

Welcome family, friends and students. Today marks the conclusion of a big commitment, not only by the students of this academy, but also by the many families. For nearly six months, we gave up a lot of time to train on many week nights and many weekend days. If we weren't training, we were studying. Why did we put ourselves through this? I believe it's because we are all here with one basic goal: to help people. Whether its people in our own home town, or its helping while we're working for some full-time department somewhere. Our goal is to help people in some of their greatest times of need. We have all heard this call, and we have answered.

A well-known hockey player once said, "You are guaranteed to miss 100% of the shots you don't take." We all took a shot at this academy, and we are all here today because we succeeded.

I came to this academy because I thought that by coming to Tri-County, I would be sure to get good instructors. I think we all expected to get good instructors. But instead, what we got were great instructors. Our instructors not only taught us the skills and knowledge we needed, they inspired us. These instructors have a big responsibility. They don't only have to train us how to become good firefighters, but also how to become good leaders.

On any given day, we could find ourselves in charge at a major incident in our own hometown. This could be a fire, or even a hazmat incident. And remember what Rob Robitaille would say, "A cat stuck in a tree is a hazmat incident, that cat is a hazardous material, if you don't believe me, then climb up in that tree and grab ahold of it." No matter how big or small an incident, we have to be prepared to handle it. Two instructors that really poured their heart and souls into this academy were J.P. Adams and Matt Wiers. Matt put on a search and rescue clinic like no other. He would praise us for searches that were done correctly, and quickly correct us when searches went wrong. This was an extremely important part of our education. Matt, we would all like to thank you for taking this so seriously and for being a thorough teacher.

J.P. was an instructor who had to wear many hats. He was a teacher who taught us the skills we have to know, and he did this well. Sometimes, he had to be the disciplinarian and let us know when we weren't bringing our "A" game, and he was good at that. There were times he would be a friend to all of us, and make the more monotonous parts of training go by a little faster. There were even times during training that he would sing (pause) – did I mention that he's a really good teacher – teaching, yes; singing, no. These two guys along with so many other instructors exceeded all of our expectations.

Another thing that impressed me during this academy was the individual strength I saw in each and every one of my fellow classmates. Watching Baily Gallapo in the practical end test face down three stations in a do or die situation and pass all three was truly impressive. We all had to rely on our own individual strength to get through many situations but much of the time, we had to rely on the strength of each other. I got through this Academy because of the strength in my company and in my classmates. I got through my practical end test because of the strength in my partner.

Being able to count on each other is the very foundation of which the fire service is built upon. Moving forward all of us need to remember the knowledge we have gained from this Academy. Remember these basic rules of thumb:

- Remember to be the lion; never the LAMB;
- Always be prepared. Nobody likes to have to be the one to sing, “I’m a little teapot” in front of everyone -- unless you’re Ryan Robitaille;
- If ever the Chief of a department says something like “10 minutes into this and you’re already suckin’ the life right out of me”, it probably means you didn’t bring your “A” game that day;
- There is one more rule of thumb that I’m going to need your help to remember. So, if I could get Mr. McGrath’s permission, I’d like to ask the class a question. What is it that we are? We’re not American’ts...

■ **We’re Americans!**

To all of my classmates: Thank you for putting up with all my questions in class; thank you for being such strong firefighters. I learned a lot from each and every one of you. Good luck to you all and most of all: Stay Safe. Thank you.