



P O N D E R O S A

FIREFIGHTER

HARRIS COUNTY ESD #28

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New Cypress Creek EMS Communications Center Opens Its Doors

On April 29th of this year, the new, state-of-the-art Cypress Creek EMS Communications Center went live. Located on Five Forks in Spring, the "Comcenter" serves the public by providing fire and EMS dispatch services to a service area of over 750,000 residents.

PFD recently sat down with the Cypress Creek EMS Comcenter's Information Technology Manager, Toivo Sari, to talk about the new facilities and how it benefits our community.

Q. Please provide a brief history of how the Cypress Creek EMS Communications Center came to be.

Sari: In the early 80s, the FM 1960 area fire chiefs met to determine if there was a better way to dispatch. As a result of this meeting, the FM 1960 Area Emergency Communications Center was formed and began operation in 1984 at the Sugar Pine Lane location. The agency was owned equally by eight departments until 1996, when the Cypress Creek EMS purchased the other seven shares.

Q. Why was a decision made to build the new Comcenter at Five Forks?

Sari: We were seeing a steady increase in fire and EMS call volume. Other agencies had also become interested in our services and a few additional departments were added. We simply outgrew the old center in both physical space and capacity.

Q. What are the amenities of the new facility?

Sari: The new Comcenter is an 8,000 square foot, standalone building. It has full kitchen facilities, bunk rooms, and a locker room with showers, which allows us to house dispatchers in the event of large scale emergencies like hurri-



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MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF...

Moving at the speed of life is the pace PFD keeps as we continue to work to provide the highest quality of services to you and your family. Several articles in this newsletter highlight just a few of our latest accomplishments and the positive outcomes that we strive for every single day with every single call.

As always, we operate under PFD's core **Mission, Vision and Values** listed, in part, below:

Mission: to be a leading emergency service organization by meeting the needs of our community in fire prevention, fire suppression and rescue using an all-hazards approach.

Vision: to utilize and improve the dedication and skills of our people and to constantly improve all of our services and operations.

Values:

- Support our volunteers and career staff with adequate incentives

and awards to achieve superior performance

- Utilize a business model that addresses adequate service levels within available resources

- Actively recruit the best qualified persons without regard to race, color or creed

- Communicate openly and honestly within the organization and with the public and related organizations

As you can see, there is great focus on acquiring and maintaining quality people. The culture of our organization is rooted in the above listed **Mission, Vision and Values** and we work hard to ensure our actions and decisions stay aligned with these goals.

As an organization that handles an ever-growing service area, we are always on the lookout for individuals committed to excellence and community service.



Chief Windisch

If you are interested in becoming one of PFD's finest volunteers, give us a call at 281-444-8465, or visit www.ponderosavfd.org and click on the "How to Join" link. We look forward to hearing from you!

It's That Time Again! Another Hurricane Season Is Upon Us

It seems like just yesterday we were dealing with Ike, but as of June 1, hurricane season is here again. Although the NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) is predicting a "near-normal" Atlantic hurricane season, it is important that we prepare ahead-of-time for the possibility of a tropical storm or hurricane striking our area.

We hope that the 2009 season will be uneventful, but if we aren't so lucky, we will once again work closely with local fire and EMS, and with our Water Districts and HOAs to handle any and all

situations that come our way. Our preparation prior to Hurricane Ike definitely paid off...thanks to the hard work of our dedicated volunteers and paid staff.

If another storm heads our way this season, we are ready, but in the emergency hours before and after a hurricane, the ultimate safety of you and your family rests predominately in your hands. In times of county-wide emergencies, we must respond first to those most vulnerable: only the elderly, the poor and the disabled should count on the government to help them escape a hurricane or endure its immediate aftermath. Emergency services cannot respond if wind speeds are over 45 mph – and once we are cleared to head

out, we must first take care of those who cannot take care of themselves.

PFD has compiled some helpful hints and sectioned them into four categories: 1) Before a Hurricane Forms, 2) Before the Storm Hits, 3) During the Storm, and 4) After the Storm. This information is now on our website (www.ponderosaVFD.org) so you can download it, familiarize yourself with these tips, and share them with your family members, friends and co-workers.

Remember, in an emergency, we're here to help...and if you'll use this information to be better prepared to help yourself and your family, we'll make a great team if a storm comes! ■

New Comcenter

Continued from page 1

canes. We now have ten radio dispatch positions instead of four, and six call taker positions instead of three...we have greater flexibility to reconfigure each dispatch position as needed.

Q. How do the improvements provided by the new facility help to better serve the public?

Sari: We built this facility from the ground up and installed the latest technology. Our systems are faster and more reliable than the old center. The better we can do our job, the better we can take care of the patient or save property.

Q. The Comcenter serves an area that houses over $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million residents. How has that translated into service calls?

Sari: Last year we had over 40,000 calls for service, and we are continuing to see a steady increase in call volume each year.

Q. What are the most common calls the Comcenter receives on a daily / weekly basis?

Sari: The most common are motor vehicle accidents. Some calls increase based on the season, like grass fire calls during drought times in the summer.

Q. Chief Windisch stated that there have been great improvements in assessing whether automatic alarms are false prior to dispatch. Can you explain how this works?

Sari: We make attempts to reach a resident or business owner to try to confirm if an alarm is false before we dispatch equipment. If a false alarm is confirmed, we save the time and money spent on attending to these calls. Of course, if it is not clearly a false alarm, we



will dispatch the appropriate unit.

Q. Have there been specific instances as to how the new Comcenter's improved facilities have benefited the area?

Sari: As of now, the benefits have been mainly industry-related... other agencies have come to learn from our experiences in putting the center together. True results for the public will be measured in our monthly performance, and we will keep our residents informed as those results are released. We look forward to realizing the benefits that the new Comcenter has to of-

fer. We are excited by the potential and possibilities, and we know the public will be better served for it.

PFD would like to take this opportunity to thank all the hard-working, dedicated folks at the Cypress Creek EMS Communications Center. Our partnership with such a quality organization allows us to do our jobs in the best, most expedient manner possible, and that translates into saved lives and property. We look forward to working with the Comcenter for many years to come! ■

Sparky Says...

Do you know when to call 9-1-1? There have been some news stories lately about people who have called that emergency number for the wrong reason. It is important for all young people to understand just what IS an emergency.



For example, is it an emergency if the fast food store is out of french fries -- as in that news story? NO...of course not. Is it an emergency if a parent or family member has fallen and cannot get up? Yes, it is. Or if the pan is on fire in the kitchen? You bet it is. Talk about emergencies with your family members and make sure everyone understands when to call 9-1-1!

Ponderosa Firefighter Spotlight...



Joe Marroni, who joined PFD as a full-time firefighter in early May, owes his life-long passion for firefighting to his Uncle Micky Brewer.

“I grew up in Alamogordo, New Mexico and often visited my uncle who was, and still is, the Chief in Loving,” said Marroni. “He allowed me to hang around the station, and pretty quickly, I learned my way around a toolbox and truck. But what stuck with me the most, was my uncle’s willingness to go out of his way to help people he didn’t know, expecting nothing in return.”

Soon after moving to Texas in 1997, Marroni came across a “Firefighters Wanted, No Experience Necessary” sign, and, remembering all the great times at his uncle’s station, he decided to go for it.

“I started volunteering at Champions Area Volunteer Fire Department and soon realized this was a career I wanted to be a part of,” said Marroni. “At the time, I

was unable to take three months off of work to go to fire school, so I took every available class I could fit into my schedule to build up my training.”

For the first few years, Marroni dedicated himself to obtaining as much experience as possible. He “got on the truck for nearly every call”, finished his EMT in 2000, and worked a duty man job at Northwest Fire Department – where he was eventually appointed to Lieutenant, a position he held for six years. His career as a construction manager did monopolize most of his time, but in May of 2008, with hard work and perseverance, Marroni finally accumulated enough training hours to qualify to take the appropriate written and practical tests to become a commissioned firefighter.

“My paid firefighter career started in New Caney,” said Marroni. “I also worked at Champions Fire Department before learning about the full-time position available at Ponderosa. I thought it would be a great fit, since I’d been responding and backing in for them for twelve years. I guess they felt it was a good fit as well!”

Marroni’s now ten-plus years of experience have taught him a lot. He most enjoys the tradition and brotherhood that this career brings and he enjoys the different challenges, but just as important, he understands the incredible necessity of training.

“Training means safety, for those we help and for the firefighters as well,” said Marroni. “It also allows us to bring a calm voice to sometimes tragic situations, and folks respond to that...they need it.”

Marroni is married to his wife of seven years, Kathleen Haney Marroni, and they have a beautiful 4-year-old daughter, Isabella, who **might** “get pretty much everything she wants out of Daddy!” In his off-time, he enjoys the lost art of sleeping, playing with his daughter, working on his motorcycle or truck, fishing, mountain biking, and basically anything outdoors. Sounds like that “sleeping” thing may just be wishful thinking!



Julio Flores chose firefighting for a reason. He wanted a job where he would be tested and challenged, and where he would be part of a team of committed individuals dedicated to helping those in need.

One of PFD's newest full-time members, Flores joined the department in early May of this year after volunteering with Sheldon Fire Department for over seven years.

"I'd decided to look for a position in or around Houston," said Flores. "That's when I ran across Ponderosa FD. I was impressed by the professionalism of the department, the dedication of the volunteers and full-time staff, and the exceptional quality of the equipment, materials and training. I immediately applied...hoping for the best."

Ponderosa was impressed with Flores' experience at Sheldon FD and his enthusiasm for making firefighting his full-time profession. He seemed like a great fit and was soon offered the position of rookie firefighter.

"Firefighter Flores will absolutely be a great addition to our team of professionals," said PFD Chief, Fred Windisch. "His personal commitment and expertise, and his attitude toward perfection are just what we look for in this organization."

When it comes to firefighting, Flores has a great thirst for obtaining new knowledge.

"I've only worked here a couple of months, but I've enjoyed every moment of getting to know the inner workings of the department and learning to do things the 'PFD' way," said Flores. "I'm still working on names, ranks, trucks and such, but I'll get there. It's just a joy and an honor to be here, and I'm trying to soak in as much as I possibly can."

Flores is the middle child of three and a first generation firefighter. When not at the station, he enjoys spending time with his

family, including new baby boy, Jeaden, walking his five dogs, watching sports, paintball shooting and playing video games.



Although Firefighter **Thomas Edwards** has been with PFD for just two years, he has made quite an impression. So much so that at the 2008 Christmas party, he was named "Firefighter of the Year" for Ponderosa's Station 1.

"Thomas is an outstanding member," explained Chief Windisch. "He is very committed to this profession...always willing to help, responding to more than a fair share of incidents and continuing to increase his knowledge by attending classes."

Edwards, of course, is grateful for this honor and in the typical humble fashion of those committed to protecting their community, he feels that he's "just doing his job".

"This award is gratifying, for sure," said Edwards, "but I think it could have been given to any one of the amazing firefighters in this department. I do what I'm told... say my 'yes sirs' and 'no sirs', and work hard to be one of the links that makes PFD so strong."

Edwards was born and raised in the Ponderosa area and got involved with PFD in 2007 after witnessing a friend's excitement while going through a recruit class.

"I'd been interested in firefighting since my senior year in high school, and even considered joining the military as a firefighter on a navy boat," said Edwards. "But I eventually decided to stay local and have direct contact with the community that was so great to me growing up."

As further proof of his commitment to this profession, Edwards is a student at Montgomery College, working toward a degree in Fire Science. He hopes to one day become a full-time firefighter.

"Fire service is always evolving," said Edwards. "Experience is key...you can't replace that, but with new technologies in equipment and the mixing of tried and true approaches with new ideas, it's never boring. It's always interesting and rewarding to learn additional ways to help our community in the best way possible."

When not at the station or school, Edwards enjoys mountain biking, hunting and fishing. He lives with his proud parents, Debbie and Tom, and has one older sister, Kim.

"PFD is an amazing department and the people here make it all worthwhile," said Edwards. "There is so much knowledge and experience. It truly is one of the best volunteer departments in the area, and I wouldn't want to go anywhere else."

PFD is pleased to call these three outstanding firefighters our own.

All in a Day's Work...If You're a Hero

Two PFD Firefighters Receive Medal of Valor

At the Ponderosa Fire Department, we consider all of our firefighters to be heroes, but from time to time, we see shining examples of their bravery in the face of danger. Recently, two of PFD's finest were awarded our Medal of Valor for their heroic acts...

John Lampl (Acting District Chief; Station 1)

On the evening of July 2, 2008, PFD was automatically dispatched to a reported apartment fire on Cypresswood Drive in the Klein Fire District. Upon arrival, John Lampl was informed by residents that a man was trapped in the back corner bedroom of his apartment.

"As I was heading back to the rear of the building to assist with the Incident Commander (IC), people started yelling that there was a person in one of the back apartments," Lampl explained. "There was black smoke coming out low of the window, so I knew we didn't have much time. I broke out the glass, took a deep breath and hoped for the best."

Lampl then entered the building, moved a night stand out of the way, and found the man lying down about 35 feet inside.



John Lampl

"I got down on the bed, gave the guy a bear hug and pulled him to the window," said Lampl. "The room was hot and the fire had made it to the door. It all happened so fast. I told the people outside to find towels so we could cover the glass from the window and pull him out safely."

Once pulled to safety,

Lampl immediately began to provide the man with necessary medical attention. He was soon assisted by Andy Dexter, a Paramedic with the Klein Fire Department, the patient was stabilized and transported to Houston Northwest Medical Center in stable condition.

A few months prior to this event, Lampl also rescued a fire victim at his full-time job with The Woodlands Fire Department. It's this type of quick action by dedicated firefighters like Lampl that saves lives, and although he labels his response "what anyone else would do", the friends and family of the victims saved would call it something else entirely...they would call it heroic. We agree.

The Ponderosa Fire Department is extremely proud of these two stellar members of our organization, and all of the other PFD firefighters and community volunteers that help us do our jobs each and every day.

Stephen Price (Firefighter; Station 2)

Is a firefighter ever off-duty? If they're anything like Stephen Price, the answer is a resounding "NO". Even holidays are no exception. Case in point...this past Christmas (Christmas Day to be exact), Price was on his way down I-10 to visit family in New Orleans when he came across a serious accident involving a jackknifed 18-wheeler that had just slammed into an SUV.



Stephen Price

"When I came upon the scene, I noticed diesel fuel leaking and people running around the back side, so I figured there was a fire hazard," said Price.

"I took off running to move them back, and that's when the SUV burst into flames. In situations like that, your training just takes over. You don't even think about it. All that matters is that someone is in trouble and they need help."

In fact, there were six people trapped in the burning vehicle. Once Price reached the SUV, the fire had already hit the gas tank and injuries were already sustained. It was a life or death situation, and the only option was to help those that could be reached through the growing fire.

Through the intense heat of a vehicle engulfed in flames, Price knocked out windows and, with the help of Louisiana State Trooper, David Easley, miraculously pulled three of the car's inhabitants out, including one child whose legs were trapped against the center console.

Price did sustain second degree burns to his hand and forearm and cuts to his left arm, but considering the extent of the flames, he feels that he was quite lucky and, burns or not, he wouldn't have handled the situation any other way.

"This is what we are trained to do," said Price. "There isn't another man or woman I know in the fire service who would have done differently."

Price, who was recently recognized by the Louisiana Emergency Managers Association, has also been nominated for the Carnegie Medal, awarded by the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission – an organization whose mission is "to recognize persons who perform acts of heroism in civilian life...and to provide financial assistance for those disabled, and the dependents of those killed."

"This fire department consists of 65 other heroes who do their job every second of every day," said PFD Fire Chief, Fred Windisch. "I sleep well each night knowing that we have such dedicated and capable people."

Howard Katz... “Fire Lawyer”

For almost 20 years, Howard Katz has served as PFD and ESD #28’s legal counsel—structuring service agreements, developing financing tools to build necessary emergency facilities and buy apparatus, coordinating activities amongst different organizations (such as the traffic preemption agreement in the FM 1960/ Spring area), and much, much more.

“I work with over 35 ESD and EMS organizations,” said Katz. “It is a big part of my personal practice, for good reason. I am honored to represent the people who consistently put themselves in harm’s way to save the lives and property of others. They’re heroes in my book, and I take great pride in helping to not only affect legislation that will benefit these folks (and in turn our community), but also to facilitate financing for the equipment necessary to keep them – and their residents safe.”

Katz has worked directly with Chief Fred Windisch for many years and also had the pleasure of working with the late, great Curtis Cook – a man who was a spearhead in the emergency services activities in Harris County.

“People involved in emergency services work are the most dedicated I’ve seen. It’s not just a job, it’s a commitment to the safety of their men and women and their community,” said Katz. “There is a special atmosphere when working with Chief Windisch...a good and challenging one. Like most of my Chiefs, he never wants a ‘no’ answer, just a ‘how do we’ answer. It’s that kind of contagious passion and dedication that creates top-notch organizations such as PFD.”

PFD, in kind, feels that



Katz’s dedication and expertise is an integral part of the success of the department.

“Howard likes to use me as an example of what to do, and sometimes what not to do! He certainly is an important part of our success because of his commitment and demeanor and, more importantly, he is an absolutely nice guy,” stated Chief Windisch. “Putting his work into perspective, we gave him a custom shirt many years ago that states – Howard Katz, Fire Lawyer.”

Katz originally got involved working with EMS and ESD organizations out in the Cy-Fair area, working with the very civic-minded Chuck Wills (who helped form HCRFD No. 9). The work was challenging and interesting, and as the years passed, he began to work with other fire and EMS groups. By the time Coveler & Katz was formed in 1988, emergency service organizations were a large part of his client base, and due to Katz’s and his colleagues now extensive knowledge in this arena, this portion of the practice continues to grow today.

In addition to ESD and EMS work, Coveler & Katz

(Founded in 1988 by Howard and law partner Fred Coveler) is also involved in real estate, probate and bank loan documentation, and business, tax and corporations practice. In his office, Katz is ably supported by associate attorneys, John Peeler and Ira Coveler, legal assistant, Deirdra Wine, and assistant, Angelique Dodd – the team that, as Katz states, “most of the ESDs know really run the place!”

Katz has lived in the Houston area since 1983 and has been married to his wonderful wife, Cindy, since 1987. Cindy, in Katz’s words is, “a very understanding person who lets me attend my evening meetings (which average three per week) with very little complaint. She is my rock.” Cindy and Howard have a daughter, Chelsea, who will attend TCU in the Fall, and who, by association has the firefighter spirit in her! In his off-time, Katz enjoys tennis, “old-time” movies and baseball.

PFD thanks Howard for his many years of dedication and accomplishment, and we look forward to many more years working together to continue to make this department the best it can be!

17061 Rolling Creek Dr.
Houston, TX 77090



Volunteers are needed! If you are hard-working, dedicated and interested in becoming part of the Ponderosa VFD, call 281-444-8465 today!

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This publication is intended for the residents within the Ponderosa VFD service area. If you received it in error, we hope you'll still read it and utilize the fire safety information.

July 2009 8.4k

Your Tax Dollars At Work

In our ongoing effort to keep you informed as to how your tax dollars benefit the department and this community – PFD has compiled the below list of recent capital, personnel and equipment purchases. If you have any questions regarding this information, feel free to give us a call at 281-444-8465.

■ **Apparatus:** We welcome the newest truck to the PFD fleet...a 2009 Pierce 100-foot aerial platform (which replaces our 1998 version). *Cost: \$1,000,000*

■ **Traffic Signals:** We've partnered with Harris County and other fire/EMS districts within Emergency Services District #11 (including Cypress Creek EMS) to install and operate state-of-the-art emergency vehicle preemption devices for 200+ intersections.

This project uses GPS, fiber optics and radio links which communicate with Transtar to minimize traffic mobility problems. *Project Cost: \$2,400,000 over the five year project.*

■ **Training Facility:** Our training facility was built in 2001 and initially included a 4-story live burn tower. Over the years, we have added live burn LPG simulators (via grant), a firefighter confidence maze, a car fire simulator, and other hands-on props. *Cost: \$1,000,000.*

■ **Computers:** This phased approach includes - Phase 1 (2007 & 2008): the installation in response vehicles of computers which utilize GPS, maps, pictures and incident preplanning drawings; Phase 2 (in progress) – the installation of web-based, enhanced graphics, maps, pictures, preplans and live vehicle movements with other amenities. *Cost: \$80,000.*

■ **Protective Clothing:** Firefighters need the best in protective clothing to ensure their safety. Each year we purchase fifteen sets. *Cost: \$40,000.*

■ **Washing Machine:** We recently replaced our existing washing machine with one that specializes in the gentle scrubbing of soiled firefighter protective clothing. *Cost: \$6,000.*



■ **Radios:** Forty new handheld radios were purchased during the past two years to ensure on-scene firefighters can communicate at all times. *Cost: \$28,000.*

■ **Rescue Tools:** Over the years, we have purchased various types of spreaders, cutters, rams and stabilizing devices, commonly referred to as the Jaws of Life®. *Cost: \$180,000.*

■ **Firefighters:** To keep up with the demand of a growing and aging community, we've added six full-time firefighters to our stellar PFD team. *Cost: PRICELESS!*