



# If you can take the heat

## Academy prepares students for careers in fire fighting

**A**s far as job security goes, fire fighters are in a service industry that likely won't change as long as there continues to be heat, fuel, and oxygen to create fire.

North Idaho College's Workforce Training Center has partnered with the Coeur d'Alene Fire Department, Northern Lakes Fire Protection District, and Kootenai County Fire Rescue to begin offering the new Fire Fighter I Academy.

The program began in the winter of 2011 with 12 students training at the Coeur d'Alene Fire Department. Each academy covers hands-on training in safety and health, personal protective equipment, rescue and extrication, ventilation, fire detection, CPR, protecting fire scene evidence, and hazardous materials. The academy prepares students and

*"I was scared when I signed up—scared that they'd figure 'Oh, she's just a girl.' But I think I'm proving that if you're willing to work hard and put the time in, you can do anything."*

- Heather Graaskamp, Fire Fighter 1 Academy participant



fire service professionals (volunteer and paid fire fighters) for testing for the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) Fire Fighter 1 certification. Fire fighters who achieve the certification entering the field will often have an

advantage over their non-certified peers.

"The certification is a prerequisite for employment with many departments," said Coeur d'Alene Fire Department Captain Bill

Deruyter, who is NIC's lead instructor. "The certification enhances an applicant's resume. It shows initiative and the desire to actually do the job of being a fire fighter. The application process is highly competitive—the more an applicant can do to prepare themselves for the position, the better."

Heather Graaskamp, 21, is grateful to have the opportunity to train as she prepares to apply for a fire fighter position.

"I think I'm proving that if you're willing to work hard and put the time in, you can do anything," Graaskamp said.

The next NIC Fire Fighter Academy 1 starts in January 2012. Information sessions will be held this fall to explain the program requirements and application process. For more information, visit [www.nic.edu/wtc](http://www.nic.edu/wtc) or call (208) 769-3333.

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## In the field with Captain Bill

*Captain Bill Deruyter is a captain with the Coeur d'Alene Fire Department and the lead instructor in the North Idaho College Fire Fighter I Academy*



### Why is it important to earn the International Fire Service Accreditation Certification?

Job opportunities are created with attrition, work-related injuries, and community growth. Local departments undergo a testing process every two years to establish a hiring pool of qualified applicants. The testing process includes a written test, physical agility test, and an oral presentation before a board. Only those who place at the top of the written test, usually only the top 10 percent, move on to the physical agility element. The physical agility element is generally either pass or fail. The applicants that pass the physical agility are then scheduled for an oral board interview. This oral board consists of three to five individuals from the community, other fire departments, city officials or others chosen by the chief of the testing agency. The average scores of each applicant determines the hierarchy of the applicant pool and who will receive interviews. The process

is highly competitive, so having a certification and knowledge in the field gives prospective fire fighters an advantage over other applicants.

### How much do fire fighters earn?

According to the Idaho Department of Labor 2010 Occupational Employment and Wage Survey, fire fighters can earn an average of \$10.50 to \$24 per hour in Idaho. Every fire department organizes their pay scale a little differently and wages also vary from state to state.

### What is the Fire Fighter I Academy like?

The course is not easy and is designed as a paramilitary (boot camp) program. Successful graduates will earn a certificate of completion and can apply to take the International Fire Service Accreditation Certification (IFSAC) test. This test is required to obtain the official Fire Fighter 1 certification. This program prepares you for that certification. In order to receive your Hazardous Materials

Operations Certificate the IFSAC test is required. If a graduate decides not to test, he/she will not be certified as a Fire Fighter 1 and will not be certified at the Hazardous Materials Operations level.

### Where are jobs available?

There's a very competitive process involved in becoming hired. If you have the desire and keep taking tests, one day it will pay off. Applicants should ask themselves "Where do I want to live?" "Which department is best for me and offers the most challenging career?" "What schedule does the department work?" "What benefits does the department offer?"

### What is it like to be a fire fighter?

Being a fire fighter is the most rewarding job in the world. Every day is different and you make a difference in people's lives. You train constantly, meet great people, serve as a role model for children, enjoy working closely with coworkers, and are given many educational

opportunities. You have to like the medical side of the profession. Some people get into the profession just to fight fire, but fires are only a small portion of the job. Fire fighters respond to medical calls, natural disasters, car accidents, water rescues, back country rescues, urban search and rescue, and various other emergency situations. Fire fighters get called for anything someone can't handle. The downside is that fire fighters must see things that most people should never see or will ever see in their day-to-day lives. Fire fighters respond in times of need and sometimes, that need is not pleasant.

### How do I enroll?

Information sessions will be held this fall. An application is required, participants must be 18 years old, and a medical clearance and current immunizations are required. An application will be available at the information session for enrollment in the January 2012 academy. For more information, visit [www.nic.edu/wtc](http://www.nic.edu/wtc) or call (208) 769-3333.

