

Students learn to handle simulated crash scene

JESSIE FORAND 5:20 p.m. EDT May 14, 2014



(Photo: JESSIE FORAND/FREE PRESS)

8
CONNECT

[TWEET](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http://bfjne.ws/1goUORP&text=Students%20learn%20to%20)
(<https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http://bfjne.ws/1goUORP&text=Students%20learn%20to%20>)

St. Albans – Windshield glass crunched, a reciprocating saw buzzed and water from a fire hose flowed Wednesday morning at the Northwest Technical Center in St. Albans.

Students at the school, studying to be first responders, joined alumni and community professionals to simulate a car crash in the school's parking lot.

A “victim” sat in the car, covered with a blanket to simulate a fatality, others were on stretchers and placed into ambulances by medical professions students. Firefighters cut off the car's roof to perform a rescue and others secured the scene. Other students observed from the school's steps.

This was the main event of a week-long culmination to the Public Safety and Fire Services course. Taught by Winooski Fire Department assistant chief Michael Antoniak and Cpl. Jason Wetherby of the St. Albans Police Department, the course teaches the basics of serving the public.

Antoniak and Wetherby helped get public safety agencies involved in Wednesday's event, but the students did all the on-scene work. Standing with ambulance, police and fire officials, the high school students performed life-saving tasks that might be required at an actual emergency.

“They outperformed what I thought I was going to see,” Antoniak said of his students.

Next year, Antoniak said he hopes to have a two-week course finale, focusing separately on fire fighting and police services. He also hopes this year's round of graduates will return to help the younger students.

This was Wetherby's first full year co-teaching the course. He also serves as the school's resource officer, but said teaching is a different experience and one he enjoys. Students in the program learn the foundations of responding, the tools of the trade, and also learn about accident investigations and reconstructions.

“We're building a base for them to grow on,” Wetherby said.

The course is so popular, Antoniak said, there is a wait list for enrollment next year.

Wetherby said he and his colleague stress in their classroom the importance of integrity and moral values. If someone can't maintain those, this probably isn't the right class for them, he said.

Proving its success, a student from the program has been hired to work park patrol with the St. Albans Police Department this summer. Others work for their local fire and rescue squads. Students excelled at a SkillsUSA technical competition and one will go to the nationals in Kansas City, Mo., in June.

Antoniak said some his pupils have already saved lives, performed CPR, and some have seen dealt with a fatality.

The trauma they see often brings responders together, and Antoniak and Wetherby work to show the value of that bond.

Antoniak noted the shortage of first response volunteers in the state and said he and Wetherby work to teach their students about the importance of volunteerism.