



March 2006 · Volume 88 · Number 2

DEPARTMENTS

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DEVELOPING DIVERSE LEADERS WHO COULD ONE DAY SAVE YOUR LIFE

Overland Park, Kansas, has found a way to challenge teenager's minds and bodies that could have profound results. Camp Inferno, a week-long summer camp for young girls, completed its first session this summer. A dozen girls between the ages of 13 and 17 from the Kansas City metropolitan area took part in the camping experience.

Overland Park Fire personnel put the women through their paces, with everything from leadership- and team-building activities to actual firefighter training drills. They rappelled from a 40-foot tower, put out fires, and cut open cars as part of their experiences. By the end of the week, there was nothing the young women were afraid to conquer.

Overland Park Fire Captain Julie Harper had seen a similar program called Camp Blaze on the West Coast. She decided it was the perfect way to empower young women and expose them to career paths they might not realize were available to them. Harper says that, while it would be fantastic if some of these girls ended up in the emergency services field, the camp is really about teaching them that they can do whatever they put their minds to.

The Overland Park Fire Department, with the help of the Johnson County Fire District #2 and the Shawnee and Leawood fire departments, devoted dozens of work hours, numerous personnel, and tons of equipment to making the camp happen. It is hoped that it will serve as a model for similar programs that invest in our nation's youth and our society's well-being.

—Jason Rhodes
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