

Firemen find junk can be treasure

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When Lackawanna has to demolish a building, the Fire Department sees an opportunity to learn.

So Lt. Neil Rogers, training officer, was waiting when the city took possession of a damaged, boarded-up house on Ingham Avenue. He said it would give firefighters a chance to practice the techniques they need in a serious blaze in a building they have not been in before.

"Unfamiliar is what you encounter in a fire," Rogers said.

This week, they practiced search and rescue techniques in the pitch-black interior of the Ingham Avenue building where they did not know the exact floor plans.

Rogers, in advance, concealed two dummies, adult and infant size, and firefighters Mark Wodzinski and Chris Georgevich went in with air supplies but no flashlights to rescue them.

"You keep one foot against the wall," Wodzinski said. "If you check the bathroom, you check the tub. Kids might hide in the tub."

Georgevich was especially cautious at doorways.

"If the door closes behind you, you have no egress," he said.

The crew found the two dummies, the adult in bed and child in a closet, and completed the rescue in nine minutes.

Chief Reynold Jenetti said once residents are out of the building, firefighters want to cool it

down, so they make openings.

"We go up on the roof and get a feel for what has to be done to get the smoke and gases out," he said. "The faster you get them out, the less likely the fire is to spread to other areas. So you open the windows — usually attic windows are little or none — and you ventilate the roof."

The firefighters use gasoline-driven saws to cut holes through the shingles. They wear their protective holding and the hoses are ready.

In this drill, only the flames are missing.

"We don't live-burn anything," said Jenetti.

The practice building on Ingham, foreclosed on by the county and turned over to the city, was the scene of an actual fire three years ago. As is often the case, it was not rebuilt.

Georgevich said neighborhood houses sell for \$20,000 to \$40,000, but replacement would cost \$60,000 to \$80,000. Owners frequently let them go after a fire, he said.

When the firefighters finish their practice sessions, a demolition company hired by the city moves in.

In an era of easily affordable smoke detectors, Lackawanna firefighters answer fewer fire calls than their predecessors, but emergency calls are on the rise. Forty-four of the city's 50 firefighters are certified to use defibrillators on heart-attack victims.

Last year, the crews responded to structural fires on the average of three times a month and to vehicle fires about as often. Burning dumpsters are the most frequent fires of all.

The department also handled 1,400 medical calls.