

Travel Report

Columbus, Ohio 2017

Monday, September 18th

Finally, the day everyone has been waiting for a long time has arrived. We are flying out from Brussel Airport to Chicago, Illinois. At around 8 am, the participants start to arrive in the departure hall near the Starbucks booth. Our trip starts with a short flight from Brussels to Amsterdam in the Netherlands, where we will board a connecting flight to Chicago. We are experiencing a small delay at Schiphol Airport due to computer problems in the terminal after which our 8-hour flight can take off.

Once arrived in Chicago, we are going through customs quite quickly after which we pick up our rental cars and head out to our first hotel in Chicago. After check-in, it is time to have some food at the local Five Guys followed by a short walk through Grant park to enjoy the Chicago scenery by night. After a long day, it is time to get some sleep.



Tuesday, September 19th

It is a short night for many of us, as the time difference of 7 hours wakes us up early. Most of the group are up by 5 AM or earlier. Today's schedule has a walk-through Chicago with visits to Grant Park, Millennium Park, a boat ride on Michigan lake and the Chicago river, the Magnificent Mile, Hancock Tower observatory and ends with dinner on the Navy Pier. The morning starts with some rain, after which the weather clears up by noon, giving us plenty of sun for the rest of the day.

During our walk, we stop by some of the fire houses of the Chicago Fire Department to meet some brothers and support them by buying some T-shirts and patches.

At the end of the day we have dinner in Bubba Gump's on the Navy Pier, followed by a late-night drink at a rooftop bar along Millennium Park on S Michigan Avenue.





Wednesday, September 20nd

Again a short night for many of us. Today we are leaving Chicago and head out to Columbus Ohio, 400-mile trip. First off, we drive to Firehouse 18 of the Chicago Fire Department, also known by many of us as Firehouse 51 of the Chicago Fire TV-show.



After a 1 hour drive, it is time to halt for a typical American breakfast at a local Denny's and a visit to a nearby Bass Pro Outdoor World shop for some first shopping. Halfway through the trip, it is time for a stop in Indianapolis, where we have a walk around the city .



By the end of the day, we arrive at our hotel in Grove city, just outside Columbus, Ohio. We decide to have some dinner at a nearby Texas Roadhouse and call it quits for today shortly after.

Thursday, September 21st

The first day of the ride-a-long program. After a small breakfast at the hotel, everybody gets ready to start the program. We are expected and welcomed at the Columbus Division of Fire headquarters. All the participants are then registered and handed out a linen package with sheets, blankets and towels for use in the fire stations. The week schedule is also presented at this time.

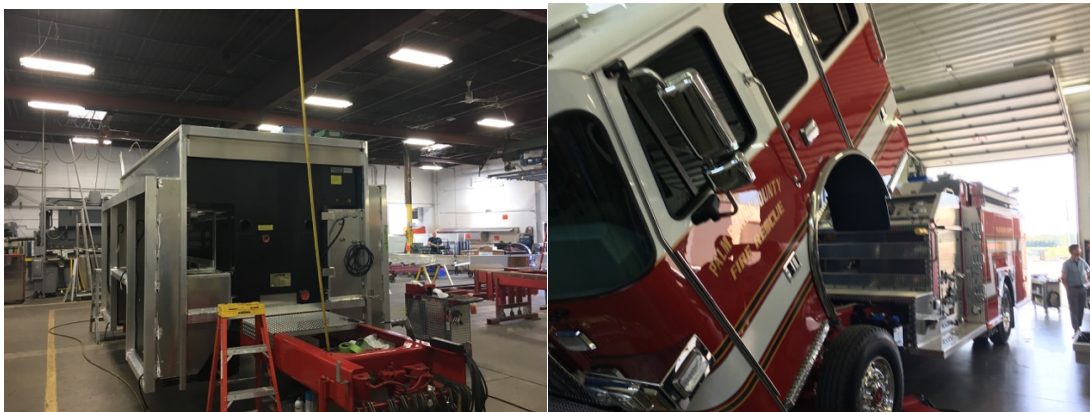


After getting acquainted, we get a tour of the administration building and the Training Academy, just next door. After lunch at a local Mexican restaurant, everybody is getting ready to be brought to their stations and start their ride-a-long. Donald and Niels are assigned to station 3, Bo and Yves to Station 3, Jan and Jordy to Station 10, Marc and Wesley to Station 17 and Sven and myself are assigned to station 8. Once everybody arrives at their stations it does not take long before the first calls come in.



Friday, September 22nd

The second day of the ride-a-long. The group meets at the Training Academy to head out for a visit to Sutphen. This company manufactures fire trucks, that are also used by the Columbus Division of Fire. The group enjoys an elaborate tour of the facility, where we can follow the construction cycle of a fire truck from start to finish. After the visit and lunch at the Spaghetti factory, we visit the Firefighter Union Hall. Next it is time to head back to the fire stations to continue the ride-a-longs.



Saturday September 23rd and Sunday September 24

All participants spend the entire weekend at the fire stations for their ride-a-longs. For me this means living with the crews of station 8, the Firefightin' Eights. This station houses, Engine 8, Ladder 8 and Medic 8 and is one of the busiest stations around. My partner, Sven has a busy time on the Engine with lots of medical calls for overdoses. The crews are super friendly and quickly treat us as members of the family.



Monday, September 25th

Today's schedule has several activities for the group. We visit the City's Fleet Management building where all fire apparatus are serviced and where possible repaired, followed by a visit to the Fire Alarm Office that handles all incoming phone calls. At lunchtime, we are expected by the company Horton for a lunch and a tour of their facilities. Horton is a manufacturer of ambulance vehicles.





This same night, Marc and Wesley get their first structure fire call ...



Tuesday, September 26th

Another day filled with activities. We start our day at the Fire Academy for a “Saving your own” Training. This training is all about saving firefighters in distress. After a very interesting class, it was time to train and try out the new techniques that were taught. After the training, we went to visit the Fire Museum.



Wednesday, September 27th

Today, the group have a meeting in the morning with the Fire Chief to talk about how the week has been so far. A good time to thank our hosts for having us with suitable gifts for the Fire chief and our chaperones, FF Doug Wortman and Chief Steven Martin. After our meeting, we head out Rickenbacker International Airport, a military and civilian airport, where we get a tour of the fire station and a ride on the ARFF rigs.



After the visit to the airport it is time for some Bavarian lunch at Schmidt's in Columbus for some sausage and Sauer kraut! The last visit of the day is to station 4, a HAZMAT station, where the crew gives us a tour and presentation of their trucks and call handling with hazardous materials.



After leaving station 4, the group heads back to their stations for their last night of ride-a-longs.

Thursday, September 28th

Today marks the end of the ride-a-long program with the Columbus Division of Fire Department. It has been a great week for everyone and we say goodbye to our chaperones and friends and start our trip towards Washington D.C. It is a trip of about 400 miles. With several stops along the way, we arrive in Washington late afternoon where we stop for a visit to the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center National Air and Space Museum, next to Washington Dulles International Airport.



Friday, September 29nd

Today we have planned a long walk Washington D.C. We the Pentagon Memorial, National Mall with the Witte Huis and several other Memorials, Union Station and many more. By the end of the day we have walked about 15 miles! After the drive we drive down to National Harbor for dinner and small walk around town before heading back to the hotel.







Saturday, September 30th

We continue our tour of Washington D.C. in the morning with a visit to Arlington National Cemetery. After this visit, we head out to Baltimore, a short 50 mile trip. Once arrived in Baltimore we head out for a walk in the Inner Harbor area, where we visit a fire station and have dinner downtown before heading to our hotel for the night.





Sunday, October 1st

Today we leave Baltimore and head out to New York City, a 200-mile trip, with a stop in Philadelphia. Marc takes us around Philadelphia where we visit the Liberty Bell, the Rocky stairs and the Eastern State Penitentiary Museum. This prison facility was transformed into a museum. After these visits, we head out to New York City. We arrive shortly before sunset at Brooklyn Heights, where the group can catch a beautiful sunset view of lower Manhattan. After checking in to our hotel in Queens, we head out with the subway to Times Square for dinner.







Monday, October 2nd

Time to put on our walking shoes again! Today's walk starts out in Lower Manhattan, heading north. Along the way, we visit the 9/11 museum, One World, Wall Street, Brooklyn bridge, ... and many more sights..





Tuesday, October 3rd

Last day of the trip. We are lucky that our flight back is only in the evening, which gives us time to head back to Manhattan for another walk around. Today we walk through Bryant Park, Rockefeller and the High Mile, an old railroad track that has been turned into a park



After lunch in Chelsea it is time to start heading back to the hotel and pick up our luggage and rental cars and head out to the airport.

After a 'short' 6,5-hour flight we arrive at Brussels Airport, which marks the definite ending of our program.



Participants (from left to right.):

Jordy Daems	– HVZ Zone 1 – post Blankenberge
Sven De Smedt	– VR Zeeland – post Koewacht
Bo Vandersteene	– HVZ Fluvia – post Kortrijk
Wesley Stofferis	– HVZ Meetjesland – post Eeklo
Jan De Cleen	– HVZ Waasland – post Kruibeke
Yves De Vogelaere	– Brussel + HVZ Vl. Ardennen – post St.Lievens Houtem
Donald De Bock	– HVZ Centrum – post Merelbeke
Dirk Van den Berghe	– HVZ Centrum – post Merelbeke
Niels Landsman	– VR Zaanstreek Waterland – post Assendelft
Marc Opstal	– HVZ Vlaams Brabant West – post Zaventem

Travel report written by Dirk Van den Berghe