



Not Your Ordinary Job – Season Two, Episode Six 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 John Rowland on the show. How are you, John?

John: Good. How are you?

Jasmine: I'm doing well. Thank you. So, tell us a little bit about yourself, John. What made you want to get into the career of fire?

John: Well, originally I'm from Long Island, New York. So I actually never even really heard about hotshots or wildfire back on the East Coast. But after high school, I joined the Marine Corps and I didn't really get the experience that I wanted out of that. So I ended up just like researching some jobs, that are pretty hardcore, hotshotting came up, learn how to apply. And I saw what I needed to do physically and mentally to get ready for it. And lucky enough, I was picked up by Jackson, my first year. Two years. Yes. So here I am.

Jasmine: That's awesome. So what are you most looking forward to when it comes to this year's fire season? I know last year we were dealing with a lot when it came to COVID. We're still dealing with a lot now. But you will manage to still get a lot done last season.

John: I think I'm looking forward to the same challenges that the crew faces every year. Whether that be the physical challenges, mental challenges. I think I just look forward to really seeing what a group of like 22, 22 people can really do together, it's pretty amazing to see that every year, what a team that's cohesive, in shape can do. So it's always really cool to see all that come to fruition every year. And honestly, just, you know, like suffering with your with your family. That's what... I don't get that during the winter. So I can definitely come here during the summer and be with a bunch of good people and just accomplish some really amazing things. So just the experience is what I look forward to every winter coming back. So...

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

John: How motivated everybody is. Everybody strives to push each other to be better. You know, it's cool, like, without this job, I wouldn't have met and become like really good friends with the majority of the people here considering we all come from different backgrounds and everything. But just like, I don't want to call it the alpha mentality, but everyone is always striving to become better. And the things that you are deficient in, (for) someone else that's their strong point. So be able to push each other to become better. And again, like the suffering part of it, like you're with a bunch of people who can mentally handle being in like, the toughest situation. So being able to bond with each other and just go through all those experiences is, you know, it's my favorite part of hanging out with everybody.

Jasmine: Are there any success stories that you've had so far with the Jackson Hotshots?

John: Yeah, I mean, personally, I'm actually on a, I'm on a saw (team). Well, I've been I was on a saw full-time last year, which is pretty big accomplishment, it was only my second year. So that was an individual goal I had the first time I was on the crew. I think the saws arguably work the hardest, I want to be a part of

that. So to be able to, like show what I was worth on the crew my first year and then get pushed to be on a saw, that's a huge success for me. And as a crew, I mean, there were some pretty tough assignments last year. I mean, every hotshot crew goes through those. But the way this crew, in particular, was able to handle those assignments and really, like really shine in like some pretty hard moments, it's pretty amazing. It's cool to see physically this crew keeps getting better every year. So that's a success, a success story in itself. Yeah, so there's a whole bunch of individual stories, but for me personally, like coming on a saw team and just like learning the ins and outs of running a saw to even like even starting to teach people this year... that's pretty, that's pretty important to me.

Jasmine: Absolutely. That sounds important. And what about your position with the Jackson Hotshots? Can you tell us a little more about that?

John: Yeah, sure. So I'm still a crew member. The qualifications I'm working on; looking to finish my [unintelligible] and my FFT1 (Firefighter Type 1). So now being on the crew for two full years, you got to show the new guys, you know, the ins and outs of the crew. So we're trying to fulfill that leadership role in terms of like, I know, people listening to this podcast back in the buggy. So by trying to lead laterally to all the other crew members, and just try and show them like, hey, any problem that you have the people who have been on the crew for, you know, three to four years can fix that. So that low-level leadership is where I'm trying to thrive this year. While continuing to work on myself as well.

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

John: Yeah, yeah, those qualifications are pretty important to me. Every year, this, this crew has fitness challenges...haven't been able to come in the first spot yet. Came in, like third and fourth on the crew. So physically, I would like to get that number one spot, in terms of fitness. Qualifications are huge again. And then my first year, I was able to get Digger of the Year, which is a crew-voted award. That means a lot like being voted by your peers, something like that, it's pretty special. So if I could do... if I could, if I could work hard enough to get Saw Team of the Year or Hotshot of the Year, those are pretty, those are pretty impressive as well. But you know, I'm just gonna work personally just make the career better, and those around me better.

Jasmine: That's great. So what kind of advice would you give to somebody that's looking to get into the career of fire or join the Jackson Hotshots?

John: So obviously, the physical aspect of the job is no joke. And that's really like during the offseason when you're not, you know, you're not at the station, you're not with the with the crew, I spend the most time for sure, conducting physical activity like physical fitness. I mean, you have to be able to endure 14 to 21 days of pretty brutal, pretty brutal, like workdays, the workload that we do is pretty intense. So you have to be able to physically keep up with the crew that was saying that you can't keep up with the crew, you don't belong, you don't deserve to be on the crew. But also, the longer I'm staying in fire, the more I see how mental it is too, so you have to be mentally prepared. Just you have to understand it's gonna be tough on relationships, whether that be with a significant other or family members, you know, they're gonna, you're gonna be gone for long periods of time. And a lot of that time you can't talk to each other. So having that support from like, family and friends is pretty huge. But I'd say the number one advice I'd give is be willing to buy into the crew. You know, like when you get when you get here, keep an open mind. Like, be humble. It's okay to make mistakes as long as you learn from them. So like that was my number one thing when I first got here is I want to just keep an open mind. I understand that I don't know everything. And just always be learning. You should always be a student, whether in fire or anything else, so that continuous learning is super important.

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

John: Yeah, great. Thank you. Thanks for having me here. It was great talking to you.

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