

Photos by Layla Turner  
The firefighters have been hard at work preparing for the upcoming competition.



**Firefighters**

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Shown for more than a dozen years on ESPN, the grueling challenge pits teams of firefighters from across the U.S. and around the world against each other. Suited up in full-bunker gear — complete with a Scotts breathing apparatus — relay-style teams negotiate a slate of challenges that simulate the work they do in real emergencies. Rescuing a 175-pound dummy and carrying 40-plus pound hoses up stairs are among the duties each team must complete with precision; the slightest slip might give a competitor the edge.

“Ever since I wanted to join the fire department, I’ve wanted to do the (Scotts) challenge,” said Harris, who is the veteran of the team, with 11 years at the department. “I said, ‘We’ve got enough women (in the department) now, let’s see if we can get five to do it.’”

Other individual and paired competitions are also part of the challenge, which is hosted in locations across the country throughout the year. The world competition is slated for November in Las Vegas.

But only the best of the best get invited to it.

“We’re going to get invited; we’re going to make it there!” exclaimed Richardson.

While men’s teams from the Winston-Salem Fire Department have competed and consistently done well in the competition for some time,



Danielle White shows off her guns.



Natasha Owens

the women’s team, which was formed earlier this year, is still looking to make a name for itself. The five-member team represents almost half of the 12 women who currently serve the city as firefighters.

“It’s been a lot of fun. I think it’s actually something that the women in the department can bond to ... because we are obviously in the minor-

ity,” Kostyrka said. “It’s something that the women can look forward to; it’s an accomplishment for us to show that there are strong women out there.”

Harris, Kostyrka and Lacy brought home a bronze from their first competition in Monroe. They were behind the second-place team by a mere 13 seconds. But the third-place standing was a good start for the team, the women believe.

“The team that won first place was world champions ... two years ago,” Lacy revealed.

Although the competition incorporates things that firefighters do on the job, the combination of tasks and the intensity of the workout is far more than the women say they would typically encounter in a normal workday.

“Sixty to 70 percent of the fire department’s business is EMS calls,” White explained.

“Even though you’re in shape, you think you’re in shape, but you try to do the contest and you’re like, ‘Oh boy.’”

Greensboro-based Piedmont Nutrition and Fitness has been helping the ladies get in shape for the upcoming challenge since March. Co-owner Natasha Owens says the group impressed her from the start.

“The first day we worked out with them ... we were speechless,” she related. “...these women were phenomenal. They give at least 350 percent to every workout that they do. As soon as it was over, they were like, ‘Alright, let’s do it again.’”

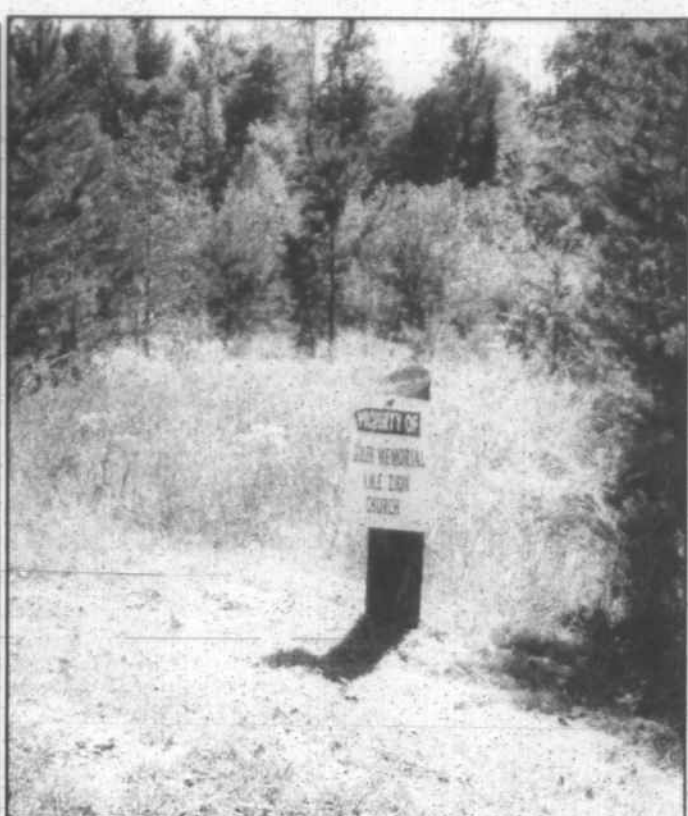
Piedmont Nutrition and Fitness, which offers boot camp and other group training sessions, has offered its services to the group free of charge.

“They help so many people and I think that for them to want this so badly, why not help them?” Owens remarked. “I don’t think we can ever give enough back to a firefighter.”

Owens, one of three owners of the startup business, says she expects the women to do well in August.

“They are so prepared and so ready for it that we’re not worried at all,” she said. “I’m definitely very confident that they’ll finish first or second place.”

To help the Piedmont Nutrition and Fitness team with expenses related to the upcoming competition, visit [www.pnfrtraining.com](http://www.pnfrtraining.com) and click “donate.”



Goler wants to trade this land for some that the city owns.

**Forum scheduled on proposed City, Goler land swap**

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

East Ward Council Member Joycelyn Johnson will hold a community forum Tuesday, June 30, to discuss a proposed land swap between the city and Goler A.M.E. Zion Church. The forum will begin at 6:30 p.m. at the Winston Lake Family YMCA, 901 Waterworks Road. Under the proposal before the City Council, Goler would give the city 14.6 acres it owns on the south side of Waterworks Road, across from the Winston-Salem Family YMCA, in exchange for 12 acres the city owns on the north side of Waterworks Road, east of the YMCA.



Johnson

Goler is seeking the land swap to build a \$10 million nursing home in partnership with the Lutheran Council on Aging. Lutheran Services would seek the required zoning permits before construction could begin.

The land acquired by the city in the swap would be added to the city’s park land inventory and developed for recreational purposes and parking.

Members of the city staff will be present to answer questions. A map showing the tracts is posted at [www.CityofWS.org](http://www.CityofWS.org). For more information, call City Link at 727-8000.

**Tests**

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graduation day did not receive diplomas.

Fifty-nine local high school seniors received degree certificates in lieu of diplomas this year, said Kenneth Simington, assistant superintendent of Student Services for school system. Most of those who received the certificates — which is not an equivalent to a diploma and basically just states that a student completed all other high school requirements — as a result of failing the competency tests.

Simington said that many of those who failed the competency tests had good grades in high school, otherwise.

“Every year, we have a number of students who accumulate enough credits to graduate, but have not met

the competency standard,” Simington said. “It is troubling for us that a student would have made good grades and not pass the competency tests.”

Mendez says the matter was recently brought to his attention.

“I started hearing about students who have done very well in school ... but, because they didn’t pass the competency test, they can’t get a full diploma,” he related. “That just struck me as being extremely weird and unfair.”

Parents are not allowed to review the tests to see where their children scored poorly, another fact that concerns Mendez.

“They need to change some of the policy,” he said. “Students and parents ought to be able to see where their weaknesses are and be able to make that up.”

Simington says the



Simington

school system is bound by strict confidentiality guidelines from the state.

The competency tests do not reflect a student’s real capabilities and potential, Mendez believes. He says

the community meeting is designed to get input from others and, possibly, develop an agenda to address the testing issue.

“I’m still getting on top of this, but the couple of people that I did talk to have a real concern about that, that’s why I want to open it up for a bigger discussion,” he related. “It’s just really getting off the ground. There’s no conclusions drawn at this point, but it sounds like a problem we ought to be concerned about.”

Eighth grade tests are initially administered at the culmination of the students’ eighth grade year. Similar tests are given during what the school system deems as gateway years: at the end of the third and fifth grades. In recent years, eighth-graders who have taken the competency test have aced it the first time, says Dana

Wrights, director of school system’s Accountability Services wing.

But regardless of when the test is taken, it is always based on the curriculum that the student taking it studied during their eighth-grade year, she added.

“The competency test ... always reflects whatever they were required to learn in eighth grade. It’s not a harder test than what they took in eighth grade; in fact, it’s virtually identical,” she said.

Tutoring is available for those who continue to have problems passing, Wright said, and if the test is insurmountable, there are ways to get around it.

Scoring above the 50th percentile in most nationally recognized standardized tests — for instance, scoring a 480 or higher on the SATs in the category or categories where the student’s competency score is lacking — is

enough to circumvent the competency test for that area, she said.

Students who finished high school this year but did not graduate because they weren’t proficient in a competency test may retake the test at area community colleges through the continuing education program, Simington said. In the event that they do pass the test at that time, the students may then receive their diplomas, provided that all other degree requirements have been met.

A meeting about the eighth grade proficiency tests, and new testing requirements for the 2009-2010 school year will be held on Tuesday, June 30 at 7 p.m. at Emmanuel Baptist Church, 1075 Shalimar Drive. For more information, call 336-788-7023.

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