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Pancake breakfast heats up

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Special to Today

Roxanne Hudkins works with firefighters every day, but never knew what it was like to don bunker gear and crawl into a hot, smoky burning building.

She found out Saturday, when she and husband Brent entered the Fireblast simulator with a municipal firefighter at Fire Hall No. 1 during the Fort McMurray Fire Department's 12th annual pancake breakfast.

"It was amazing. I was surprised how heavy the equipment was," she said. "I could barely stand up in there."

For a \$5 donation, curious and able-bodied visitors could strap on the gear, including full-face air mask, and haul a heavy live fire hose into a darkened simulator trailer to see what firefighters experience when entering a burning house.

Hudkins, an administrative assistant with the training branch of the fire department, says she now has a greater admiration for what her colleagues do.

School-aged fans of firefighters were also in for some special moments when they fought a burning mixture of propane and water with a dry chemical fire extinguisher. Riley Payne, a six-year-old whose mother said was on his first visit to the fire hall breakfast, sprayed yellow powder all over the test fire and it was out in a few seconds.

"It's a really good thing," said his mother Robbie Kaboni. "Firefighters are his heroes."

While rain showers may have kept attendance numbers down this year, many families didn't pass up the chance to see the town's bravest men and women demonstrating their firefighting and rescue skills.

That included watching rescuers cut the roof off a Volvo sedan to rescue a live victim injured in a simulated car wreck.

Sponsors of the event provided door prizes, food for the pancake breakfast, face painting, and a static helicopter display. One lucky visitor won a free tour of the city in the Phoenix Heli-Flight helicopter.

"All the money raised here today will go to the Boys and Girls Club, Food Bank, Santas Anonymous, Muscular Dystrophy Canada, and the women's shelter," said Megan Steiestol, public education officer with the fire prevention branch.

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