



# PREPARED TO SAVE LIVES



**Eric Davis fights fires, rescues cats, and even changes doorknobs.**

Story and Photos by Jean Daigneau

Imagine rushing to get out of a house and dragging a 175-pound dummy—while you're blindfolded! As part of his firefighter training, Eric Davis did exactly that.

Davis got hooked on firefighting when he was in the army. And while much of his job today involves emergency medical services (EMS), his first love is fighting fires. "I enjoy the job and working with people. I enjoy firefighting," he says.

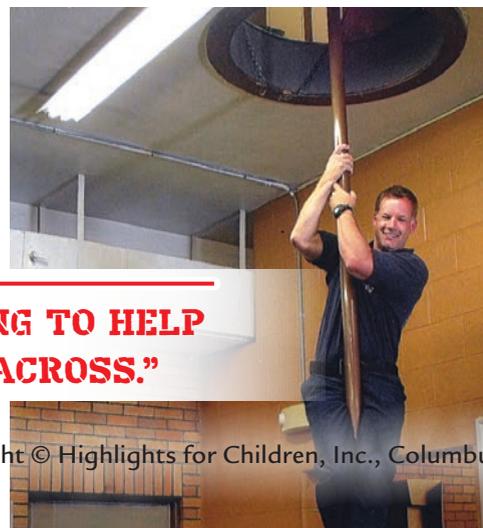
### School for Firefighters

Davis attended firefighting school for about three months and took part in classroom work,

physical exercise, and hands-on training such as fighting live fires in buildings filled with straw. Weekly tests included how fast he put on his gear, how physically fit he was, and how quickly he took apart and reassembled his equipment. Testing also involved operating ladder trucks, climbing through windows, and rescuing dummies, which represented real people.

Davis says the blindfold training prepared him for real fires. "By the time we get to a fire, if it's going

pretty good, the whole house would be filled with smoke. And anytime you get near the fire, you won't be able to see at all. Zero visibility is the same as darkness. The blindfold works about the same."



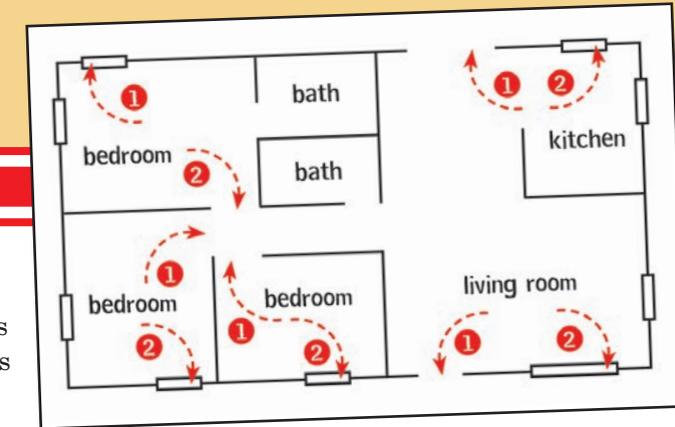
**"YOU HAVE TO BE WILLING TO HELP ANY PERSON YOU COME ACROSS."**

### CREATE A FAMILY ESCAPE PLAN

The best escape plan involves two things: shortest distance and safest exit. Remember: the shortest distance, like a second-floor window, may not be the safest.

1. Draw a map of each level of your home. Include all doors and windows. Show at least two ways to safely escape from each room.
2. Share your plan with family members. Ask if they have other ideas for safer, shorter routes out.
3. Put an emergency phone number on your plan. Then put your plan on the refrigerator or somewhere else where everyone can see it.

4. Decide on a meeting place outside, a safe distance from your home. Meet out front where the firefighters will be sure to see you and know you are outside and safe.
5. Practice your plan at least twice a year. Practice during the day and at night. Activate a smoke detector and have everyone escape to the meeting place. Take count and make sure everyone is out. NEVER go back inside once you have escaped a fire!



Being a firefighter involves more than battling fires. Davis installs smoke detectors, checks fire hydrants, and inspects buildings for safety issues. Firefighters respond to all calls, even false alarms. On one call, a woman's doorknob had fallen off. "We showed up and put the doorknob back on," Davis says.

### Being Prepared

Davis believes his most important responsibility is "making sure I'm prepared for any situation I might come across." To keep physically fit, he runs several times a week and works out. He takes classes to keep up his skills and trains regularly by

fighting practice fires. Sometimes this involves cutting holes in roofs, which helps vent smoke and improves visibility for firefighters inside the building.

Firefighting equipment is more than hoses and ladders. It also includes tools like chain saws and axes. Davis keeps all his equipment in good shape. Even checking flashlight batteries is important. All that preparation helps when Davis suits up for a fire.

While his daily uniform is a collared shirt and blue pants, his fire gear, including helmet and air pack, weighs about 70 pounds.

He and his fellow firefighters are expected to be dressed and out the door one minute after the alarm goes off.

### Risks and Rewards

Firefighting involves plenty of risks. Plus, Davis says, "You have to be willing to help any person you come across." His department's motto is "Risk a little to save a little. Risk a lot to save a lot." If someone might be trapped, Davis or a fellow firefighter puts himself at risk to get the person out. If no one is in the building, he and the rest of the team might fight the fire only from the outside.

Davis says he is not afraid when he's fighting a fire. His adrenaline kicks in and he does what's needed. But he knows firefighters who are scared to climb ladders. He says, "They do it because it's part of their job. The key is to get focused on the task at hand and just get the job done. Afterward, you might say, 'Wow! That was kind of scary, but I did it!'" That could mean saving a life. 

### AFTER THE ALARM GOES OFF, DAVIS HAS ONE MINUTE TO GET DRESSED AND OUT THE DOOR.



At a weekly equipment check, Davis inspects the 105-foot ladder truck (above) and pump panel (right).

