

Firefighters prove they're up to a challenge



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Firefighters from across the region showcased their skills to the local community last weekend.

Ready 4 Rescue, a mobile training and testing service for firefighters, hosted a Firefighter Extreme Challenge at Trainer Games in Shelburne July 19.

"The public holds firefighters at a high standard, but also don't really know what we do," said Sabrina Caruso, co-founder of Ready 4 Rescue. "They see the red fire truck, the gear and know you're going into a fire, but they don't really understand the steps and what is involved before you even walk into a fire.

"With this, the public can see the exertion, the heat exhaustion, and what it feels like to work under load."

Firefighters were tasked with making their way through an obstacle course, which included pulling a 200-pound sled, climbing 50

feet, an overhead pike pole, carrying and hoisting tools, and crawling while dragging a charged hose line.

The obstacle course was completed while wearing a 50-pound training pack.

The event saw 10 firefighters compete and about 15 community members test their mettle.

Brendan Neely from Oakville Fire Department placed first in the men's heat of the course, Christine Martel from Caledon Fire Department place first in both the women's heat and partners with Brain Ewles, also from Caledon Fire Department.

"It's a very accurate picture of the physical demands of the job with a well-rounded combination of fitness. Pushing, pulling, and lifting while being aware of where you're at in time and space," said Neely, who has been with the Oakville Fire Department for nine years and previously volunteered with the Mulmur/Melancthon Fire Department.

The event also served as a fundraising opportunity for the Canadian Fallen Firefighters Foundation with donations collected through a silent auction and "boot drive."

"Every firefighter knows that there's a risk involved in their job," Caruso said. "You never know when you go in that it's you or a brother or sister that does down on the job. We want to support any non-profit organization that is willing to go the mile to take care of those people and their families."

Founded in 2003, the Canadian Fallen Firefighters Foundation (CFFF) is a registered non-profit charitable organization dedicated to honouring Canadian firefighters who have died in the line of duty.

In addition to honouring fallen firefighters at an annual memorial ceremony on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, the organization also helps provide financial assistance, support programs, and scholarships and bursaries for the children and spouses of the fallen firefighter.

"Everything we do is through fundraising efforts. Grassroot efforts like this, where we benefit from the money that's raised, is the lifeline of the CFFF," said David Sheen, the foundation's president. "The emotional resilience of the families is so incredible and inspiring. We have found that it means the world to these families to know that their loved ones are not forgotten."