

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Rastin Challenge showcases first responders, honors 9/11 heroes**

MOUNT VERNON, Ohio – The fourth annual Rastin Challenge for First Responders will be held at Ariel-Foundation Park on Saturday, Aug. 24, beginning at 9 a.m. The event will showcase firefighters and law enforcement officers in a variety of physical challenges. The public is encouraged to show their support by coming out to watch, cheer on participants and interact with a variety of special guests and vendors.

The series of intense physical challenges includes a Tactical Obstacle Course and K-9 Competition for law enforcement and a Combat Challenge and Rastin Stair Climb Challenge for firefighters/EMTs. Free breakfast is available for first responders, compliments of Tim Hortons. Lunch will be available for purchase from Annie's Concessions. Other activities for the day include a one-mile fun run with Get Healthy Knox Coalition (8 a.m. registration), youth challenges led by the Mount Vernon YMCA throughout the day and an afternoon firetruck sprinkler to cool off the kids. Life flight helicopters and a variety of military vehicles will be on display as well.

The Rastin Challenge was developed as the brainchild of local businessman and park supporter Tom Rastin as a way to honor first responders and the memory of the firefighters who climbed the steps of the World Trade Center. The Rastin Stair Climb Challenge consists of four firefighters climbing the tower in full turnout gear, relay-style. "This event has a powerful symbolism. The combined total of the four climbs roughly equals the height the 9/11 firefighters reached before tragedy struck," noted Melanie Bolender, Rastin Challenge committee chair and Foundation Park Conservancy board member.

Among the special guests appearing at the event will be retired NYPD Officer John Lambkin and Fire Department City of New York Firefighter Joe Gavitt, both first responders at 9/11. They will be speaking about their experiences and presenting some artifacts from that tragic day. Lambkin retired after serving more than 20 years, most of that time with the Emergency Services Unit. He was the team leader when the Federal Emergency management Agency activated the New York Task Force Urban Search and Rescued Team during the days after 9/11. Over his police career, he received 4 commendations, 2 meritorious and 15 excellent police duty medals. He was also awarded 8 Life Saving Benevolent Awards for water rescues. Firefighter Gavitt retired after a 20-year career and was awarded the Frank W. Kridel medal for bravery and a Life Saving Benevolent Association medal for water rescue.

Jody Shelley will also be present for the Rastin Challenge. He is a former National Hockey League player for the Columbus Blue Jackets, San Jose Sharks, New York Rangers and the Philadelphia Flyers, and current television and radio analyst/commentator for the Columbus Blue Jackets.

The event is hosted by Foundation Park Conservancy, Mount Vernon Police Department, Knox County Sheriff's Department and Mount Vernon Fire Department. Winning teams' departments receive prizes of \$750, \$500 and \$250, in addition to the more than \$3,000 worth of door prizes for individual first responders. Proceeds from the Rastin Challenge go to a scholarship fund for current Knox County first

responders (fire/law enforcement) seeking advanced training or college credit. Scholarship recipients for 2019 will be announced at the event.

"This is an amazing opportunity for everyone, especially children, to see some of central Ohio's finest first responders demonstrate their skills and to interact with them one-on-one. We'd love to have a big crowd there to watch and cheer them on," explained Bolender.

Happening the same day in downtown Mount Vernon is the Kokosing River Brewfest, benefiting the Foundation for Knox Community Hospital. Rastin Challenge guests have the opportunity to make it a day-long outing in Mount Vernon honoring first responders at the park and enjoying musical entertainment and craft beer from more than 30 breweries in historic downtown Mount Vernon. Learn more at [www.foundationkch.org/krbf](http://www.foundationkch.org/krbf).

For more information about the Rastin Challenge or Ariel-Foundation Park, visit [www.arielfoundationpark.org](http://www.arielfoundationpark.org) or follow the park's Facebook event page. Please visit the website for a complete list of event sponsors.

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