



In Their Own Words

# Phoenix Firecamp Graduates Up for Firefighting

by Jackaline Ring  
Advisory Member, Board of Directors, FSNYS

The Fire Service Women of New York State, Inc. established Phoenix Firecamp in 2007 with a singular mission – attracting young women into the state’s career and volunteer fire and emergency services. The weeklong overnight camp for girls, ages 14-19, is held yearly in July at the Utica Fire Academy. The mission is being realized.

Phoenix Firecamp Director, FDNY Lt. Anna Schermerhorn-Collins, said that the graduates keep in email and phone contact with the camp staff who are female members of career and volunteer departments from throughout the state. “We volunteer our time, take vacations and pay our own expenses to be in Utica for the week. Responses like these are our reward – this is the next generation of women in firefighting – and we are thrilled to be their mentors.”

Ashley Baker, who planned to be a journalist, will instead attend the University of New Haven’s Fire Science program, majoring in Arson Investigation. Ashley wrote, “If it wasn’t for camp, I don’t think I would have been able to see everything a woman can do in the fire service and I would have never picked Fire Science as a major.” Right after camp, Ashley joined the Lee Center Volunteer Fire Department in her hometown.

Kori Wilson has changed her college major to Firefighter/Paramedic. A resident of Beavers Dam, NY and a member of that fire department, she aspires to be the first female firefighter hired by the

City of Corning and will take the exam in June. She wrote, “Camp has impacted my life greatly...now I know that I’m not the only one out there...I have people to back me up and help me to achieve my dreams.”

Bethany White of Candor, NY had been involved with EMS and always wanted to try firefighting, but was never given the opportunity. She was both thrilled and nervous about attending Phoenix. “It was a little intimidating not knowing anyone and having no experience,” she said, “but the staff is amazing. They created an environment that is perfect for developing new skills, experiences, and lifelong friendships. Each individual staff member shared a part of their life with

us that week, while giving us valuable life lessons to be used in any part of our lives.” Bethany joined the Vestal Volunteer Fire Department after completing Phoenix Firecamp.

Danielle Finch from Brackney, PA, came away from camp with a new ambition – to be hired by the FDNY. She is finishing up her Paramedic with an Associates Degree.

“Without firecamp,” she said, “I would have never found this passion that I want to live for. When I first arrived, I thought that it was going to be like a military boot camp and I wasn’t going to get along with everyone, but I was completely wrong. I was friends with everyone there and we all had each others’ backs during the rugged, hot training days. I learned teamwork, communicating, and way more.”

“I went to camp, with some experience, thinking I might learn something new, or maybe make a friend or two. Instead, I left with a family.”

Karen Jackson has dreamed about being a firefighter almost her entire life. A resident of Charleton, NY, Karen wrote that Phoenix Firecamp “opened my eyes to how incredible and in depth the world of firefighting is. I found that it’s not just pointing a hose at a fire, spraying water and watching the fire go down. Oh no. I found that firefighting is about teamwork and communication and the courage to actually go into a fire even if everyone is running out.” Right now, Karen is part of the auxiliary of Harmony Corners Volunteer Fire Department.

Megan Collins, who lives in Ontario, NY, is an explorer with the Walworth Volunteer Fire Department. She called the firecamp, “a real training ground, with real female instructors and realistic situations. Although we just dipped our feet into a lot of aspects, it gave me a perspective into what part of the fire service I want to enter. It happens to be search and rescue and ladder truck operations. The most memorable encouragement for life I was taught at Phoenix was to ‘work smarter, not harder.’ Phoenix Firecamp was an amazing and unique experience. It is one that has changed me, and one I will remember forever. I went to camp, with some experience, thinking I might learn something new, or maybe make a friend or two. Instead, I left with a family.”



Megan Sauer of Liberty, NY, wrote that practicing in the smoke trailer simulator at camp helped overcome her fear of going into fires. “I was really able to improve my search skills. The training in truck operations, such as roof ventilation, and the evolution in vehicle extrication have inspired me to continue my professional training. In the near future I will be taking Firefighter 1 and eventually Apparatus Operator courses. The opportunity to participate in this program with sister firefighters is an outstanding professional growth opportunity that I will remember well into the future.” Megan is associated with the Liberty Volunteer Fire Department.



“I learned that I can do anything that I want if I put my mind to it, and to never be afraid of something that I don’t know about.”

Romulus, NY resident, Tiarra Roberts, who works with her hometown fire department, maintains that Phoenix Firecamp was the best thing that ever happened to her! “I enjoyed meeting the other girls and getting to know them better throughout the whole week and living in the bunk room in the academy was the best. What I learned was how to tie ropes and knots, and doing SCBA trainings. What I liked was the heated training that we got and being able to ride the snorkel and climb the ladder...I was unafraid.”

Victoria Estupinan, lives in Wallkill, NY and is the only female member of the Plattekill Volunteer Fire Department Explorer Post. She says that Phoenix Firecamp taught her more than firefighting skills – she learned a lot about herself. “I learned that I can do anything that I want if I put my mind to it, and to never be afraid of something that I don’t know about. Camp made me feel confident in myself and boosted my self esteem. I learned that teamwork is the key to almost everything and to trust the person in front of me and behind me with my life. My favorite part was probably the search and rescue. It was really cool packing up and crawling around in the dark and smoke.”

Phoenix Firecamp is free, except for a non-refundable application fee of \$40. It will be conducted July 19th – 24th, 2009 at the Utica Fire Academy. Applicants need not have any prior experience with emergency services. All of the information, including the application form, is available at [www.fsnys.org](http://www.fsnys.org) along with 2008 photos and news media coverage. The Phoenix Firecamp phone number is (845) 309-1325.

