

BC3's fire-prevention lesson reaches, teaches 570 kids since June

“When your clothes are on fire, you should roll around,” 8-year-old learns

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Third-graders at Portersville Christian School react as simulated smoke descends from the ceiling of Butler County Community College's fire safety training trailer, which visited the school on Oct. 17, 2017.

(Portersville, PA) Small hands sensed heat on the door, and as simulated smoke rolled above their heads, third-graders Della, Sara and Tabitha dropped to the floor, crawled to and through a



Third-graders at Portersville Christian School move to the floor and toward a window as simulated smoke descends from the ceiling of Butler County Community College's fire safety training trailer, which visited the school on Oct. 17, 2017.

window and met safely at a designated spot outside Butler County Community College's fire safety training trailer, executing perfectly a lesson presented only 45 minutes earlier.

Della, Sara and Tabitha are among more than 570 children who since June have learned how to prevent a fire in their homes or how to respond in the event of one through BC3, which received one of two 30-foot fire safety training trailers purchased through the Cranberry Township Community Chest's Project of the Year program in 2016.

Volunteer firefighters Greg Haughey, John Stokes and Rick McClain have taught the life-saving skills to kindergartners through fifth-graders at

10 Butler County elementary schools in the past four months.

"It's important to start early teaching the proper way to react when an emergency occurs," said Steve Bicehouse, Butler County director of emergency services. "Emergencies do not care how old you are."

"If there is smoke, we get down on the ground"

BC3's fire safety training trailer, outfitted with a small kitchen, five-tiered seating area for pupils, bathroom and bedroom, visited for the first time on Wednesday Portersville Christian School's 18 fourth-graders and 12 third-graders -- a class that included Della, Sara and Tabitha.

They heard its fire alarm blare. They saw its alarm's strobe pulse. They touched its heated doors. They were told when and when not to call 911, told how to operate a fire extinguisher, and told how to place a lid on a stove-top pot to starve a grease fire of oxygen.

Della, 8, said she learned "that when your clothes are on fire, you should roll around."

Added Sara, 8: “That you should have a meeting place as far away as you can get from your house. So you don’t get caught in the fire and you don’t get lost.”

And Tabitha, 9: “If there is smoke, we get down on the ground. Then we get out of the building.”

Bicehouse, an emergency responder for more than 30 years and fire chief of the Evans City Area Volunteer Fire Department, said BC3’s fire safety training trailer is “a great asset to the community as it accurately depicts emergent situations and how to properly react.”

It also provides instruction that teacher Kathy Roe said she cannot replicate in her third-grade classroom at Portersville Christian School.

“When we do fire safety at school, we are always talking about places in school, and maybe more in the bedroom at home,” she said. “But the kitchen was a fantastic demonstration, how (Haughey) showed how to put the lid on the pan to stop the grease fire. And of course they loved the escape, which is great. And the smoke. It was very realistic.”

And intentionally so, said Butler County Commissioner Kevin Boozel, who holds a degree in elementary education and himself serves as a volunteer firefighter and EMT with the Harrisville Volunteer Fire Company.

“Too many times, as a firefighter, we need to be trained on primary searches of a residential fire that lead to finding children hiding under their beds or in closets,” Boozel said. “I pray to find them on the first search because the guilt that carries over to the firefighter for missing a child is unbearable.”



A third-grader at Portersville Christian School determines whether a door is warm while attending a lesson inside Butler County Community College’s fire safety training trailer, which visited the school on Oct. 17, 2017.



Butler County Community College’s fire safety training trailer, shown Oct. 17, 2017, outside Portersville Christian School, has brought its lesson to 570 children since June.



Instructor: Students should “talk to their parents”

The goal of BC3’s fire safety training trailer, said Haughey, a volunteer with Butler Township Fire District 3, is to have children discuss emergency plans with their parents or guardians, and not just during October’s fire prevention month.

His 24-slide PowerPoint presentation includes EDITH – Exit Drills in the Home – which states that children should know at least two ways out of every room, if possible; that they should close doors behind them as they leave; that the family should identify an outdoors meeting place; and that the family should practice its drill at night and during the day twice a year.

Greg Haughey, above, who with fellow volunteer firefighters John Stokes and Rick McClain conduct lessons inside Butler County Community College’s fire safety training trailer, speaks with Portersville Christian School third-graders on Oct. 17, 2017.

“It is really worth our effort to talk with these students,” Haughey said. “If somebody doesn’t get hurt in a fire or if a fire doesn’t start, then it is worth our efforts. The real thing here is for them to

go home and talk to their parents. We also hope it is something that teachers will continue to discuss in the classroom.”

Brian Opitz, BC3’s executive director of operations, said the college has received “a ton of requests” for BC3’s fire safety training trailer in 2017, and that the responses from teachers have been “fantastic.”

“They say that it is good practical training,” Opitz said. “They say it is something that they can’t teach their students in the classroom. It is one of those life lessons that students need to understand. This type of setup helps the kids to understand.”

Fire prevention, said Bruce Mazzoni, a Cranberry Township supervisor and BC3 trustee, is important for all ages.

“Being able to have the trailer at schools, grand openings, fairs and other such events promotes fire safety, but also highlights the importance of our volunteer services in our communities,” Mazzoni said. “The safety trailer is a win-win, providing opportunity for fire companies and BC3 to educate young and old to these important issues.”