

## A Real American Hero in our Midst

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Most college students spend their time in school searching for personal advancement. Most students look forward to Friday afternoon, and their biggest fear is an 8:00 a.m. test on Monday morning. Most college students would not dream of running into a four alarm blaze on a Saturday night when all their friends are out living it up. Most college kids are not Doug Austin.

Austin, a 20-year-old Fayetteville native, has been putting service before self since he was 16 years old. As a sophomore in high school, Austin volunteered at the local fire department. Now a college sophomore and conservation major, he has years of experience.

Austin explained that in order to become a state certified fire fighter, an applicant must undergo 400 to 600 hours of training. As a seasoned veteran, Austin serves several local fire departments including West Area and Stoney Point, working both as a paid professional and also as volunteer when stations are a man short. He does this while taking 17 hours of college credit at our own Methodist College.

Austin is not limited to the Fayetteville scene. He has fought fires nationwide.

In the summer of 2002, Austin began working for the North Carolina Forest Service. This is no easy task. Candidates must pass several tests and also complete a three-mile hike wearing 45 pounds of equipment in less than 45 minutes. Austin worked for the Forest Service on an on-call basis.

"When things would get real

extreme we would get a call and go out," says Austin. "We worked out in Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona."

Austin does not consider himself to be "an adrenaline junky." He simply has the desire to help others.

In the summer of 2003 Austin put in an application to fight fires on the Federal level. He was awarded the position of GS-4 and was assigned to a Type 1 Hot Shot Crew in California.

Austin explained a normal "non-fire" day, "We usually woke up around 7 a.m., got to work at 8 and stretched for about 30 minutes. After that we would do a really intense PT hike for about two hours and then training, project work, or gear maintenance for the rest of the day."

"Fire days were different," he said. "We would wake up around 4:30 a.m. and go to about 10 or 11 p.m. It was not uncommon to see a 16-hour shift. The crew that I was on would go in when the fire was too big to parachute in, normally we would park a few miles away and hike the rest of the way. Physically it can be very tough. Mentally, it was very frazzling."

Austin was put in harms way on a daily basis. The scariest situation he came across was during what is called a "burn out." This is when one fire is intentionally set to burn out another fire.

"We were in the middle of a giant W with fire coming in on both sides. Luckily we were able to get out before things got bad," Austin said.



photos provided by North Carolina Forest Service

While Austin has been in over a hundred fires he, has no plans of slowing down. After college, Austin plans on going into some kind of public service, possibly even in law enforcement. If you are interested in fighting fires on the national level, simply go to [www.apue.com](http://www.apue.com) and fill out an application.

Austin says that, "while positions are competitive, there are always spaces for college kids, the key is making yourself marketable." Austin suggests anyone interested in volunteering on the local level should go to a local fire department and someone will get them "squared away."