

THE BUILDING TRADESMAN

Trades among hundreds of volunteers who helped build rescue simulator

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SOUTHFIELD – Someday, maybe the efforts of people who helped build the city Fire Department’s new rescue simulator will help save the life of a fellow construction worker in need of rescue.

The new simulator, built on Lahser south of 10 Mile Road, got off the ground – or in this case into and above the ground – with the commitment of time and effort by of the apprentices at the Iron Workers Local 25 Training Center, as well as personnel from the Cement Masons and the Carpenters. They were part of a group of no less than 400 individuals and 86 vendors who gave their time, talents, money or material to build the simulator, which is about 85 percent complete, according to Southfield Fire Captain Joe Dell, who conceived of the project after the events of Sept. 11, 2001.

“Over the last few months, it came together in a hurry,” Dell said. “It has really been a humbling thing to watch all the tradespeople and contractors come together to get this done.”

Located on donated land near Southfield Fire Station No. 5, the simulator will allow first responders to train in a number of disaster response areas, including confined space, rubble pile rescue, building collapse, and vehicle extraction. Dell said rescue training will be made available to about 170 firefighters spanning 13 Oakland County communities who are linked by a mutual aid agreement.

With plans for the site he “wrote on the back of a napkin,” Dell said Barton Malow, which volunteered to manage the job, “gave us a jumpstart” on the project, and it has moved quickly over the past several months. Barton Malow’s Kara Prince along with onsite “boss” carpenter Joann Rowland used their industry contacts, Dell said, to help line up donated materials and volunteer personnel where possible. He estimated that the site would cost about \$1.6 million.

“We thought it would be a perfect training opportunity for our apprentices,” said Mike Relyin, training coordinator for the Iron Workers Local 25 Training Center, who said about 10 apprentices, tying reinforcing rod for the trench simulator, worked on the job over a two-week period.

“We’re always glad to help where we can,” Relyin said, “especially when it comes to firefighters, who do so much good for the community.”

The building trades and firefighters in Michigan and other areas have developed relationships over the course of this decade, spawned by the example of cooperation after the collapse of the World Trade Center. The building trades’ expertise in the use of cutting materials and lifting heavy objects are particularly useful in many catastrophic situations.

Dell said firefighters would be cooperating with MUSAR – the Michigan Urban Search and Rescue Training Foundation, which trains out of the Operating Engineers Local 324 Training Center in Howell.

MUSAR works in cooperation with fire service, local emergency management, State Police and private sector agencies to provide a statewide capability for specialized response to structural collapse emergencies and search and rescue.

“My goal is to interact with MUSAR and coordinate our training,” Dell said. “With municipal finances the way they are, we want to provide the most cost-effective training that we can, for as many firefighters as possible. Already, we’ve seen the value of the firefighters working together with the building trades on this project. It’s been really cool and great to see how they work together.”

And someday, he said, that training and interaction will pay off. The Southfield project is about 85 percent complete, and Dell said he like to have it close to complete when he retires at the end of the year. “Someday, we’re going to need your guys to set things up for us, and we’ll work together to save a life,” Dell said.



The Southfield trench rescue simulator under construction.