

Preschoolers learn, play at fire safety day

They may not have known who Smokey the Bear was, but by the end of the class Thursday, preschoolers from Oberlin's Kids First Learning Center, the Head Start class, and a handful of daycare centers knew what to do in case of a fire, thanks to the Decatur County Fire Department and Donald Duck.

The kids started the field trip by watching an old 1970s cartoon, where a smart-looking family learned about fire safety from their dad with the help of Mr. Duck and his three nephews.

Afterward, the kids answered questions about what they should do in case of a fire, like what to tell an emergency worker, how to check if a door is hot before you go through it, and to crawl on the floor if awaked by the fire alarm.

"We did the normal fire safety stuff," said Chief Bill Cathcart, who teaches the classes at the fire house every year. "Things like don't light matches, how to get out of a fire safely and having an escape plan. We've been teaching them this forever. It's something we've been doing since before I took over as chief, since the '70s."

After the tips, the kids got to see what a fire fighter looks like when

he's all suited up, an experience that teacher Becky Ayer's acknowledged could be scary. No one cried however, and after a normal man came out of the giant mask and coveralls, the kids themselves got to try on the gear, posing for pictures for their parents.

"The thing I like best is having the kids see a firemen in his everyday clothes, and then put on his firefighters suit," said Karen Smith, case manager for the Head Start program. "Some are a little bit afraid when he's in it, and then he takes it off, and it helps them to know that they don't have to be afraid, even though he looks and sounds so different. And of course the kids love the fire engine and love getting on it."

And of course, for the grand finale, there were the fire trucks. They explored both the old yellow one and the shiny red one, and the men lifted each kid up to see where the hoses connect and how the trucks work, including the lights.

"I love to have the kids up there," Mr Cathcart said. "It's a lot of fun. I think I probably enjoy it more than the kids do. It's all about their excitement when they come to the fire station."



CROWDING AROUND the painted fire hydrant in front of the Oberlin Fire Station, Cowen Anderson, Ian Anderson, Kaden Sowers and Mason Tally (above, from left) placed

their hands on the prints of high schoolers who had painted it. Cowen Anderson was the first to jump into the firefighter's suit (left), his legs sinking into the giant rubber boots.



FIRE CHIEF BILL CATHCART showed the kids (above) where the firefighters operate the pump on the truck and lifted each one up to see the controls. Kaden Sowers (left) was a little wary of a firefighter Jerry Stein when he was all suited up and talking through his air mask, but once they got to touch the man and watch him climb out of it, they were all put at ease. Brycen Ketterl and Cowen Anderson even tried on the hats (below).



Photos and story by Stephanie DeCamp