

SAVING LIVES AND PROPERTY

THE INS AND OUTS OF FORT LAUDERDALE FIRE STATION
NO. 2 – THE BUSIEST FIREHOUSE IN NORTH AMERICA

WRITER JASON LEIDY

Our firefighters know what they're signing up for when they make their bids for service each fall. Those that choose to serve at Fort Lauderdale Fire Station No. 2 know they will be busy, which is a good thing. “You miss a third of your life with your family, but we all chose this,” Deputy Fire Chief Timothy Heiser says. “We have a lot of tradition and people want to work here, which is nice. The people here love this job. They love this city.”

Our local Downtown fire station ranked as “the Busiest Station in North America” in *Firehouse Magazine's* Annual Run Survey in 2013 and 2015. With over 33,000 runs in 2015, Station No. 2 topped second place Los Angeles by nearly 6,000 calls and 25th place Miami by over 19,000.

These city employees understand that in addition to a demanding schedule with 24-hour rotating shifts (24 hours on/48 hours off), their





typical workday will be on the front line of crisis in our Downtown core. About 70 percent of calls are medically related, but the nature of 911 calls range from pulling a duck out of a drain to medical emergencies, traffic accidents, vehicle fires, and structural fires.

Station No. 2 covers a geographic area from Davie Blvd. on the south, to Sunrise Blvd. on the north, and from I-95 on the west to Victoria Park and Colee Hammock on the east. Plus, two to four times a day, they respond to “Mutual Aid” calls, where neighboring areas request assistance.

Shift change is at 8 a.m. and begins with cross briefing between the crews going off and the crews coming on shift, usually in the kitchen over generous amounts of coffee. This is also when each firefighter chips in for the day’s groceries. They also cover their other amenities such as TV, cable, and satellite service, etc.

Each crew is then responsible for positioning personal gear and checking safety equipment to ensure it’s ready for service. The station is filled with constant communication from the personal dispatch radios and pagers, station-wide P.A. systems, and lights in every room, color coded for visual cues to the nature of incoming calls.

In between calls, firefighters work to meet ongoing training requirements, maintain their station, engage with community events, and run errands like picking up groceries. The crews are on duty even while buying food, and have an understanding with their local store that if they need to respond to a call, their groceries are stored in a cooler until they can return and finish the shopping thereafter.



Shift change in the kitchen at Station 2 with members of B Shift passing on updates to members of C Shift. At the front edge of the table, grocery money is being collected and a shopping list is underway.



Chow time at the station. Each shift has between 17 and 21 staff on duty and the ladder company crew traditionally cooks three meals a day for them.



Engine Company 2 responds to a call from a Flagler Village mid-rise with residents trapped in an elevator. Captain Javier Perez and driver/engineer Matt Erb stand ready to assist firefighter Anthony Li as he pulls open the elevator door

Tradition dictates that the ladder company is responsible for cooking the meals at Station 2. Cleaning up falls first to “probies,” or ones in the beginning probationary stage of their career, and moves up the chain of command, however there are plenty of chores for everyone.


Every Friday is “Bay Day” when the engines are pulled out of their bays and the inside of the station is cleaned. Over time, toxic residue from the diesel engines and the carcinogens in soot from fires accumulate on gear and equipment and these crews have to keep on top of it. “Bunk Day” is Monday, when all on shift firefighters are expected to clean out their bunks, mop the floors etc.

The camaraderie among crews is cited by probie firefighter Ashely Burns as a key job benefit and is evident at shared meals. Firefighter Matt Modafferri says, “We talk about the truck, we talk about each other.” The safety culture of the fire station encourages this ongoing conversation about equipment. Firefighters know how important it is to have reliable gear and by knowing one another well, they build reliability into the team.

There is a common thread in all who are called to this kind of work. It's a desire to be of service to the community. One of the most rewarding aspects of this work is fulfilling their stated mission right there on the uniform patch and on every truck – “Saving Lives and Property Since 1912”.

Understatement is among the highest forms of bravado among these men and women. Firefighter Anthony Li says, "I just go when the lights go on." By reducing well-honed and hard-earned skills for emergency response to an instinct, Li's statement minimizes something, which, for many of us, would be a hard thing to do. It's actually a window into the pride these people take in their willingness to run towards crisis, to put themselves in danger in the service of others. As the call comes in, immediate movement towards the nearest stairs or fire pole is conditioned into these firefighters. Success comes down to arriving safely at the scene and a reliance on training, working equipment, and a depth of knowledge about best responses for all types of crisis.

The companies based out of Station No. 2 do this without hesitation. Still, the grueling number of calls isn't necessarily a good thing. Deputy Fire Chief Heiser says, "These crews take a beating. It's basically two fire stations combined."

Between the number of trucks at the station and the area covered, it's an unusual situation and these crews look to the day when a new Station No. 8 will relieve some of the call volume south of the New River. So, next time you're driving Downtown and hear a siren, remember to perk up and pull over for our busy firefighters on their way to a call. They could very well be on their way to save the life of somebody you love. 



A peaceful moment viewed from back of the cab in Engine No. 8 after a call. At Station No. 2, crews will often go from one call to the next without returning to the station.



Firefighter/paramedic Anthony Li in the back of the cab in Engine No. 2



Tower Ladder Company No. 2 Captain Matthew Adams takes in the view from the bucket at the top of the extended engine ladder.