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Firefighter-paramedic Kendrick Johnson and his team head out to a call from Station 42 in Whitehaven. Johnson has been with the Memphis Fire Department for six years. All city firefighters are required to undergo emergency medical response training.

## TRAINING from 1B

In 2007, the department instituted a requirement that all firefighters must undergo training as paramedics within 3½ years of their date of hire, and they ran intensive training programs in-house.

Since many new firefighter recruits were black, the proportion of paramedics naturally rose.

"We've really achieved something that's the envy of the nation," Benson said.

He and other leaders of the Fire Department say the accomplishment also helps the department serve a majority black city.

They say cultural misunderstandings can occur in tense situations. Deputy Chief Gary Ludwig, who is white, recalls responding to a medical call for a child at a day care center. The black minister who owned the center was trying to help, but getting in the way.

Ludwig recalls that another white paramedic wanted the minister arrested.

"You don't do that," Ludwig recalls saying. "This man is a role model to a lot of these kids."

Today, the Fire Department employs 272 white paramedics, who also work as firefighters. The department employs 94 black firefighter-paramedics, five Hispanic firefighter-paramedics, and one Asian firefighter-paramedic. Recruits earn \$48,100 and those with three or more years' experience earn \$56,400.

During the in-house training, paramedics must master topics such as anatomy and learn to administer powerful drugs.

The job can be emotionally difficult too. Johnson recently prayed as he helped a man who was

trapped in a car. The man died, and Johnson participated in a group talk about the incident that the department calls a critical stress debriefing.

Johnson also recalls happy moments, such as the recent case when he used his basic Spanish to communicate with a husband and wife from Haiti.

The wife had fainted, and when she recovered, she and her husband thanked him warmly. "That's what I come to work for," Johnson said.

And the girlfriend he asked to stand by him during his intense study? They're married now.



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Memphis firefighters (from left) Ira Crisp, Jeremy Blackmon, Darell Kiner, Eric McNeal and Matthew Bennett work on a scenario during the paramedic training class.