

TOUGHEST TWO MINUTES

FIREFIGHTERS COMPETE AT WINDSOR FIREFEST 2023

STORY BY MATTHEW ST. AMAND / PHOTOGRAPHY BY NORA ROMERO

IT HAS BEEN CALLED “the toughest two minutes in sports” and it’s coming to Riverfront Festival Plaza September 8, 9, and 10: the FireFit Championships as part of Windsor FIREFEST 2023.

“Windsor Fire and Rescue Services is excited to host the 2023 Windsor FIREFEST, including the FireFit Western Ontario Regional,” says Fire Chief Stephen Laforet in a promotional release. “The Windsor Firefighter Challenge Team members have participated and set records in these events since 1997. In addition, their actions extend beyond the competition, donating equipment to the department and extending fundraising opportunities that support local organizations. We look forward to cheering them on again in September.”

Team members representing Windsor are Carlton Ylinen, Chris Horvath, Darren Quennell, Jack Bailey, Captain (has competed for eleven years and is in FireFit Hall of Fame), Jason Laughland and Kory Bremner.

The FireFit competition—individual and relay—is based upon firefighting tasks often performed in emergency situations. The course is highly demanding and each task is completed while wearing full firefighting gear, which weighs 80 lbs.:

Task 1: Stair Climb has firefighters carrying a “Hi-Rise pack”—a four-foot bundle of four-inch hose weighing 42 lbs—up a five storey tower.

Task 2: Hose Hoist occurs at the top of the tower, where competitors hoist—hand over hand—a 45 lb. donut roll of BullDog LDH hose tied to a 5/8” kern-mantle rope.

Competitors then bolt back down the stairs for Task 3: Forcible Entry, which utilizes a chopping simulator (Challenger Force Machine) using the 9 lb. Trusty Cook shot mallet provided. Firefighters move the beam along the decal into the “green” (Green means go). Once this task is complete the hammer must be placed on the designated 4’ x 4’ area.

Task 4: Run around a series of hydrants for 140 feet to a 1.75” fully charged BullDog Hi-Combat hose line.

Task 5: Hose Advance has competitors dragging the fully charged hose 75 feet, where they stop and hit a target with a stream of water. The nozzle must clearly cross the doorway marker (blue line).

Task 6: Victim Rescue involves competitors dragging a 175 lb. mannequin, backward, 100 feet. Carrying the mannequin in one’s arms or over a shoulder is not permitted. The mannequin must not be grasped by its clothing or appendages.

“It’s an excruciating minute-fifteen to two-minute competition,” says twenty-six-year veteran Jack Bailey, Team Lead and Captain, Windsor Fire & Rescue Services. “We train to be able to take it to the limit—we train hard! It’s something you haven’t felt before until you do it. We’re wearing full firefighting gear, breathing from compressed air, running, slamming and rescuing the mannequin at the end. The advantage we have now for the young guys—those of us who have done it over the years, we’re teaching them. Darren Hillman, Captain - Windsor Fire & Rescue Services, came back to help as a coach. He’s been instrumental in training the young guys.”

The FireFit competition is just one of the “Four Rugged Competitions” occurring at FIREFEST 2023 at the Riverfront Festival Plaza. There is also the Transition to Betterness (T2B) Rescue Relays – Community Obstacle Course on September 8.

“This is where community teams can try out this one-of-a-kind course,” says David Bellamy, Marketing Chair, Windsor FIREFEST 2023. “We will have teams made up of five-to-seven people that will try their best to do what the professionals do. We only have room for twenty teams.”

The second Rugged Competition is a five-kilometer run with first responders on September 9th. This is open to the public and 500 participants are anticipated to take part. Proceeds from the ►



Clockwise from above: FIREFIT’s Victim Rescue - Firefighter rescues 175 pound lifelike adult mannequin and drags it in reverse 100 feet; FIREFIT’s 5 storey tower at Windsor’s Riverfront Festival Plaza during the 2022 Can-Am Police Fire Games; Windsor’s FireFit team (l-r) Kory Bremner, Darren Quennell, Jack Bailey, Stephen Laforet (Fire Chief), Carlton Ylinen, Jason Laughland, Chris Horvath.

run benefit the Canadian Mental Health Association Windsor-Essex County Branch as well as the Law Enforcement Torch Relay for Special Olympics.

Also, that day, is the Tug Across the Detroit River.

The FireFit competition is the focal point of FIREFEST 2023. Although Windsor has not competed since 2014, from 1997 until that year, the Windsor Team took five Canadian National titles and two World Championships. Four Windsor firefighters are in the FireFit Hall of Fame.

“We won back-to-back World Championships starting the year Deerfield Beach, Florida hosted and then in Ottawa, the only year that the Worlds were hosted in Canada—2002 and 2003,” Jack says. “This year, however, is an interesting time. We have a new team. We haven’t done this in a number of years as a team. We’ll see if this is something for the future.”

As for the FireFit tour, this is the tenth time it has been in Windsor.

“The Canadian National Championships take place in Sarnia one weekend after Windsor’s FIREFEST 2023,” David says.

He goes on to explain: “The success of the Windsor team has translated into benefits for the city. When the team was at its peak of success, it not only won bragging rights, but also a variety of prizes, some of which were donated to the City of Windsor. Namely, seven thermal imaging cameras with a combined value of \$130,000.”

“One of the first thermal imaging cameras was placed on one of our vehicles,” Jack adds. “At the time that was really something. Now, we have a thermal imaging camera on every vehicle in the city. These cameras aid us in saving lives and property. They help us detect danger areas through thick smoke and give us an idea of where the fire is at its worst before we go there.”

This is the 18th year Windsor Firefighters have competed, and more than 25 Windsor Firefighters have participated over the years in the gruelling challenge.

“It’s worth noting that team members train and compete on their own time and at their own expense,” David says.

Windsor FIREFEST 2023 is not only a free event, but a family event. There will be a Kids’ Zone and opportunities for the public to interact with members of the fire service and other first responders.

For more information about Windsor FIREFEST 2023, view further details at windsorfire.com/firefest.

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