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## A trial by fire

MAC seniors in LBJ's Fire Academy program undergo live propane fire exercise



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Bella Russo

SATURDAY NIGHT'S ALRIGHT FOR FIRE FIGHTING: MAC seniors Ena Nolan and Zach King joined the rest of their LBJ Fire Academy crew in a live propane fire exercise on Saturday Oct. 12 at the Austin Fire Academy. The goal of the practice was for the group of seniors to control the fire enough for a member to get close enough to turn off the tank's gas valve, which would extinguish the flame. Earlier in the day, the juniors in the program, including MAC students Molly Odland, John Hughes, Thomas Lucey, Tex Mitchell and Will Russo, underwent an obstacle course in full gear while trying to conserve air, and stuck around afterwards to watch the seniors and to help replace their air tanks in between rotations. "I don't even know how to describe it," Nolan said, who is in her second year in the program. "Watching it [last year] was an ethereal experience, and doing it myself was absolutely amazing, definitely one of the most epic things I'm gonna do in the next couple of years." Photo by Bella Russo.

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**WATCHING THE FIRE BURN:** A member of LBJ's Fire Academy stands and watches the propane fire during their live fire exercise on Oct. 12. The drills were held at the Austin Fire Academy, where the city of Austin and Austin Community College also train fire fighters. The LBJ Fire Academy is a student sharing program held at Lyndon B. Johnson High School and is open to all AISD students interested in fire science and emergency medical training. Currently, seven McCallum students are enrolled in the academy.





FUTURE FIGHTERS: Attacking the fire from the side, the LBJ Fire Academy seniors inch their way closer and closer to the propane tank with the hopes of turning off the gas nozzle feeding the flames. "My favorite part was being in the very front on the nozzle and advancing it to about six inches from the fire so that we could turn off the propane tank," McCallum senior Zach King said. "You could see the flames jumping at you and getting blocked by the water, which looked really cool. Overall, it was a great experience, and I am very excited to hopefully one day serve on a fire department."



FANNING THE FLAMES: Student firefighters from the LBJ Fire Academy use water hoses to control the propane fires. Since the flames were gas fed, the goal of the exercise was to get close enough to the propane tank to theoretically turn off the gas, as illustrated by the front men waving a hand once they could touch the gas nozzle. The live fire marked a turning point in the academy's senior curriculum. "The goal of the propane fire was more practice on live fire, and it was symbolic of us graduating from the Fire Academy and moving into EMS," Zach King said.



FIRE AWAY: Using multiple angles to combat the fires, two groups of student firefighters control the propane fires during their live drills. During the course of the evening, the firefighters in training were able to switch positions on the hose and around the drill, giving everyone a chance to experience the live fire from every angle.



FIRELIT FACES: Faces tinted by the light of the propane fire, McCallum junior Will Russo and Austin High junior Archer Brookes watch the academy's seniors battle the live fire. The LBJ Fire Academy is a two-year program open to all junior and senior AISD students as a school-sharing program. "At the end of

the day, it's not really all that different going to LBJ." Russo said. "The people aren't that different, but getting to see people from different schools and their different mentalities towards things and taking a class at a different campus is an interesting experience."



CLOSING IN: The LBJ Fire Academy seniors spray the propane fire with water, hoping to control the flames enough to inch up to the gas nozzle step by step.



CHIEF IN CHARGE: LBJ Fire Academy Chief Matt Orta crosses the perimeter of the drill as his crew

beats back the propane fire behind him. Under Orta and the rest of the academy's teachers, many of whom are active firefighters, academy students learn leadership, fire science and emergency medical training. The academy's students are then able to apply their classroom learning to real drills, such as the live propane fire exercise. "We went through practicing each step for the fire earlier in the day," King said, "but we had also been putting out building, car, and dumpster fires the weekend before."



SAFETY FIRST: The propane fire spewing above them, LBJ's fire fighters act as safeties during the drill: their goal to protect their peers advancing from the side of the fire with another water hose positioned for backup.





COLUMN OF FIRE: Positioned on standby across from the live fire, a group of firefighters act as safeties while the rest of their crew prepares to begin spraying down the flames. “We were all in different stations at different points,” senior Ena Noble said, “but on the last rotation I was on safety, so basically my role was—if one of the people getting closest to the fire catches on fire—I put them out.”

*Photos by Bella Russo.*

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