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JAMES QUIGG, DAILY PRESS
CHECK THIS OUT: Children line up to get a close look at one of Mercy Air's helicopters Wednesday during the Academy of Academic Excellence's safety fair. The fair included ladder trucks from area fire departments and squad cars from sheriff's stations, but the helicopter was the most popular display.

SAFETY CAREERS EXCITE STUDENTS
Agencies gather to offer thrills, education
BY LYNNEA LOMBARDO ~ STAFF WRITER

APPLE VALLEY • A thick cloud of dust swirled around a Mercy Air helicopter as it gently landed in the vacant lot behind the school, the deafening sound of chopping blades drowning out the shouts of children as the craft touched down.

The Academy of Academic Excellence held its first "Safety Day" at the Corwin Campus in Apple Valley, a second through fourth-grade school that teaches close to 300 students. The charter school partnered with the Apple Valley Fire Protection District, California Highway Patrol, the Bureau of Land Management Fire Department, the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, AMR and Mercy Air for a few hours of thrills and education.

Event coordinators focused on highlighting the different careers within the realm of public safety by exposing students to the various jobs they entail.

Jennifer Eisenbrey, public education specialist with the Apple Valley Fire Protection District, said the event allows students to have a more hands-on experience with public safety officials, their vehicles and their equipment. Eisenbrey, who has a son attending the Corwin Campus, said they had been planning this event since the end of summer, noting it was particularly challenging bringing all the agencies together because each was subject to emergency calls.

"Why are the tires so big?" one student asked Vince Spina and Alberto Camba Jr., two firefighters that work on a fire engine for the Bureau of Land Management.

"We like showing off our equipment," Spina said, after he answered questions from a large cohort of students. "And this is good experience for the kids. We answer their questions and let them feel what it's like to be up there (in the engine)."

“They’re so excited, it’s hard for them to contain it,” Camba said. “They ask great questions. They’re not as intimidating as speaking in front of adults.”

A fire truck with a large ladder extended at a 60° angle attracted the most attention from the students when two Corwin Campus employees fearlessly scaled it half way.

One of the employees, proctor Dianne Moore, drew cheers from the children as she planted her feet onto solid ground, exhilarated by the experience.

“I don’t think I could have made it to the top,” Moore said, as wide-eyed children watched her remove a red helmet that read “Fire Chief ” and a thick yellow jacket, called a turn-out. “It was pretty cool!”

Although the event was intended to be career oriented, the motive was two-fold: Eisenbrey said she wanted the students to have a positive first experience with public safety agencies so the children would be less fearful if they have contact with them during an unpleasant or scary situation.

“The first experience they have with us (public safety officials) should not be something bad,” Eisenbrey said compassionately. “Good guys wear masks, too. We don’t want them to be scared.”

“This is definitely worth it,” said Jason Nailon, deputy fire marshal for the Apple Valley Fire Protection District. “They are our future, and they need to have some positive influences. These kids could be saving our life one day.”



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CURIOUS: Children walk up to a Mercy Air helicopter while the dust still settles at the Academy for Academic Excellence’s Corwin Campus on Wednesday. The helicopter was the highlight of the school’s safety fair, which was focused on developing career interest in rescue-oriented jobs, and safety for children in crisis situations.

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