

LEOH Trip

Houston Fire Department

Training Facility (Val Jahnke; VJTF)

May 19, 2022





Trip coordinator Ann and Precinct One
bus driver Eddie kept us on course
to enjoy our trip.





We began our tour in a classroom, where we received a refresher course on basic fire safety, and the types and proper use of fire extinguishers and smoke detectors. We also received personal copies of fire safety/prevention booklets.

We enjoyed listening to knowledgeable and experienced instructors during our entire visit.



WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BECOME A HOUSTON FIREFIGHTER?

- Applicants must be between 18-35 years old, with some college credits or military experience
- They must pass the Civil Service exam, an approximately 3-hour test assessing basic reading and math skills
- Passing the physical ability test (PAT) will ensure they can handle basic firefighting duties requiring physical strength
- They must complete fingerprinting and required immunizations
- They must successfully pass a drug test, a physical, an interview, a polygraph, and a background check

Once these criteria are met, they will enter cadet training class for several months to become a certified EMT/firefighter.



WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BECOME A HOUSTON FIREFIGHTER?

The physical ability test (PAT), one of the numerous requirements, is physically challenging and intense!

Applicants must successfully do the following, which demonstrate basic firefighting skills:

1. **Ladder raise** – raise the fly section of a 24-foot extension ladder using a rope (halyard) and hand-over-hand technique, while standing in a 3x3 foot painted area on the ground; then lower it hand-under-hand.
2. **Stair climb with equipment** – climb and descend 6 flights of stairs while carrying 35 pounds of hoseline.
3. **Hoseline hoist** - from the 3rd floor of an outdoor staircase, use a rope to hoist a 35-lb hoseline up to and back down from the 3rd floor, while standing in a 3x3 foot painted area on the stair landing.
4. **Equipment carry** – carry a 75-pound box 100 feet and place it on top of a 3-foot-tall platform.
5. **Victim rescue** – drag a 165-pound human form dummy 50 feet, using a specified dragging technique.



All 5 tests must be performed consecutively, and during all tests, the candidate is wearing fire-fighting breathing gear that weighs about 20 pounds.

BUT WAIT... THERE'S MORE!

After completing the 5 skills successfully, remaining candidates are allowed to rest 15-20 minutes.

Then they must **run 1.5 miles within 15 minutes**.



If they pass the PAT and running test, and complete the other requirements, they will be considered for admission to the academy.





This room in the main building is dedicated to Houston firefighters who have fallen in the line of duty, and dates back several decades. Their pictures and stories line the walls in this room. Many of us recalled some of these incidents.

Val Jahnke, for whom the facility is named, served the Houston Fire Department between 1940-1977. Many of his relatives, all named Jahnke, chose to serve, as well. Unfortunately, one of the Jahnkes, Jay Jahnke, died in the line of duty.



We enjoyed a tour outside to hear more about training, and to view some training buildings and exercises. We were told that the training buildings are some of the best in the country, and that classroom training is state-of-the-art, with the ability to utilize instructors, videos, and other training tools from around the globe.



The “burn building” is one of several used for training.

At the time of our visit, the fire had already been extinguished in the building, and firefighting garb had been hosed down to remove the soot.





We observed trainees at work, sharpening their fire axe skills by chopping holes in plywood, to simulate gaining rapid access to a building roof.

One of our tour guides made the point that size (or sex) does not determine the physical abilities required of a firefighter. For example, a large, muscular person may not pass the physical tests required for admission to cadet training, while a smaller, thinner person may pass these tests with ease.

On the other hand, many seemingly well-qualified candidates who pass all tests and are accepted into cadet training drop out during training for a variety of reasons, such as fear during a particular exercise.



We took a brief tour by bus to view other training scenarios on the facility grounds, to include a hazardous spill from a railroad car off the tracks, a container ship, a plane crash, and a schoolbus wreck.

There are many more acres available to the academy, and they are looking forward to constructing more scenarios, including a swift-water rescue.

Back at the buildings used for fire training, our guide explained that one of the buildings is known as the “fun house” (which it is not)! They set up scenarios inside the building to (safely) mimic real-life emergency events that resulted in a firefighter dying in the line of duty.



To end our visit, anyone who wished to, could practice using a fire extinguisher on an actual fire.

It appears that these folks enjoyed putting out their fires. Some, including the spectators, got more excitement than they bargained for when the wind suddenly shifted, sending heavy smoke their way!

It is safe to say that all of us came away with a greater appreciation of the skills, bravery, and dedication required to be a firefighter.





Now we were ready for lunch, before we returned home.

We were a large and enthusiastic crowd, but the waitstaff did a great job taking care of us.

Food portions were huge – no one left hungry!