



CITY OF HARRISONBURG
FIRE
DEPARTMENT

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HFD Firefighters Graduate from Leadership Programs

HARRISONBURG, Va. – Four members of the Harrisonburg Fire Department recently graduated from one of the state’s most prestigious fire officer training programs.

Lt. Robert Hilley and Capt. Hunter Desper completed the Virginia Chief Officer Academy (VCOA), and Lt. Brandon Dyer and Lt. Joel Bradley completed the Virginia Fire Officer Academy (VFOA). Dyer and Hilley completed their programs in Abingdon, Va., earlier this year, while Desper and Bradley completed their programs in Richmond in June.

Desper just completed his 16th year with HFD. Currently assigned as the department’s training officer, Desper oversees all HFD training, including promotional testing for the driver/operator rank. Desper holds a bachelor’s degree from James Madison University and a master’s degree from Liberty University. He recently completed the promotional process for the rank of Battalion Chief.

Hilley is currently in his 18th year of service with the City of Harrisonburg. He has served in both the fire department and police department, holding certification as a firefighter, fire officer, police officer, fire investigator and paramedic. Currently assigned to the Rock Street Fire Station #4, Hilley commands an engine company on B Shift. He also is a SWAT Medic and a member of the HFD Bike Team. Hilley is a 2022 graduate of the VFOA. He has also completed several courses at the National Fire Academy.

Dyer has been a HFD member for nearly 11 years and is currently assigned to Fire Station #4 on “A” Shift, where he commands a crew of firefighters. Dyer is a Nationally Registered Paramedic, SWAT Medic and member of the HFD Bike Team. He also is the team leader for the Division II Heavy Technical Recue Team, a Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM)-sponsored regional specialized group of responders trained to deal with a wide array of high-risk events that can threaten the safety and well-being of served communities.



(Clockwise from top left) Capt. Hunter Desper, Lt. Robert Hilley, Lt. Brandon Dyer and Lt. Joel Bradley

Bradley is a nearly seven-year veteran of HFD and commands the newly created Engine Company #5 on A Shift. Bradley is a student of the fire service, holding certifications in firefighting, emergency medical services, hazardous materials management and technical rescue. Bradley also serves as a member of the department's structural firefighting protective equipment maintenance program.

"For generations, the Harrisonburg Fire Department has maintained a deep commitment to training at all levels," HFD Chief Matthew Tobia said. "When our personnel invest their time in professional development, our entire community benefits. We could not be more proud of their commitment to themselves and the HFD. We also extend our deepest appreciation to the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association for implementing and supporting these courses of instruction."

Established in 2007, both courses include an intense focus on leadership and personnel management, physical training, practical scenarios, team building exercises as well as speakers from all aspects of the fire service. The goal of the VFOA is to develop leaders in the fire service through scenario-based training with a focus on accountability, education, safety and ownership. The goal of the VCOA is to prepare officers to assume the responsibilities associated with higher rank, typically focused on strategic leadership and management.

The Harrisonburg Fire Department is an ISO-Class II All-Hazards agency providing essential emergency and non-emergency life safety services to the public who live, work and travel in Harrisonburg. More information about the Fire Department is available on-line at www.harrisonburgva.gov/fire or on Facebook[®], Twitter[®] and Instagram[®].

The City of Harrisonburg is centrally located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It is home to approximately 56,879 people. More information about the City of Harrisonburg is online at www.HarrisonburgVA.gov.

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