



Not Your Ordinary Job – Season Two, Episode Seven Transcript

Jasmine: Welcome to this week's episode of the Not Your Ordinary Job podcast. I am Jasmine Brown public affairs specialist with BLM Eastern States. And I would like to welcome Jackson Hotshot crew member, Howard Rapp, on the show. How are you, Howard?

Howard: I'm doing just great. How about you?

Jasmine: Doing well, thank you. So tell us a little bit about yourself, Howard, what made you want to get into the career of fire?

Howard: Okay, so, um, growing up, I was, I've always been in love with the outdoors, you know, camping, hiking, watching the wildlife. And I knew that being inside... a desk job, I just knew that that wasn't for me. And so throughout college, I got into the geography program. The funny thing about all this is I can pretty much correlate, where I'm at now with my job by signing up for the wrong class in college. And through that, I was introduced to my major, which is geography. And then from there, I was able to get out West. And that's when I really kind of found out what wildland firefighting was being from the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, that's not something that's really prevalent around here. And so once I kind of, once I figured out that that was a profession or career that I could pursue, I started doing anything that I could do that would make me look desirable to a wildland fire crew. And it just so happens that there's this hotshot crew up here in Jackson. And, you know, just started, just started working out. And I got a job with the Mississippi Forestry Commission, which allowed me to get some field experience and the necessary qualifications to... to be on a crew like this.

Jasmine: That's great. And tell us a little bit about your position. What do you do with the Jackson Hotshots?

Howard: Okay, so this year, I will be a primary sawyer. And basically, what our job is, we go out in front of the, in front of the dig line, and we basically just, you know, cut a path through the woods, allowing, allowing the dig line to come behind us and, and put some line in to contain the fire. And other than that, you know, there's kind of little special projects, we'll do some tree felling sometime. Um, if there's any, there's any large down trees that may be in the way, it's our job to really just kind of get anything out of the way that somebody couldn't just pick up and move.

Jasmine: That's great information about your position. And I know last year, we were going through a lot when it came to COVID, we're still going through a lot now, but you all manage to get a lot accomplished. What are you most looking forward to when it comes to this year's fire season?

Howard: Well, after last year, I'm from I mean, last year, last year was my first season was the crew. And that was from what I from what I hear from some of the senior members, that was that was a pretty busy year, I'm really looking forward to another busy year, I really enjoy our time out on the road, getting to go getting to go a lot of places that most people would never really get the opportunity to go. And, you know, seeing and experiencing those things, and then just really, um, really the satisfaction of just going out and putting in a hard day's work. And then what you know, you're hiking home at the end of the day, and it's like, hey, you know, I accomplished that. And that's, that's really one of the driving forces that keeps me going in this career and keeps me pursuing is just that that satisfaction and knowing, you know, hey, me and my

buddies, you know, we went out there we gave it our all we're tired, we're be we're hurt, but we're ready to get back up and do it again in the morning.

Jasmine: Absolutely. And speaking of your team members, what's the best part about working with them?

Howard: I would say that I'd say the camaraderie. Everybody on the crew wants to see you do well. And so there's really a lot of there's really a lot of motivation that you get from other folks sometimes that's positive motivation. Sometimes that could be suffering, motivation. You know, whether you kind of doing something you weren't supposed to do and they just, you know, there's the crew, the crew will do their job and keep you on the right track.

Jasmine: I see what you mean. So, everyone is always looking out for one another. Is that correct?

Howard: Absolutely. In this in this line of profession, everybody has to look out for everybody to make sure that we all can come home safe.

Jasmine: Absolutely. So, I know with this being your second year on the Jackson Hotshots, there's already been so much that you've accomplished in your first year. Are there any more goals that you would like to achieve?

Howard: Yes, ma'am. So, my goal for this year is to is really just for the most part, I want to advance my skills as a sawyer, I want to I want to be the best sawyer that I can be. But I'm kind of a longer-term goal is I will be starting on my Firefighter Type One task book. And the reason in and getting that is I'm, I'm a little older in age than most of the crew members. And so I have a limited, limited amount of time to get a to get a permanent position on a fire crew. And you, you got to have that you got to have that Type One Firefighter certification, or qualification, I should say, to get that to get that permanent position. And that's really, that's really my goal. Just putting everything in and giving it my all and get getting those opportunities to get pulled to the side and work on that task book or, you know, whatever, whatever I can do to advance my career.

Jasmine: Definitely. And is there any kind of advice that you would give to somebody that's looking to get into the career of fire or join the Jackson Hotshots?

Howard: So for me, I always say that hot-shotting is 60% mental and 40% physical. It's a really tough job. But the hardest part is, is your mind telling you to, is your mind telling you that you can't do it. And if you can overcome, if you can overcome that mental battle, nine times out of 10, your body's going to allow you to do what, what it is you need to get accomplished. Other than that, you know, I tell them like, this is this is the greatest job in the world, you know, I get to I get paid to do my favorite things. You know, they they're paying me to go out and hike in the woods. They're paying me to camp out. They're paying me to set the woods on fire. And I don't I don't think there's a greater job out there than this.

Jasmine: Are there any success stories you would like to share?

Howard: So, I have a personal success story. You know, coming on... a swayer position is usually something reserved for more experienced crew members. And coming in my first season, I was I was put in a I was put on a saw team as a swamper for a primary sawyer. And I'll admit that I had a had a pretty tough time kind of catching on in the beginning. And it really took a couple months before I kind of fell into fell into my role and could do my job, proficiently. And I mean, I just to be completely honest with you, I look at just being able to complete a full season a success story for anybody. But you know, coming in as a as a rookie, and being put on a saw team, my saw partner last year was a very driven a very, very hard worker. And so, you know, I was I was pushing myself to the limit, just trying to, just trying to keep up with him. And I feel like by the end of the season, I was, I was able to accomplish that.

Jasmine: That's a great accomplishment. And I would like to thank you, Howard, for allowing me to interview you and we're looking forward to all the great work you and your team members will be doing this fire season.

Howard: Yes, ma'am.

Jasmine: Listen to our podcasts every other Friday to learn more about our Jackson Hotshots.