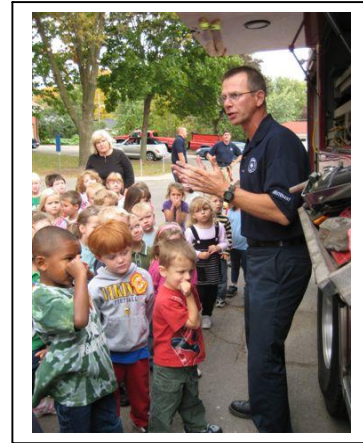
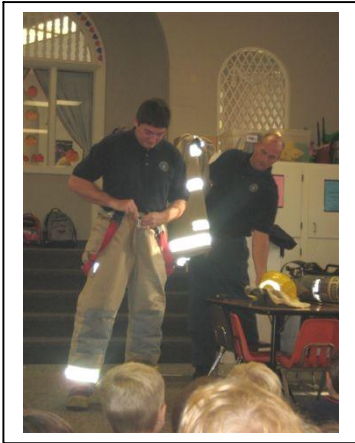


## ***Waterloo Fire Rescue Ignites Preschoolers Interest in Fire Prevention***

**By Jill Smith, Fire PALS Program Assistant**



Have you ever wondered what it is like to teach fire prevention to preschoolers? Each year Waterloo Fire Rescue's very own firefighters are called upon to do just that. During Fire Prevention Week, and throughout the entire month, Waterloo Fire Rescue have preschool classes visit the fire stations. All of Waterloo Fire Rescue engine companies also go out to area preschools and spend time teaching important fire prevention messages to our community's youngest citizens. On October 13<sup>th</sup>, a crew of 3 firefighters from station 6 went to St. Edward's Preschool. The weather was a warm 68 degrees and the sky was overcast. But dreary skies didn't dampen the preschoolers excitement for meeting the firefighters and seeing the fire truck.

As Mrs. Liljegren finished up her morning lesson with her students, Firefighters Jeff Freshwater, Chris Behrens and Doug Schwebach entered the back of the classroom to cheers of, "The firefighters are here! The firefighters are here!"

Firefighter Jeff began the lesson with important information regarding smoke detectors and showed the students the sound a smoke alarm makes. Several of the children put their hands over their ears to cover out the shrill beep. "This is how this smoke detector sounds. When you go home tonight boys and girls I want you to ask Mom and Dad to show you where the smoke detectors are in your house. Ask them to push the button so you can hear what your smoke detector sounds like because all smoke detectors sound a little different. You should have a smoke detector on every level of your home, in the basement, on the main floor and in each bedroom."

"Hey do you know what you should do if you hear the smoke detector go off at your house?"

Anxious to share their knowledge the students shouted. "Get out!"

"That's right! You need to get out of your house and and meet at your family meeting place. Once you are outside should you go back inside for anything? For your pet Fluffy or Buffy or for even Mom and Dad?"

"No!" replied the children.

"That is right. That is the firefighter's job! Let them go into the building. They have the gear to protect themselves from the smoke and heat from fire!"

As he continued talking about important fire safety topics such as Dial 911 in an emergency and get out and stay out, Firefighter Jeff introduced the children to his partner Doug.

“See that guy over there with the ugly face? Notice how he is just a normal guy right now. Well he is going to get even uglier as he puts on his gear.”

“Boys and girls, while I keep talking I want you to watch as he changes into some of the gear he might wear if he had to come in to rescue you in a fire. And please don't be frightened. He's just a normal guy putting on his firefighter's gear. Watch now how he puts on his pants and his boots, followed by his coat, hat and oxygen mask.” Eyes around the room got bigger and bigger, and the room grew quieter and quieter as Firefighter Doug continued to change.

“Now listen to what he sounds like when he talks through his oxygen mask.”

Firefighter Doug got down on his hands and knees and crawled on the floor and said, “Is anybody here? I'm here to help you escape.” As he crawled around on the floor he got right into a pile of kids and let them touch his glove, his arm, his, his mask.

“Go ahead and touch me. I'm still me behind this mask. I won't hurt you.” Although some of the children were a little more apprehensive, many were in awe and phrases such as “Cool!” and “Awesome.” could be heard echoing throughout the room.

One little girl sitting next to me said, “I'm a little scared of him.” I reminded her that he's the same guy that he was a minute ago and told her to watch now as he started taking the gear off.”

“Oh, she said with a smile, as he made his transformation out of his SCBA gear, “He is the same guy!”

“Great job boys and girls! This is the first time in a long time that we haven't had anyone cry!” said Firefighter Jeff.

Firefighter familiarization was the key concept that the engine company wanted to get across on this day.

“The firefighters did a great job! They really held the students attention. It was neat how he let the children touch him with his gear on. It reinforced that he (the firefighter) was not someone to be afraid of,” said St. Edward Preschool teacher Renee Duggan.

After the lesson in the classroom the students were led outside to view the firetruck up close. The important tools on the truck were explained and the students were allowed to touch the truck and as the day's lesson ended, the firetruck pulled out of sight in full glory with it's lights on and sirens blaring.

“Cool, “ said five year old George Smith. “Cool!”

Indeed very cool!

***Note: According to the National Archives and Records Administration's Library Information Center, Fire Prevention Week is the longest running public health and safety observance on record. The President of the United States has signed a proclamation proclaiming a national observance during that week every year since 1925.***