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## House ignited for firefighting exercises in Cumberland

By Jim Hale Times Staff Writer

Aug 16, 2021



In the left photo, a chimney collapses at right as flames jet from a house that was allowed to burn Sunday as part of a fire training exercise in Cumberland Township. In the right photo, a firefighter uses water to keep utility lines from being ignited by the intense heat.

Jim Hale/Gettysburg Times

Even across the street, the heat was too intense to bear as firefighters allowed a house to burn down Sunday at the end of training exercises in Cumberland Township.

Using hay and wooden shipping pallets as fuel, firefighters repeatedly ignited and extinguished individual rooms before allowing flames to spread throughout the two-story house just northwest of Herrs Ridge Road at Battalion Lane.

Fire was gushing through the roof by about 2:30 p.m. at 560 Old Mill Road. Water was sprayed on nearby utility lines to keep them from igniting.

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It has been several years since local fire companies have had such a training opportunity, said Gettysburg firefighter Doug Kahn. He lives nearby and contacted Burkentine Builders of Hanover, which owns the house and is developing the area.

Burkentine was preparing to demolish the structure, but when presented with the idea of a training exercise, “they thought it was a great idea to help the community and help the fire department,” Kahn said.

Numerous fire companies from around the area were on hand for the training session that began Sunday morning, while others were at Gettysburg’s station to cover any emergency calls, Kahn said.

“Community members can see how seriously we take training,” Kahn said.

Many neighbors stood or sat in folding chairs across the street at the entrance to the Cannon Ridge development. Residents provided firefighters with snacks, Kahn said.

Being able to use “an actual house is very rare,” not only because of structure availability, but also the intricacies of environmental regulation, insurance, and the like, Kahn said.

Having such an opportunity to “improve our skills is invaluable,” especially for personnel who don’t respond to building fires frequently as urban firefighters do, Kahn said.

Guiding 15 students who received formal training were nine instructors from the Pennsylvania State Fire Academy in Lewiston, Gettysburg Fire Chief Ed Mizenko said. They were employed by Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC), he said.

Repeated blazes in separate rooms allowed firefighters to gain multiple experiences of “exposure to the heat,” “looking for the seat of the fire,” and “seeing smoke patterns,” Kahn said.

Even an experienced firefighter like Kahn learned from the event.



It was good to have a reminder about how smoke patterns develop, he said, and the experience was also “a reminder how tough it is on the body, a reminder that you’re not 19.”

Kevin Kuntz, who has been in the fire service for 47 years with Gettysburg and elsewhere, agreed, saying the event provided the opportunity to confront “multiple fires in a relatively compressed time-frame,” to “cycle through different tasks,” and to collaborate with mutual aid departments.

His son, Robert Kuntz, also concurred.

“It’s an opportunity you seldom get” to experience “a much more realistic atmosphere,” Robert said. He began as a junior department member at age 16 and has been a certified firefighter for three years.

The atmosphere made for a different experience than that provided by concrete structures used at training facilities, Mizenko said.

The house was perfectly situated for the event in that no other structures were nearby, he said.

Burkentine was planning to remove the structure, Mizenko said.

“The structure has been cleared of all its contents including having an asbestos abatement,” before issuance of a burn permit, according to a news release issued by the Gettysburg Fire Department, which sponsored the event.

The building “has been surveyed by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, which issued a burn permit, according to the release.

Though personnel at the scene could not see it, they were conscious of a funeral procession of emergency vehicles for Joshua Laird, 46, of Fairfield, who lost his life Wednesday while battling a blaze in Maryland.

Thousands lined roadways to pay their respects as Laird’s body was moved from Washington, D.C. to Taneytown, Md. on Saturday and from Taneytown to Gettysburg on Sunday.

“It really hits home. A lot of us knew him and respected him. I know he’d want us to be out here thinking about him” and his family, Kahn said.

