



Dalton firefighter quick on his feet climbing skyscraper

By **Kim Sloan**

Dalton Daily Citizen

Thu, May 08 2008

— The students who watched Dalton firefighter Douglas Kerns run the stairs at Dalton High School in his heavy firefighting gear this spring didn't know why he was doing it. But on April 19, Kern's training resulted in a second place finish at Climb Atlanta. The competition, sponsored by the American Lung Association, challenged Georgia firefighters to climb the stairs in Atlanta's Bentley Forbes building while wearing their turn-out gear.

"It was 55 floors up and one sweet elevator ride down," Kerns said. "My goal was to beat last year's time and get below the 12-minute mark. I did that and bettered my time by two minutes from last year."

Kerns, 32, climbed the 1,378 steps in 11 minutes and 27 seconds. Kerns won the event two years ago when it was held at the Peachtree Hotel. He came in sixth last year.

"I got all the way to the top and didn't even know my time. I looked at my watch and I was on cloud nine," Kerns said. "I didn't even know how I did but I knew I did the best I could do that day."

Running up and down stairs in 30 pounds of gear is a challenge, he said.

"I trained for over three months to get ready," Kerns said. In addition to running the stairs at Dalton High School, Kerns said he ran and rode his bicycle.

Staying physically fit and competing in contests like Climb Atlanta helps Kerns, who has worked at the Dalton Fire Department, perform his job.

"It trains me to get used to my gear," said Kerns. "It's all about being a better firefighter. I represent the Dalton Fire Department. When I go to these competitions they don't know my name. They call me Dalton. It's on my hat and it's on my gear."

Last year's winner completed the challenge in 12 minutes and 15 seconds. Kerns put a piece of paper in his locker after last year's competition to inspire him to make his goal this year.

"I put his name and time I wanted to beat on it," Kerns said. "I put my time on it last year."

Kirk Corsello of the Gwinnett County Fire Department won the challenge this year in 10 minutes, 33 seconds.

When asked if he had put Corsello's name and time on a piece of paper to inspire him for next year, Kerns said, "Not yet."

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Photos



Dalton firefighter Douglas Kerns holds up his award for coming in second at the recent Climb Atlanta, in which he climbed 1,378 steps in 11 minutes and 27 seconds in the 55-story Bentley Forbes building. Matt Hamilton