

Life's ambition made real for Chris Gibbons

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Arlington, Mass. -

It's the classic story — Chris Gibbons always wanted to be a firefighter, and never gave up on his dream until it became a reality.

He passed the last portion of the firefighter physical agility test, will begin the job on Monday, and looks forward to the Arlington Fire Academy.

"The sense of accomplishment after finishing (the test) was unbelievable. I was taken aback by it."

Gibbons originated from Stoughton, and moved to Arlington in 1991, where he became a Boy Scout.

There, he learned from friends in the Scouts about their affiliated program, Explorer Post 911, which can provide first aid and security during various situations. They also provide support for the Fire and Police Department.

Gibbons volunteered for the Explorer Post 911 for many years, and also became an Emergency Medical Technician.

"I always wanted to help people. I always knew I wanted to be an EMT, and I got my EMT (license) when I was 18. I was an EMT for 11 years. It helped me keep my direction through school it kept everything in perspective for me," Gibbons said.

During his time as a volunteer and EMT, Gibbons also met his wife of five years, Laurie.

"It's kind of funny. I knew her brother before her, and she became a member of the Post, and I was actually going through EMT class with my friend. We ended up meeting each other through the program," Chris Gibbons said.

He maintains ties with many of the Explorers. Mark Roche, one of his closest friends, said that Gibbons' entry into firefighting is "wicked exciting," and Gibbons is going to be the best man in his wedding on June 21, 2008.

"I've known him and his wife Laurie since I joined the Post when I was 14. It just kind of developed sort of like a family like relationship. I actually lived with them for a while, and they currently have custody of my dog (Frisbee). The apartment I'm living in can't have pets, so when I moved out they took care of my dog," Roche said.

Another volunteer, Jim Sullivan, said he's known Gibbons for more than six years, because Sullivan also began as a boy scout.

"I've always looked up to Chris, because he's always been there to help me, and it's great he's doing so well. He's doing great, there's no doubt about that," Sullivan said.

The process of becoming a firefighter wasn't always easy for Gibbons. He failed the StepMill (or stair-climb) on his first attempted when he slipped.

"The initial obstacle is a StepMill. You go on for a minute, at 52 steps a minute. Then you rock for a minute, and then you go back on for three minutes and 20 seconds at 67 steps a minute. Which is equivalent, after you're done, of sixteen floors of stair-climbing," Gibbons said.

After that, there is a five-minute rest. Then, there are the obstacle events. Gibbons says these events are the ladder raise, hose drag, and forcible entry.

"That's where you move a 700-pound sled with a 12-pound sledge-hammer. You have to move it a certain distance. You then go through a dark maze, and you do what they call a 'dummy drag,' a 150-pound bag which you drag through a maze."

Those are some, not all, of the obstacles. Gibbons successfully completed them all in order to finally become the firefighter he always wanted to be.

"I keyed in on it, really. I also did some other agility training as well. I wanted to give myself every opportunity to make sure I could pass it...it was a good feeling. I proved to myself that, even though I fell, I was able to get through," Gibbons said.