West Iron County's race team is on the run during the ladder race, which they won in 18.91 seconds—dressing, running and climbing the ladder.

IRONWOOD—If those ancient Mayan prophecies somehow turn out to be wrong and the world doesn't end this December, the West Iron County Fire Department will be going for its third straight U.P. Firefighters title in L'Anse next July.

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WIC won its second consecutive title at the 118th annual U.P. Tournament, held here July 26 to 28. West Iron took first two of the five races and placed in four of them, was a close second in the shirttail parade and won the commercial parade, clinching the overall title.

West Iron finished with 347 points, a margin of 4 1/3 points over second place Skandia-West Branch (342.66). Champion was third (337.33), and three area departments claimed fourth, fifth and sixth place: Florence, Wis., with 314.66; Crystal Falls with 272.33; and Caspian-Gaastra with 267.33.

Iron County teams and Florence claimed four of the top six places.

For West Iron County, it's the third title in the last five years. They won in 2008 and ended up second in both 2009 and 2010 before winning again in 2011.

This year's theme was "Battling the Beast Like It's the End of the World," and beastly images of fiery monsters played a central role in many of the shirttail parade entries that took over Aurora Street late Thursday night.

Champion took first place (beast atop the "Ironwood Theater" with firemen sliding down "Copper Peak" to save the day), but West Iron was a close second.

WIC's entry had several parts; first, a Mayan god carried down the street by a group of devotees who occasionally stopped to bow down before him (Al Perlongo, of course, in a starring role), then the Mayan pyramid from Chichen Itza, followed by a little fire truck and then a big beastie with a red head coming out of a volcano.

Crystal Falls and Florence tied for fourth in the shirttail. Both featured variations of those "Messin' with Sasquatch" TV ads. Crystal Falls had him in a boxing ring with a firefighter, and Florence had had him in a forest scene among some trees, with firemen squirting him with water to make him rage.

Florence was also second in the dress parade (Forsyth Township won) and again had a big day at the races, winning one, runner-up in two others and third in the mystery race (which involved rolling up three lengths of hose).

"We've got a team that's been sticking together for quite a few years," said Florence race captain Ray Mills, "and that's what it takes. And we have a department that backs us."

Crystal Falls got DQ'd in one race and also had to deal with injuries and people who couldn't

make their schedules work. “Hopefully we get the young guys back out next year,” said Dan Graff.

The racing was highly competitive, with a long dispute after Florence initially got disqualified in the interchange race—race officials made a mistake. Florence got to re-run the race and wound up in first place, improving its first time by six seconds.

Overall, Skandia-West Branch won the races with 86 points (two firsts, one second, one third), followed by West Iron County (84; two firsts, one second, one third) and Florence (82).

As hard-fought as the races were—and they were!—the racers from the Iron County departments, Florence and Skandia-West Branch gathered right after it ended to toast each other’s successes with some golden nectar and wish each other well until same time next year. It’s a tradition.

“When the other teams run,” explained West Iron race captain Tony Bongi, “we always cheer ‘em on and clap, and they do the same for us. We’re all friends.”

As for his own racers, “They’re tough. They’re competitors, and they give me 150% all the time.”

Going into the tournament’s final event (the commercial parade on Saturday morning), SWB had a narrow lead (2/3rds of a point over West Iron, nine over Florence).

But West Iron County has won the U.P. title before with a big score in the commercial parade, and they did it again, getting 85.33 points with its Mayan entry. Champion was second (82.33), and SWB finished third (79.33).

Caspian-Gaastra was fifth—their parade entry featured a fire truck blasting through a wall, Big Boy (complete with his big burger and checkered pants) and plenty of firefighters.

If the world is still spinning in 2013, L’Anse will host next year’s U.P. tournament. Breitung Township is in line for 2014, and Crystal Falls has applied for the 2015 tourney.

Overall scores: 1. West Iron County, 347; 2. Skandia-West Branch, 342.66; 3. Champion, 337.33; 4. Florence, WI, 314.66; 5. Crystal Falls, 272.33; 6. Caspian-Gaastra, 267.33.

Dress parade: 1. Forsyth Township, 92; 2. Florence WI, 91; 3. L’Anse, 90; 4. (tie), Skandia-West Branch, Champion, both 89.

Shirttail parade: 1. Champion, 94; 2. West Iron County, 93.67; 3. Skandia-West Branch, 88.33; 4. (tie), Crystal Falls and Florence WI, both 81.33.

Commercial parade: 1. West Iron County, 85.33; 2. Champion, 82.33; 3. Skandia-West Branch, 79.33; 4. Caspian-Gaastra, 69.33; 5. Florence WI, 60.33.

Races overall: 1. Skandia-West Branch, 86; 2. West Iron County, 84; 3. Florence WI, 82; 4. Champion, 72; 5. Crystal Falls, 67. (Individual races are scored 10-8-6-4-2, with teams also getting 10 points for taking part.)

Ladder race: 1. West Iron County, 18.91 seconds; 2. Florence WI, 20.28; 3. Skandia-West Branch, 20.90; 4. Champion, 21.30; 5. Breitung Township, 22.60.

Hose relay: 1. Skandia-West Branch, 48.50; 2. West Iron County, 49.60; 3. Crystal Falls, 49.78; 4. Champion, 50.06; 5. Breitung Township, 51.00.

Coupling race: 1. West Iron County, 26.66; 2. Skandia-West Branch, 27.15; 3. Florence WI, 30.25; 4. Champion, 31.06; 5. Caspian-Gaastra, 31.82.

Interchange race: 1. Florence WI, 44.53; 2. Crystal Falls, 44.93; 3. West Iron County, 46.68; 4. Champion, 54.43; 5. Skandia-West Branch, 56.23.

Mystery race (three-man hose roll): 1. Skandia-West Branch, 40.53; 2. Florence WI, 42.48; 3. Champion, 43.62; 4. Crystal Falls, 44.21; 5. Chocolay Township, 46.31.