



01/02/2006

Ludden Hall gives firefighters unique training

By KIM SCHMIDT , Hub Staff Writer

KEARNEY — For 40 years, Ludden Hall helped provide students with many unique opportunities. Last week, the building gave emergency responders a different kind of opportunity.

Saturday, about 60 firefighters from seven Buffalo County departments trained at the dormitory on the University of Nebraska at Kearney campus. Thursday, members of the Kearney/Buffalo County Emergency Service Unit also trained in the building.

“The nice thing with a building like this is that it gives us an opportunity to practice skills we usually don’t have the opportunity and the skills to use or time to do over and over again,” said Kearney Volunteer Fire Department Capt. Todd “Walt” Walton, who was in charge of Saturday’s training.

“Short of (ground) laddering and aerial (truck) operations, we have pretty much every facet of firefighting tied up in this,” he said.

Although firefighters set and put out fires in the building, most of the training was on how to gain entry into rooms and go through various types of walls.

Firefighters from Axtell, Amherst, Gibbon, Minden, Pleasanton and Shelton joined Kearney firefighters in the training.

On Ludden’s third floor, firefighters used sledgehammers to pound holes into the brick walls next to the door lock.

The technique is used to gain access to the door handle instead of breaking the door lock or jamming and unlocking the door.

Halogen tools also were used to pry doors open.

Pounding on brick walls is a golden training opportunity, firefighter Gene Rains said. “You usually don’t get concrete or masonry walls to work with.”

Using axes and sledgehammers, firefighters also broke through sheetrock and 2-by-4s to go through walls.

On the second floor, firefighters used an extinguisher simulator to replicate small fires in a room. The simulator can be ignited remotely using propane and then extinguished with water. The technique can be used again and again.

Mark Lovelace, a training lieutenant from Shelton, has been a firefighter for 22 years and said he’s never had training like Saturday’s.

“When we do get a building to work with, its usually an old house, nothing like this,” he said looking at Ludden. “It’s quiet a bit different than a wood-framed house. It makes it wonderful.”

Members of the KVFD Explorer Post accounted for all firefighters going into and coming out of Ludden by using the nametags on the back of their helmets.

Firefighters also videotaped much of the training.

Ludden Hall is one of two residence halls at UNK that soon will be demolished to make way for new residence halls.



Hub photo by Brad Norton
Kearney Volunteer firefighters John Mason, left, and Jay Hallgrimson practice fire suppression on the simulator in one of the rooms at Ludden Hall Saturday.

Kearney Police Department Sgt. Kyle Harshbarger said Thursday's training with the Emergency Services Unit team also was helpful. Hostage negotiators worked with the team and the snipers.

"It gave us the opportunity to coordinate all those things together and work on our communications with each other and pinpoint the tools that we needed to do our job better," Harshbarger said.

Firefighters also taught the ESU team how to use some fire department tools and techniques on breaking down doors and entering rooms.

"It's not really traditional for SWAT team members to train with fire departments and use their techniques. But we have found that what they do for fire entry techniques is extremely useful for what we do," Harshbarger said.

Since its inception in 2003, the ESU team has served high-risk search warrants and is used with barricaded subjects and on bomb threats.

e-mail to:

kim.schmidt@kearneyhub.com

©Kearney Hub 2007