Fire Department-Allingtown, at 203-933-2541 or Rick Green, Director of Communications at DESPP, at 860-828-6681.

To learn more about becoming a career firefighter, visit the state Commission on Fire Prevention and Control website at <https://portal.ct.gov/CFPC/Recruit-Firefighter-Program/How-to-Become-a-Career-Firefighter>



Photo credit: West Haven Fire Department



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