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Not your usual Family Readiness Group meeting

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By Tina Miles

Special to Soundoff!

"Fire safety! Fire safety! Fire safety!" shouted the children. These were the magic words they were taught to help Fire Fighter Mike Crofts, Laurel Volunteer Fire Department, successfully turn three separate scarves into one banner displaying the numbers 9-1-1.



Firefighter Mike Crofts of the Laurel Volunteer Fire Fighter Department entertains the children with magic at the 310th Family Readiness Group's "Fire Safety Night" here.

The 310th Military Intelligence Battalion holds regular Family Readiness Group meetings the last Thursday of each month, which usually entail discussions of support for families of deployed Soldiers. The June meeting, however, took on a different agenda as the 310th sponsored a "Fire Safety Night" for family and friends here at Fort Meade.

Plastic fire chief hats, coloring books and rulers were handed out to the children by Capt. Lloyd Shipp, Fort Meade Fire Department, along with fire safety brochures for adults. The entertainment included Crofts, also known as "the Friendly Fire Fighter," and his bumbling, yet loveable, assistant, Teddy, the Fire Bear (played by Phil Clinard, a volunteer fire fight

er from the Laurel Fire Department).

Using magic, Crofts educated the children on fire safety tips, while the not-always-attentive Teddy tried to assist. Teddy was the prime example of what not to do, such as grabbing a hot pot without using potholders, thus burning his hands. Then Crofts would show the proper method, after giving Teddy first-aide.



Demarian and Devante Fontenot enjoy their hats, rulers and coloring books given to them by the Fort Meade Fire Department.

Through Crofts' magic and Teddy's mishaps, the children learned

the dos and don'ts of fire safety. "I learned to check the smoke detector once a month," said five-year-old Devante Fontenot, son of Staff Sgt. Axel Fontenot, 310th Military Intelligence Battalion

ion. "And don't play with lighters," chimed Fontenot's younger son, Demarian, 3. When asked what number they should call if they need help, both replied in unison, 9-1-1!"

As entertaining as Crotts and Teddy were, the excitement heightened when the hook-and-ladder fire engine from the Fort Meade Fire Department pulled onto the lot, with lights blinking and twirling. The children screamed with delight as the fire fighters climbed out of the truck and began dropping the engine's support legs and raising the gigantic ladder.



Teddy gets a hug from Jasmine Aldridge, daughter of Sgt. William Aldridge, 310th Military Intelligence Battalion.

Assisted by fire fighters James Evans and John Trottman, the children were allowed to climb onto the engine and look around at all the equipment it carried. Meanwhile other fire fighters, Jason Boyer and Mark Fayer, explained how the gear worked and answered questions. Shipp talked with the parents as they watched their children, some possibly becoming future fire fighters.

Editor's note: Tina Miles is the public affairs officer for the 902d Military Intelligence Group here.