

Toughest Fire Fighter Alive South Africa 2022: What an experience!



The 2022 Toughest Fire Fighter Alive South Africa (TFA SA) was held on 16 and 17 September 2022 at De Bakke Beach in Mossel Bay with Mossel Bay Fire, Rescue and Disaster Management Services being its host. TFA SA organiser, Mark Smith said, "This year, TFA was exceptional, the best so far. It was very encouraging to see the number of fire fighters, male and female,

attempting to do the gruelling circuit, displaying the grit and determination of South African fire fighters such as the camaraderie and the encouraging of teammates. Fire fighters were proud to represent their regions and many vowed to return better next as this only bodes well for the future of the event. Thank you to all the fire fighters, volunteers and sponsors. You made this a memorable TFA event."

During the opening, Leon van Dyk, Mossel Bay MAYCO member of Council for Community Safety together with Etienne du Toit, deputy director: Fire Rescue Services for Western Cape Province and CFO Joseph Johnston, acting director of Community Safety and chief of Mossel Bay Fire, Rescue and Disaster Management Service provided participants, their families and attendees with much

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motivation, speaking from the heart. The event MC was Platoon commander Johann Makwak of Mossel Bay Fire and Rescue Service.

The prize giving was held at the Mossel Bay Fire Station and Mossel Bay Mayor, Alderman Dirk Kotze, together with Etienne du Toit of Western Cape Province, CFO Joseph Johnston, Garden Route District Municipality Mayor Memory Booysen and TFA organiser, Mark Smith, handed over the trophies. Mayor Kotze shared quite a few inspirational quotes from his own experience as an athlete “Push through the pain”, from author Carol Dweck on grit and on leadership from authors Dr Myles Munroe and Arthur Ashe.

Winners: Individuals [View PDF](#)

Although the finishing times of the participants show their performance at the event, I believe that they are all winners by simply taking part in the Toughest Fire Fighter Alive South Africa 2022 with perseverance, grit and dog-headed determination. Although a competitive challenge, participants shared a deep camaraderie and built new connections while strengthening existing ones; TEAM WORK.

The overall winner of the TFA SA 2022 is 44-year-old Manie Gouws from West Rand with Baigum Abrahams of the City of Cape Town taking the top female position again. Emile Conrad from Garden Route District Municipality Fire Service came second, just a few seconds behind Gouws while Dale Alexander of the City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service came third. Lesego Molikwe came second and Pule third in the female challenge, both from West Rand. Molikwe also took winner of Best New Entrant Female.

The 44-year-old Gouws started working as a fire fighter in 1999 and is currently a paramedic in the service of Gauteng Province. He has competed internationally but never managed to secure the TFA SA title. In an interview after the prize giving, Gouws gave glory to God for his victory. The past four years, Gouws has been involved in training of the West Rand Team who did particularly well in the TFA competition. Gouws said that hard work, focus and dedication is the key to success. “And I always tell my team, just enjoy it. It’s one step at a time until you cross that finish line. I am content now that I finally got this title.”

Conrad the former title holder for five consecutive times commented on a special relationship between him and Gouws. “Manie has been chasing me for years. I am thrilled for him to have secured the title.”

It was Alexander’s first TFA and he also claimed the title of best newcomer in the male category.

Piet Niemann, the oldest fire fighter to compete in the challenge at 61 years of age, was given a standing ovation by his fellow fire fighters and guests as he was called to stage to receive his prize.

Winners: Relays [View PDF](#)

West Rand took first place in the relay event for both male and female categories.

Mini TFA 2022

This year’s TFA SA included a Mini TFA for children for the first time. The event was open to kids aged three to 10 years’ old. Garden Route District Municipality’s Emile Conrad, organised the event, creating an exciting mini circuit, which was a copy of the TFA circuit with a mini Kaiser Force machine (built out of



TFA SA organisers Mark Smith and Ryan Abrahams



Leon van Dyk, Mossel Bay MAYCO member of Council for Community Safety

- ▶ wood by Conrad and even a hose drag, hose carry and roll.

Conrad said, "It was such a joy and honour to put together the first Mini TFA event this year. Not knowing what to expect, we were blown away by the amazing turnout. Just over 70 kiddies registered on the day and competed in The Mini TFA event. The event featured a compilation of similar fire fighting tasks done in the National TFA competition. Kids had to perform hose drags and carries, mini Kaiser Force machine, crawling and moving over obstacles in the quickest possible time. The event was aimed at kids between the ages of three to 10 years old, hoping to inspire some future fire fighters and also to allow kids the opportunity to join in on the TFA in a fun and interactive way. We had really great feedback and the kids had huge amounts of fun." "All the kids received a gift pack and cupcakes, sponsored by Reel Cakes, as well as fire and life safety material, which were sponsored by Western Cape Province Disaster Management. We also had a lucky draw, giving away hampers sponsored by Nestlé as well as fire fighting puzzles and fire engine toys sponsored by Fire and Rescue International magazine. I would like to thank all the volunteers that helped on the day as well as all the sponsors. You made the event a huge success", added Conrad.

Message from CFO Joseph Johnston, Mossel Bay Fire and Rescue Service

CFO Johnston summarised the eight most noteworthy traits that were displayed by fire fighter during the event as follows.

1. Drive: "Great fire fighters and leaders have set an expectation for themselves to be the best they can be and to not leave anything in the tank. They have a personal standard that they will not compromise. They have a can-do attitude with a relentless work ethic. For them, it's not about if they will accomplish a goal but when they will accomplish it."
2. Organisation: "Great fire fighters have a plan. They outline what they need to know, what classes and certifications they need to obtain, what skills they need to master. Then, they continue to stay sharp on those skills and work on their plan."
3. Tenacity: "The fire service is a 'doing' business. When someone calls 911, they are not looking for advice or an opinion. They are looking for someone to show up now and solve their problem. Great fire fighters invest long hours training their minds and their bodies and practicing the skills that go into being a great fire fighter."
4. Humility: "One of the most common traits of great fire fighters is their humility. The student is never greater than the teachers. Great fire fighters stay humble and continue to be students of great fire fighting throughout their careers."
5. Self-control and persistence: "Find the most direct route to your goal, but don't fall for the short-cut trap; there are none. Great fire fighters know that it takes discipline and time to maximize their potential. Great fire fighters have learned and exercise self-control to avoid burnout. They exercise persistence through to meet and exceed the challenge."
6. Accountability: "It's easy to point a finger and blame others or objects like an alarm clock when it doesn't work. Great fire fighters always take 100 percent accountability 100 percent of the time because that is where the power is. It is where you find the power to improve and the power to adapt and overcome. Always be prepared with a backup plan."
7. Inspiration: "Show me the five people you surround yourself with and I can tell you what your future holds. Humans are tremendously influenced by peer pressure. This peer



**Etienne du Toit, deputy director:
Fire Rescue Services
for Western Cape Province**



**CFO Joseph Johnston, fire chief
of Mossel Bay Fire, Rescue and
Disaster Management Service**



**MC was Platoon commander
Johann Makwak of Mossel Bay
Fire and Rescue Service**

pressure can work for us and against us. Great fire fighters know this and use it to their advantage. This is how they stay consistent and motivated in the pursuit of excellence.”

8. Thoughtfulness: “Fire fighters have so much to appreciate about those who have come before them. They blazed the trail and helped raise the quality of the fire service. We get to stand on the shoulders of those great fire fighters and leaders. Yet we also must plan for the future challenges. Join in making the fire service better by reminding yourself of the characteristics that you have and incorporating the ones you need to.”

“Each and every participant who entered excelled in completing the challenge and we will definitely welcome them and more at the 2023 event in Mossel Bay”, he added.

Comments

We have received numerous feedback and comments from the 2022 participants. These include:

Manie Gouws

Ongelooflike goeie atmosfeer. Goeie vertoning van krag, stamina en durf met goeie sportmanskap deur al die deelnemers.

Baigum Abrahams, City of Cape Town

It was an honour having the privilege to compete in the TFA SA 2022 again this year. The camaraderie that was fostered amongst all the fire fighters through the display of determination and grit, was truly a highlight of the event.

Competing in the TFA always leaves open the window of opportunity for growth. Through every gruelling stage I experience growth and the way I add value grows as I grow and view life from a different vantage point. For these reasons I’d keep coming back for more! Thank you to all of the organizers who were part of this huge successful event.

Emile Conrad, Garden Route District Municipality

This was a very special TFA competition for me. One would think losing the title after five consecutive wins would leave me feeling sad but coming second this year, feels a bit more than any other victory in so many ways. First of all, to celebrate a new South African TFA Champion, Manie Gouws, who has also become a good friend of mine after many years of competing together and a well-deserving champion. Well done once again, Buddy. I also think the competition can only get more exciting from here. Seeing how the

TFA SA has grown in competitors, teams and competitiveness since the very first pilot competition in 2011, gives us a glimpse of how much it has impacted the South African fire services. The results speak volumes in how fire fighter’s work capacity increased from year to year. And meeting up with old friends and making new ones is always a highlight for me. God bless you guys!

Russel van Deventer, Mangaung Fire and Rescue Service

Great to be back after three years! Challenging but enjoyable. The atmosphere was fantastic. Can’t wait for next year!

Neo Leholo, shift supervisor: Airports Company South Africa (ACSA) Gqeberha ARFF

Mossel Bay TFA was my third TFA and the first that I can say I came prepared for. Building up to the preparation we selected five other members and made the necessary shift swapping so that they come to my shift and train together. It was tough! I drilled them hard and intense. All of them were first timers. What most people don’t know is that I pulled both my hamstrings a day before I took part in the competition. Glen and I were doing incline road sprints when it all happened. I was “advised” not to



Future fire fighters in the making!



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▶ compete the following day because I will make the injuries worse, so I decided to at least just “participate”. Well, I cruised through the first and second stages in pain. The third stage I was warmed up and took it up a notch and fourth stage I pushed a bit harder and low and behold, SILVER MEDAL! I started my fire fighting career in 2009. My FF1 passout parade was in Mossel Bay at the same fire station I received the Silver Medal from the same Chief Joey Johnston... talk about a full circle! Thank to everyone who took time out to prep such a memorable event and I’m grateful to have been part of it.

Piet Niemann, oldest fire fighter to compete

I am still overwhelmed by the reaction of most of the participants and organisers. I take part in the event because I believe in “leading by example” and not only to be rewarded. According to me I did not do the best I could, I nearly mist this event due to an old back injury and I’m glad that I didn’t withdraw. Despite all of this, everyone told me that I am an inspiration to them. I would really like to thank the organisers and everyone else that helped to make a great success of TFA 2022; without your effort the event would not be the same!!! Thanks again.

Dale Alexander, fire fighter, City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service

It was my first time competing in the TFA. I loved the comradery and I got to experience with work colleagues I hadn’t met before in the fire service and had a sense of common goal. It felt amazing to win my age category (30 to 34), came third overall and secured the trophy for best newcomer. I am already looking forward to the next one. A special thanks to the organisers for providing such a well-run competition. Lastly and most importantly, a big thanks to my two close teammates Tristan Nayman and Baigum Abrahams for keeping me and each other accountable through the difficult tedious training sessions. See you soon TFA 2023.

Lesego Molikwe, Team N’zuri (West Rand)

For me it was a test that stood the test of the tough....but key was not to be shaken, it will always be a memory for me and my team: winner of Best New Entrant Female (second overall).

Ontiretse Puleb, Team N’zuri (West Rand)

For me the competition was a wonderful experience that I will forever cherish. Giving it my best was not enough, I gave it my all. Winner of 45 to 49 group and third overall.

Samson Mokemane, Team N’zuri (West Rand) team captain

For the competition was so exciting and wonderful. I have learned that working together as a team full effort brings excellent results, believing in the Almighty in everything is the best move that one can choose to follow and as fire fighters we don’t stop because we tired, we stop because we’re done. Ready or not when the bell rings, someone must respond.

Bongiwe Kubeka, Team Nzuri (West Rand)

Thank you for the opportunity of being part of TFA competition. I wouldn’t have made it without the support of my coach, Mr Manie Gouws and my team, Nzuri. I am very grateful for the support they gave me. I feel overwhelmed and emotional and I am at a loss for words, this is a very special moment in my life. It already felt like a win when I found out that I am part of the TFA competition. I am looking forward to the next year’s competition because now I know what to expect, thank you!

Siphosethu Mataka, uMgungundlovu District Municipality

I came second in 40 to 44 years’ category and a newbie but had a great experience and for my first time I did my personal best.



The atmosphere was great, the support, the camaraderie that other fire fighters and the spectators were, was out of this world. Hoping next year would be more fun and thanks to Mossel Bay Municipality and family, see you next year.

Laeza Mokoena

The competition was very tough, however, it has taught me to “never say never” in life and am so proud of myself that am at the top three.

**Gerard Lundall,
Fire Fighter 3, Chief Dawid
Stuurman International, Airports
Company South Africa (ACSA)**

I was the organiser for our team and partly responsible for us making it to TFA 2022. We were newbies at TFA 2022. Our experience at the event was truly enlightening and magnificent at the same time. Our guys out did themselves and we even managed to achieve a second place age category placement and sixth place in the relay event...well done to us!

TFA will be seeing a lot more of the ARFF guys in the future.

**Christo Theron, operational
director, Firstcare Wildfire Support**

On behalf of the Firstcare Wildfire Support team I want to thank Mark and his team for presenting an

awesome event. To each and every fire fighter that took part, you are all winners. Thank you for the new friendships made, we will cherish this weekend always. Also a big thank you to Chief Johnson and his team from Mossel Bay Fire and Rescue for your hospitality and hard work that went into this event. As wildland fire fighters, this was an eye opener for our crews and they enjoyed every minute of it. And even though we are just a volunteer organisation, we were welcomed with open arms.

**Johannes Selogiloe,
JB Marks Municipality**

My experience was that even if things are hard and tough, you must never quit in life in whatever you are doing and being at the TFA, it matters not if you are a newbie or not, it needs stamina and endurance and I have realised that I must put in more effort on my fitness.

Mamzo Moswete

The mountain feels a little too high to climb but is climbable.

Smanga Kamase

I won Gold on relay out team name The Legend. And I won Silver on 50 to 54 age category. It was very challenging, extremely difficult and exhausting but what a great experience.

**Gift Malejwe,
N’zuri Team, West Rand**

It was great to see how all gave some and some gave it their all. Winning the men’s relay for the second time really shows that greatness demands commitment. The key is to enjoy it, after all pain is temporary but pride is permanent. I can’t wait for the next one already.

Vincent Naudé

For a first timer at TFA it was way beyond what I expected but having a first time experience in light and functional Charnaud fire gear, was well worth the blood sweat and tears. But what a great and humbling experience that I got to share this with a great bunch of brothers and sisters who all share the same love and passion!

Fire and Rescue International magazine is proud to be the official media partner to Toughest Fire Fighter Alive South Africa.

Congratulations to all participants and a very big thank you to all the sponsors, exhibitors and volunteers for their tireless input and support of TFA SA 2022. The TFA will be returning to Mossel Bay in 2023 and 2024.

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