

Nostalgia smolders: Fire Museum celebrates anniversary with old memories and young lessons

By Linda Moore (Contact), Memphis Commercial Appeal
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Pick an emotion and it was there on Saturday as the Fire Museum of Memphis celebrated its 10th anniversary.

There was the joy of more than 400 children who took the Kids' Junior Firefighters Challenge, an obstacle course that had them shooting a mini-fire hose and dragging a child-sized dummy to safety.

"I had the one with the deformed foot," said Jessica Miller, 11, of Memphis.

There was a touch of fear for some kids like Lamoneka Bunting, 5, also of Memphis, who "had to cry" in the fire room where she felt what it's like to be in a burning house.

There was the pride Francis Gilmer of Horn Lake felt as he and his daughter visited the old Fire Engine House No. 1, where a picture taken in 1912 shows Gilmer's grandfather, Patrick Owen Miles, on the first motorized pumper bought by the city. The firetruck is on display at the museum not far from the photograph.

"It's something to come right here and see my grandfather standing right there and for my sister to name her son after him and then him becoming a firefighter," Gilmer said. "It's amazing."

There was nostalgia for I.G. Bradford of Bartlett, who retired as a battalion chief after nearly 30 years, as he showed his grandchildren the No. 1 fire house where he was assigned fresh from training in 1960.

"Back where our kitchen used to be, when they had horses -- I wasn't on then -- it was underneath where they stored the oats," Bradford recalled. "Oats would fall in the kitchen."

The day was everything those dedicated to fire education hoped for, including an impressive turnout.

"Our mission here is fire safety and this has been wonderful," said Brier Smith Turner, museum executive director.

This summer the Fire Museum, a nonprofit organization, had to let go one of its two full-time employees. But Turner said earned income is up. The museum isn't funded by the Memphis Fire Department, but firefighters are big supporters, so far this year giving individual donations totaling \$100,000, she said.

Among its backers is Memphis Fire Department Director Alvin Benson, who was assigned briefly to the museum 10 years ago. He was there on Saturday with his family, shaking the hands of active and retired firefighters.

"For me to see it 10 years later and see it all come to fruition, it really is gratifying," Benson said.

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Faith Brewster, 6, takes aim with the fire hose during the Jr. Firefighter Challenge at the 10th anniversary celebration at the Memphis Fire Museum. Helping Faith is Conway AR, firefighter, Danny Collins who was on hand with his fellow firemen to help make the event a success.



Chelsea Riddick, 10, takes her turn at the Kids' Junior Firefighters Challenge on Saturday with an assist from Ian Moix, a firefighter from Conway, AR.