



# P O N D E R O S A FIREFIGHTER HARRIS COUNTY ESD #28

Spring 2004

## ESD Facts

- Cooking is the leading cause of home fires in the U.S. It is also the leading cause of home fire injuries. Cooking fires often result from unattended cooking and human error, rather than faulty stoves or ovens.
- Direct property loss due to fire is estimated at \$8.6 billion each year nationally.
- Careless smoking is the leading cause of fire deaths.
- In the first three months of this year, PVFD responded to more than 292 fire, EMS and mutual aid calls.

### HCESD #28

#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Bob Palnau** - Acting President  
Northview resident
- Edson Dronberger** - Treasurer  
Westador resident
- James Chatterton**- Secretary  
Cypresswood resident
- Dan McDermott**- Assistant  
Treasurer, Ponderosa resident

## Gone but never forgotten...

Our community lost a great friend and leader on February 16, 2004. **Curtis J. Cook** left us for a better place after a long battle with cancer. While you are reading about this remarkable man, please take a minute or two and send him a silent thank you, and think about all the lives he touched -- and the many he saved -- while we were fortunate enough to have him with us.



**Curtis J. Cook**

Curt served as our President since 1976 when we left the Spring Volunteer Fire Department to go on our own. He leaves a legacy of success, caring and professionalism.

We will miss him in a million ways...we'll hear his voice blended with the sirens as our volunteers race into service...we'll hear his laughter mingle with the giggles of our volunteers' children when we have the opportunity to relax together for a picnic. We'll feel his hand guide us when we battle dense smoke to complete a rescue. And, during the more difficult times, we'll feel his arm around our shoulders, gently consoling and encouraging us. Curt is a treasured and inextricable part of everything we do, and his memory surrounds and uplifts us.

Curt never asked for a thank you, nor did he seek recognition for his commitments. He was always there for us, and he expected excellence -- nothing less. Curt was a man of passion and giving -- from his children's sports activities, to the fire department, to the subdivision, to his career at Shell Oil Company, to his civic and community commitments, to the county emergency service agencies, to the state legislative process, and the list goes on.....

If you'd like to make a tax-deductible contribution to his legacy, please consider donating to the *Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Association Curtis J. Cook Firefighter Education Fund*, 17061 Rolling Creek, Houston, TX 77090.



*Chief Fred Windisch*

## *Message from the Chief...*

# **Growth and Growing....**

The fire district continues to grow, and with that comes more service requirements. Our estimated population is now about 46,000; apartment complexes are nearing capacity; and the business community is thriving. With all this growth, we understand the simple fact that the people we serve demand the best, so everyday the Ponderosa VFD continues to work on providing an even better response system for you.

Recently we entered into a lease/purchase agreement via *OshKosh Leasing* for three new fire engines. They are all in service now, and the old engines were traded in for resale to smaller agencies. These new Pierce apparatus have many safety and performance features, and in seven years will be traded in for new units. Training and use become easier and more effective, there will be less downtime for repairs, and the engines are state of the art.

The Ponderosa VFD has hired a full time firefighter and the fire chief's position is now full time. A part time paid staff assists our volunteers Monday through Friday during daytime hours, and we have some of our volunteers staying at our fire stations. Changing demographics and "the speed of life" has caused some volunteer availability deficiencies, and we continually adjust our operating policies to be friendlier to our valuable volunteers. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter, please stop by for an application.

The **Curtis J. Cook Training Facility** has been in use for about a year now, and we are continually finding new and better ways to train our members. We have added a breathing apparatus training simulator that challenges the participant and allows them to operate safer in dangerous environments. We have developed a fee schedule so other fire departments can take advantage of this outstanding facility, as well.

We never forget that the focus of this organization is on **service**. Our insurance rating is excellent and our citizens and businesses benefit every year through lower insurance rates. Growth is change and we are changing to meet the challenges.

Let's not underestimate the importance and value of the fire department. Insurance companies may pay out numerous claims for residential losses -- from damage caused by everything from broken washing machine hoses to major hurricanes and earthquakes. But in terms of dollars paid out -- **fire loss is the single largest cause of property loss**. We're working hard to help you minimize any potential loss from fire. Learn and practice fire prevention at home!

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## ***In case you didn't know...***

The Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Association, Inc. (PVFA) is the non-profit 501-c organization that operates the Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Department. The PVFA Board of Directors consists of five civilian members, the fire chief, and a firefighter representative and they meet on the second Tuesday of every month.

The PVFA sets the vision and policy for the business end; the fire department operates the emergency part of the business. This business model has worked very successfully since our inception in 1976 because the citizen driven board of directors is focused on the big picture and they demand excellence.

The department has a very strong community presence, and holds periodic educational events for the public and welcomes your questions on our op-



*Chief Windisch and some Scout visitors...*

erations and on fire safety. This newsletter is published and distributed throughout our service area to promote fire prevention and to provide timely information about our mission and operations.

# Children Aren't Waterproof..

Swimming is an excellent form of exercise for people of all ages. Unfortunately, children under the age of five are 14 times more likely to be involved in a fatal accident in a swimming pool than in an automobile.

Since summer in Houston almost always involves swimming activities of one kind or another, one of the first things parents are concerned about is helping their children learn to respect the water...whether they are in it, on it, or just around it.

Basic water safety should be learned by people of all ages, because simply learning to swim is no guarantee that you will never be involved in an aquatic accident.

American Red Cross statistics indicate that 50 percent of pool accidents involving young children could be prevented by adequate fencing and barriers. Local laws and regulations call for all Houston pools -- public and private -- to be enclosed by a fence at least four feet high, and specify that they must have self-closing, self-latching devices to keep out adventuresome youngsters.

The vast majority of people who drown ***never intended to get in the water in the first place***. Most were dressed for activities *near the water*, but not *in it*. Drownings are often called "silent" accidents, because the usually happen quickly, without a cry for help.

Experts insist that no one -- of any age -- should EVER swim alone. It only takes a minute for a serious accident to occur, so par-

ents should never take their eyes off children around the water...not even for a second.

Youngsters are naturally curious about a sparkling body of water. Never take barriers for granted; constantly check to see that they are secure and prevent unwanted access to a pool area. A sliding glass door that successfully separates a child from a backyard pool one day...can be opened by young fingers the next.

Sadly, the Consumer Product Safety Commission predicts that this summer alone, more than 300 children under the age of five will drown in home swimming pools. While thousands more will



be rescued in time to prevent drowning, many will suffer serious and permanent brain damage.

Minimize the risk that you or someone you love will be involved in an aquatic accident by following some simple, common-sense rules, and make your backyard pool safer for everyone who uses it.

- ◆ Make sure children learn how to float on their back and how to reach the side if they should ever fall into a pool. Teach them how critical it is to YELL FOR HELP



immediately!

- ◆ Make sure your pool or spa is inaccessible to unsupervised children. Be sure there are no footholds or handholds in any fence or barrier that will allow a child to climb over.

- ◆ Doors to pool areas should be kept locked and protected with audible alarms and out-of-reach locks.

- ◆ Keep rescue equipment and a telephone near the pool whenever it is in use.

- ◆ Flotation devices will not keep a child safe in the water; don't rely on them.

- ◆ Insist that all who use the pool follow some strict rules: No running; no pushing others under water; no diving except in designated areas with adult permission and supervision.

- ◆ Anyone who supervises youngsters around water should learn CPR and be able to administer it at once. Seconds count in preventing death or brain injury -- which can occur in two to six minutes after oxygen is cut off from the brain.

- ◆ Diving into the shallow end of a pool can result in a paralyzing spinal injury. Simply do not allow diving from the side of the diving board, slide or other pool equipment, or diving through an inner tube or other pool toy. ■

## Emergency Services District #11 Election

A very important election for the residents of our fire district will take place on May 15, 2004. Registered voters will have the opportunity to vote FOR the formation of Emergency Services District #11. ESD 11 will be for the sole purpose of funding emergency medical services within our fire district -- within a total of about 240 square miles of unincorporated Harris County.

ESD 11's area is served by the Cypress Creek Emergency Medical Services Association (CEMS). Our working relationship with this fine organization has

been consistently extraordinary since 1975, and PVFD wholeheartedly supports this new method for funding this nationally recognized emergency medical service.

Under the current funding, residents are invited to make a voluntary donation along with their water bill payment. This method does NOT include contributions from the many apartment complex residents and businesses in the CCEMS service area. Because it is voluntary, there is no guarantee that the funds will be forthcoming, which makes it diffi-



cult to establish a workable annual budget.

The tax rate will be capped at three cents/\$100 property valuation -- that translates to a \$100,000 property paying \$30.00 per year. After the creation of ESD 11, the voluntary water bill donation will cease.

## Another Household Hazard... Overheated Dryers Can Cause Fires!

Of the many invaluable household choremasters, there's one workhorse that poses a significant risk of causing a fire...the clothes dryer -- either powered by electricity or by gas.

In 1998, the last year for which statistics are available, clothes dryers were associated with 15,600 fires, which resulted in 20 deaths and 370 injuries. Lint builds up in the dryer or in the exhaust duct, which can block the flow of air, cause excessive heat build-up, and ignite a fire. Here are some safety tips to avoid a dryer fire:

- **Clean the lint screen/filter** before or after each load of clothes. A warning sign that a problem may be building is if clothing is still damp at the end of a typical drying cycle, or drying requires longer than normal. This may be a sign that the lint screen or the exhaust duct is blocked.

- **Clean the dryer vent** and ex-

haust duct periodically. Check the outside dryer vent while the dryer is operating to make sure that air is escaping. If it isn't, either the vent or the exhaust duct may be blocked, and it may be necessary to disconnect the duct from the dryer to clean out the blockage.

- **Clean behind the dryer** where lint can accumulate. Periodically have a qualified service person clean the interior of the dryer chassis, too. Lint can get in and around lots of places inside the dryer, causing a hazard if not removed.

- **If your dryer is an older model** and still has the plastic or foil, accordion-type ducting material for the exhaust, replace it with a rigid or corrugated semi-rigid metal duct. This type provides the maximum air flow and isn't as likely to trap lint as the plastic type. The more flexible foil or plastic type ducting material is also more susceptible to kinks or crushing --



which greatly reduces airflow and traps lint.

- Take special care when **laundrying clothing that has been soiled with volatile chemicals** such as gasoline, cooking oils, cleaning agents, or finishing oils or stains. If possible, wash the clothing more than once to minimize the amount of volatile chemicals on the clothes and, preferably, hang the clothes to dry in a well ventilated area. If you do use a dryer, select the lowest heat setting and a drying cycle that has a cool-down period at the end of the cycle.

# FAST FACTS YOU CAN USE

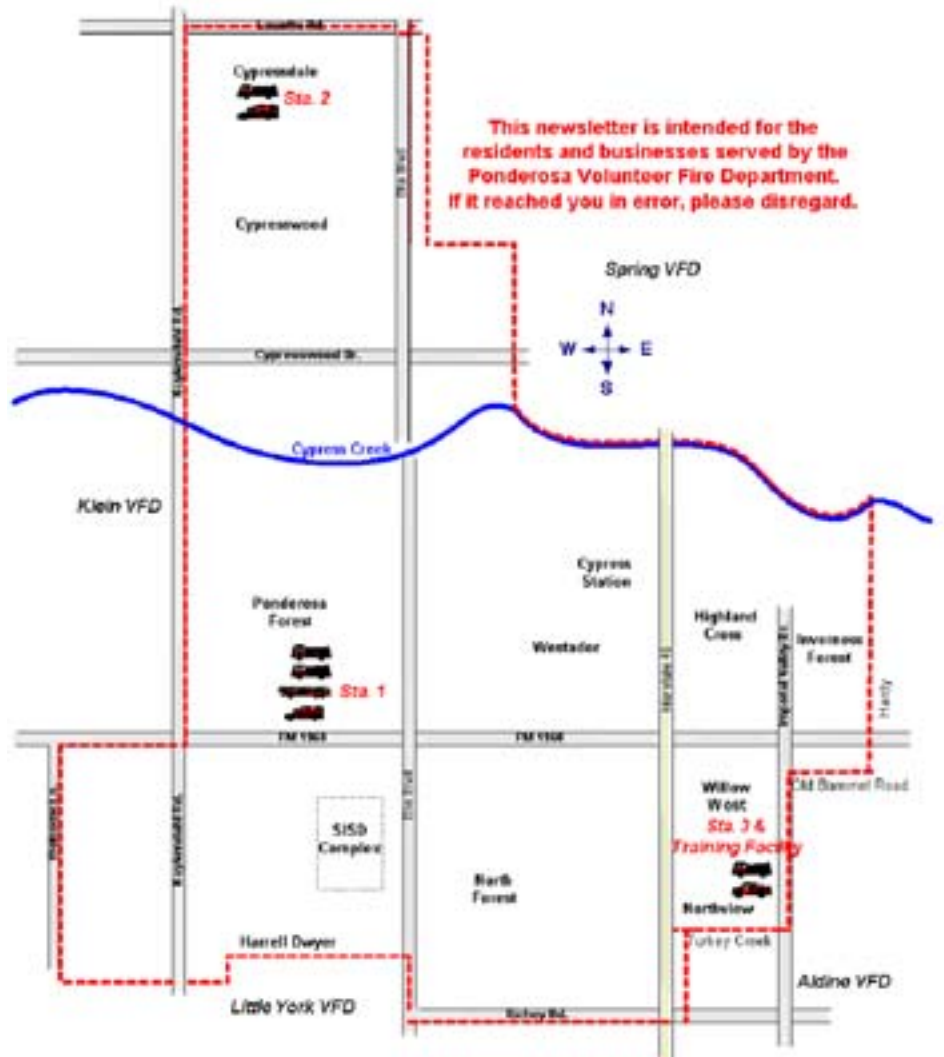
■ **Homeowner's Insurance Savings...** Make sure that you contact your insurance provider to ASSURE that your fire insurance rating is correct. We are a **Public Protection Class #3**. Some insurance companies may not have updated this information. Don't miss out on the savings! Having the correct classification for your homeowners insurance can save you (up to) hundreds of dollars per year!

■ CCEMS offers a series of life-saving CPR classes on a regular basis at their Education Center, 7111 Five Forks Drive. The popular *Heart Association Heartsaver/First Aid* class costs \$20.00 for First Aid only, or \$35 combined with Heartsaver CPR. Classes are held the Thursday following the second Tuesday every month, 6-10 p.m. Visit the education page on their website, [www.ccems.com](http://www.ccems.com), for more information. Babysitter training classes are also available.

■ Did you know that four out of five car seats are used incorrectly? Could yours be one of them? **Car seat inspections** are held the first Wednesday of every month, 3-6 p.m., and the third Thursday of each month, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Cypress Creek EMS, 16650 Sugar Pine Lane. Appointments are required. Call Kendra Windisch for more information, 281-440-9650, extension 132 for scheduling.



## The Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Department Service Area



## PVFD Receives Equipment Grant

The Ponderosa VFD recently received a grant of \$2,250 from the First Responder Institute that funded the purchase of six "first out" kits for our emergency medical service volunteers to be equipped for a more rapid and more effective response. The kits contain oxygen therapy, blood pressure cuffs and other basic life support supplies.



We work in conjunction with Cypress Creek EMS by providing primary and additional responders during peak times and during special events. This model has saved lives, and has also been

a proactive method of addressing others in non-life threatening conditions. We take significant pride in our relationship with Cypress Creek EMS; it continues to grow so that our citizens can have the best response they deserve. ■

# Is YOUR garage an “accident just looking for a place to happen?”

Do you have one of those wonderful, organized, neat and tidy garages they show on home and garden TV shows? Or is it more like a dark, shadowy lair filled with unnamed traps and potential dangers. Perhaps your garage or storage shed is somewhere in between, but odds are that you are storing some kind of chemical or toxic products that have the potential for damaging the environment or posing a genuine safety hazard to your family.

Let's face it...hazardous waste does not just originate in industrial operations. Most homeowners unknowingly store a number of household products that can be classified as hazardous in garages or in tool sheds. And, because they don't realize the products are considered “hazardous,” they casually dispose of them down the drain or in the trash -- that subsequently gets dumped in landfills. You may not realize that one quart of improperly disposed of motor oil can contaminate 250,000 gallons of water!

Many of the substances stored in homes are the same as -- or similar to -- substances regulated as hazardous wastes for businesses and industry. Because the

amounts stored in each household are smaller than the amounts used commercially, however, the safe disposal and storage of household hazardous waste is left up to the good sense of the resident.

Here are some products that need special attention when it comes time to dispose of them: used oil and oil filters, antifreeze, brake fluid, kerosene, oil-based paints, varnishes/shellacs, turpentine, various flammable solvents... to name just a few.

Flammable or “reactive” household chemicals may release toxic fumes or explode if they are mixed together in the trash. Dumping solvents or oil into the sewer system, for example, on the ground or into landfills contaminates ground and surface water, ruining drinking water and killing fish and wildlife. Improperly stored products -- such as gasoline or paints -- can pose a real fire hazard, while corrosives, pesticides and other household chemicals pose potential health risks for children and pets.

Every year, there are special Hazardous Waste Disposal sites announced in Harris County so that residents can safely get rid of these products. (Contact our of-



fice (281-444-8465) to request information about disposal sites.)

In addition to disposal of these products, homeowners should also be concerned about their safe use and storage. Here are some safety tips that might help:

- Avoid storing hazardous household wastes (HHW) by purchasing only the amount you will need.
- Share products with neighbors. Donate leftover products to charitable organizations. Many groups can use leftover paint or cleaning supplies.
- Make donation or disposal easier by NOT mixing materials together.
- Plan a regular HHW clean-up in your home and neighborhood. This way, you can get rid of hazardous materials, be aware of what and how much you are storing and find a group or individual to share with or donate to while the materials are still usable.



[www.cleanwaterclearchoice.org](http://www.cleanwaterclearchoice.org)



## MEET YOUR PONDEROSA FIREFIGHTERS...



**LEN CALL**, Captain at Station 61, didn't start out knowing that he wanted to fight fires. A friend was a PVFD member and, according to Len, seemed to really enjoy the experience so much that he thought he'd give it try, too. He joined Ponderosa in 1993 at Station 62 and supplemented the Department's training by earning the TCFP (career firefighter certification) at San Jacinto College.

Len has also been a firefighter/paramedic for the City of Houston since 2000, in addition to being active with PVFD. He is currently studying for the Engineer/Operators exam which will enable him to drive emergency vehicles, in order to work his way up within the ranks of HFD.

Len is single, but enjoys spending time with Dana, his steady girlfriend. Len is very focused about his goals and eventually wants to get married and have a family.

When it comes to being a career firefighter, he says he'd recommend it -- to friends and to his children when they come along.

"It's a good steady job," he says, "and while it won't make you rich, saving lives or completing a rescue is very personally rewarding and satisfying. Spending time with your friends and colleagues at the station also gives you a deep sense of belonging. I'd recommend it."

**PAT LONGORIA**, Lieutenant at Station 3, manages to turn the usual 24 hour day into at least 30 hours. He runs his own Air Freight/Courier/Cartage service, he serves on his homeowner association board, and is in charge of supervising security services for his subdivision. He and his wife, Teri, have three children: Steve, 13; Shane, 3; and Samantha, 16

months.

Pat didn't start off being a firefighter, either. He says that when he was 19, he stopped to help a man put out a grass fire and the experience "hooked him." Five years ago, he joined Ponderosa as a firefighter and says the experience has been very rewarding.

Looking to the future, Pat says he'd like to be retired by age 50 with plenty of time to spend with his family, really enjoying life. This week, however, his highlight was having his three year old son win his first fishing contest! ■



## Top 10 Fire Safety Tips

Here are some practical steps you can take to make your house a safe home:

- Purchase enough smoke alarms to protect your entire home, and check them regularly.
- Have all family members participate in creating a fire action plan so that everyone in your house knows how to escape in the event of fire.
- Take care when cooking with hot oil and consider using thermostatically controlled deep fat fryers instead.
- Never leave lit candles unattended.
- Make absolutely sure that

cigarettes are stubbed out and disposed of carefully.

- Never smoke in bed...ever.
- Keep matches and lighters away from children.
- Keep clothing away from heating appliances.
- Take care in the kitchen! Accidents while cooking account for 59% of fires in the home.
- Be especially careful when you are overly tired or if you've consumed adult beverages. Half of all deaths in domestic fires happen between 10pm and 8am.

# Fireworks -- Yes or No? It All Comes Down to Safety

It is almost that time of year again when fine summer weather beckons us to the great outdoors to enjoy a wealth of recreational opportunities available in the Houston/Galveston area. The Fourth of July holiday is just around the corner, and we wanted to get a headstart in communicating a strong message about the use of fireworks.

The short version of this advisory is, "Protect your family and yourself...don't buy fireworks," and we believe that there is sound reasoning behind the message.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) monitors a number of emergency rooms and reports on injuries recorded by these selected hospitals. In 2002, there were an estimated 8,800 injuries related to, but not necessarily caused by, fireworks. The estimate includes incidents with all kinds of fireworks, including homemade items and large illegal devices.

CPSC enacted national standards for family-type fireworks

in 1976, and all fireworks legally available must comply with CPSC rules. While the amount of fireworks has doubled since these regulations were issued, the incidence of injuries with family-type fireworks in recent years has involved misuse rather than malfunction.

The real problem continues to be the illegal fireworks. At least 33 percent of the injuries over the past decade have been associated with the illegal explosives or home-

made fireworks.

The US Fire Administration reports that in 1997 the dollar loss value of fires related to fireworks was \$5.4 million. While this is a relatively small part of the overall dollar loss value of all fires -- \$3.6 billion -- it still represents needless loss of property.

Of significant concern, however, is the incidence of injury to children age 5-14 -- the age group most frequently involved in fireworks activities. Even one injury to a child is one too many! Please keep your family safe this 4th by leaving the fireworks displays to the pyrotechnic experts! ■



**PONDEROSA**  
**FIREFIGHTER**  
HARRIS COUNTY ESD #28

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NEW