



Bea Ahbeck — Staff photo

FREMONT FIREFIGHTER JIM LEWIS does the hose-part of the relay Saturday during the Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge at the Fremont Festival of the Arts.

Fire department teams compete in Fremont for sporting glory

By **Rachel McMurdie**

STAFF WRITER

FREMONT — Rescuing victims in smoke-filled buildings, rushing up flights of stairs and taming flames with powerful water hoses are all part of a day's work for firefighting crews.

But Saturday, the work was sport for fire departments competing in the Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge at the Fremont Festival of the Arts.

Day one of the two-day event drew large crowds, as local relay teams from Fremont and Newark faced challengers from across the country for a chance to go to the World Championships in Las Vegas.

"This is great fun — for firefighters and for the community," said retired firefighter John Cerruti, who was racing

with Fremont's Finest Team 5.

Wearing full firefighting gear, teams race through an obstacle course that simulates the real demands of firefighting, passing off a flashlight baton after each leg.

Competitors wind through a course of five flights of stairs toting a 42-pound hose pack, then hoist another 42 pounds of hose to the top. After the hand-off, the next firefighter pounds at a Force Machine, a 160-pound steel beam, to simulate chopping. When the chopping is complete, the next firefighter runs through a zig-zag of fire hydrants and must hit a small target with a stream of water. Finally, competitors drag a life-size, 175-pound mannequin

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NEWARK FIREFIGHTER JOHN HILL pulls the dummy during the relay Saturday in the Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge at the Fremont Festival of the Arts.

Firefighters show off their skills at festival

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to the safety of the finish line.

"It's really exciting," said Paul Davis, creator of Firefighter Combat Challenge. "It provides a platform for the public to see firefighters in action and allows firefighters to show off their skills."

From firefighter family and friends to local community members and challenge fans, roughly 400 spectators watched the games live from bleachers that flanked the course. For 4-year-old Brandon Quinson, it was a chance to see real-life heroes in action.

For Kathy and Rich Kuwitzky, it was a chance to see the games they had watched on ESPN live. And for Dana Barbero, it was a chance to root for her dad, Cerruti, and to bring his grandchildren to watch.

Team Travis Relay, from Travis Air Force Base, took first place after three qualifying rounds with a best time of 1:20:04 and will continue on to Las Vegas. Team Captain Mike Melton said, "The goal for us is to be the best in the U.S., and then to be best in the world."

Captain David Easton of the Fremont Fire Explorers said, "It was great. Overall, it was just a lot of fun."

Today, individual competitors will take on the course. The games start at 11 a.m.