



P O N D E R O S A

FIREFIGHTER

HARRIS COUNTY ESD #28

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**HCESD #28
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

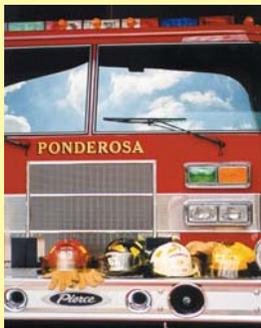
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**TRAINING FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS HELP KEEP PVFD
FIREFIGHTERS ON TOP OF THEIR GAME**

When you view the history of the Ponderosa VFD, you view a history of pioneers. Over the past 30 years, our staff and volunteers, along with our board members and community leaders have worked together to make the PVFD a forward-thinking department of "firsts". The first department to have a ladder truck in the 1960 area, the first to bring a platform ladder truck to the region, and the first to build a state-of-the-art training facility - a facility which provides our firefighters with the tools and hands-on experience necessary to be prepared for the many challenges that come their way.

Improvements to the training facility, which was originally erected in 2001, were made possible in 2005 after PVFD received a federal grant (in the amount of \$157,000) used to purchase two liquid petroleum gas (LPG) live burn simulators - a kitchen and a bed. The training facility can also be filled with "theatrical" smoke to simulate real fire conditions, while producing near zero emissions.

"The live burn simulators have basically removed the pollution associated with the original method of burning pallets and hay," said PVFD Chief, Fred Windisch. "Not only did we eliminate the trash debris and smoke, but we also eliminated the clean up of the facility and the washing of all the protective clothing every time a training evolution was performed."

Chief Windisch also explains that the largest gain from the live burn simulators was in the 'firefighter throughput'.

"In the past we could do maybe three burns in a three hour period, followed by a lot of time and hard work to clean everything," said Windisch. "Now we can do burn after burn with zero clean up. We just reset the electronic control system and do it again and again...allowing us to simulate ten burns in that same three hour window."

The 2005 grant also set the stage for the most recent improve-



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MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF..

Thanks to all of you who supported our election this past May. By a margin of 8 to 2, voters agreed to allow Emergency Services District #28 to raise the tax cap from 6 to 10 cents...a necessary and much appreciated increase. We are all concerned about rising taxes, but in this case we feel that what we hope is a small impact to you will make a significant difference to us - ensuring sufficient revenue to take us well into the future.

For 2006, ESD28 set the tax rate at 7.5 cents - providing revenue which will allow us to hire three full-time firefighters and make various equipment purchases that have been delayed for the past two years.

We had hoped to receive a federal grant to hire six more full-time firefighters, but were informed

in mid-November that the grant was denied. Although the grant was written properly, there were more than 1,700 fire departments vying for a portion of the appropriated 100 million dollars, and unfortunately, we weren't chosen. We do forecast the need for more paid firefighters, primarily due to a reduction in volunteers and an increase in our service requirements, so we will try again next year to receive this grant which pays for about 70% of wages over a five year period.

On a different topic... remember to check with your insurance provider to see that your property insurance is adjusted to reflect our **Public Protection Class rating of 3**. The Ponderosa VFD is rated in the top 4% of our nation's fire service, and our improved rating allows you to save



about 50% of your fire tax in reduced insurance premiums each year.

Ponderosa VFD is here for you. We hope you're never in need of us, but if the time does come, be assured we will be there as quickly as possible with professional members and quality equipment.

Happy Holidays to you and your families!

J. C. Wondrus

In The Spotlight



Brandon Huffman

"Giving back to the community is important to me," says Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Association board member, Brandon

Huffman. "And giving back by serving on the Board of such a quality organization...an organization that makes a difference in the lives of thousands of people each year, is truly rewarding."

Huffman, a PVFA board member for over seven years, serves as Treasurer and feels that the most important role the Board plays in this community is to provide the highest level of service in a manner that is economical to the taxpayer.

"The men and women of this fire department often put their lives in danger to save our lives and property," says Huffman. "It is our job to allocate the funds necessary to provide them with the best equipment and training possible, while still maintaining a reasonable tax rate. It can be a balancing act,

but I think the community understands the importance of their fire department, and they've worked with us to help keep the PVFD performing at the high level they expect and deserve."

Huffman feels that the biggest challenge the Board faces today is the unprecedented growth in the area.

"There is a lot of area being built up in this District," says Huffman. "As a result, planning to provide fast and effective service in the future is paramount...and sometimes difficult. The fire department is made up of mainly volunteers, and as demand increases, the need for additional personnel increases. Needless to say, we were all relieved to learn that the taxpayers voted to approve

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Ponderosa VFD Responds to Two Major Fires in Ten Hours

Within a 10-hour time span in early December, the Ponderosa VFD was called out to two accidental, but major fires. The first, a challenging house fire in Cypresswood, had the garage totally involved prior to the call for help from a passing Klein volunteer firefighter. Ponderosa, Klein, Spring and Little York teams responded within minutes of the call, but due to delayed detection, the garage and two vehicles were totally destroyed and some damage occurred to the neighbor's garage. The fire also moved through the breezeway and did significant damage to the home and contents.



Firefighters stand ready to replace the interior crews fighting the fire.

Firewalls - An Easy Fix

This type of fire stresses the need

for the installation of one very important fire safety measure...a firewall between the garage and home. Without a firewall, the breezeway acts as a horizontal chimney and the heat, smoke and flames enter the attic area of the house. This creates a very difficult situation for firefighters. Attic fires move fast and usually cause extreme damage.

We have witnessed a number of devastating fires where a firewall would have stopped the flame spread and contained damage to just the garage. A firewall can be easily constructed by using doubled sheetrock or plywood installed as a barrier as close to the garage as feasibly possible. If you're unable to do it yourself, hire a local handyman to have a firewall installed. It will cost you about \$200 and could potentially save you thousands.

Hundreds of Animals Saved in Pet City Blaze

You're probably aware of this fire due to the extensive media coverage it received. Pet City at the corner of IH45 and 1960 was a significant blaze, but due to fast and efficient work by the firefighters and local citizens, the fire was ex-

tinguished quickly and hundreds of animals were saved. Firefighters removed the future pets as quickly as possible, a local veterinarian provided immediate care, and many friendly citizens used their vehicles as temporary shelters from the chilly morning air.

"It amazes me that only two animals were killed in this fire (two birds)," stated Chief Windisch. "The smoke was intense and the heat was very high...a combination that is deadly to animals. We are very fortunate that our firefighters immediately recognized the limited time available and worked quickly to remove the animals from the extremely hazardous environment."



Firefighters and citizens take care of the evacuated pets.

Training Center

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ment to the facility - the expansion of the existing training tower. After plans were approved by the Ponderosa VFD Board of Directors, work began to remove the one-story burn annex and build a two-story, four room building that resembles an apartment complex. The entire building can be used for a host of scenarios, maintaining and sharpening the skills of the firefighters.

"As a Board of Directors, we



recognize the fantastic service that the entire fire department provides to our citizens," said board Presi-

dent, Tom Wyka. "We must provide them with the necessary resources to continue that outstanding service."

And that they do. Over the years, the dedication of the PVFD, its Board and the community it serves has not only improved the department's insurance rating from a 5 to a 4 to today's stellar rating of 3 (putting them in the top 4% of our nation's fire departments), but more importantly, it has helped us to take care of our citizens in a manner we can be proud of. ■

CHRISTMAS TREE FIRES EASILY PREVENTED: GET THE FACTS AND PLAY IT SAFE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

More than 4 out of every 10 home Christmas tree fires are caused by an electrical problem or malfunction. One in four (24%) resulted from a heat source placed too close to the tree. Source: NFPA

The holiday season is a time for family and giving and joy, but unfortunately, preventable fires sometimes result in tragedy and loss. The key word here is **preventable**. Follow some of these simple safety suggestions for Christmas lights, trees and other holiday activities and help reduce the risks to you and your family.

Christmas Lights

- Always use safe tree lights. Some lights are made for **only** indoor or **only** outdoor, but not both...make sure you are using indoor safe lights.
- Larger tree lights should have some type of reflector rather than a bare bulb.
- All lights should be listed by a testing laboratory.
- NEVER use electric lights on a metal tree.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions on use. Any string of lights with worn, frayed or broken cords or loose bulb connections should not be used.
- Check your strand of lights to determine the number of strands that may be connected. Connect no more than three strands of push-in bulbs and a maximum of 50 bulbs for screw-in bulbs.
- Children are fascinated with Christmas trees. Keep a watchful eye on them when around the tree and do not let them play with the wiring or lights.
- Always unplug Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to bed.
- Bring outdoor electrical lights inside after the holidays to prevent hazards and extend their life.

Christmas Tree Choice and Maintenance

- When purchasing a live or cut tree, check for fresh, green needles. Do not purchase a tree that is dry or dropping needles.
- Try to keep live trees as moist as possible by giving them plenty of water daily.
- Choose a sturdy tree stand designed not to tip over.
- When purchasing an artificial tree, be sure it is labeled as fire-retardant.
- NEVER use lit candles to decorate a tree, and place any other burning candles well away from tree branches. Store matches and lighters up high, out of reach of children, preferably in a locked cabinet.
- Make sure the tree is at least three feet away from any heat source, such as fireplaces and radiators. Try to position the tree near an outlet so that cords are not running long distances, and do not place the tree where it may block exits.
- Safely dispose of the tree when it begins dropping needles. Dried-out trees are highly flammable and should not be left in a house or garage, or placed against the house.

View a video on our website (www.ponderosavfd.org) which shows the severe hazards presented by Christmas tree fires, and how quickly a fire can develop in a dry tree.

Home Heating

December, January and February are the leading months for home fires, and heating de-

VICES are often the culprit. Take the proper precautions to ensure you and your family stay safe while you stay warm.

- Install a smoke detector and carbon monoxide alarm near your bedrooms and on each floor.
- Familiarize yourself with the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning for easy detection: headache, fatigue, nausea, dizziness and shortness of breath.
- Have your heating system tuned up each year.
- If you have a wood-burning fireplace, make sure you have a sturdy fire screen in place. Make sure your chimney and flue are inspected each year and, if necessary, cleaned. Burn only untreated wood...never burn paper or pine branches: pieces can float out the chimney and ignite your roof or your neighbor's as well as nearby trees.
- Do not use gas appliances such as ovens, ranges, or clothes dryers to heat your home.
- If you use a kerosene heater, never use gasoline, which can cause a fire or explosion. Use only water-clear 1-K grade kerosene. Never refuel the heater inside your home or when it is hot or in operation. Do not fill the tank above the "full" mark and keep a door open to the rest of the house or open a window slightly to reduce the risk of carbon monoxide build-up.

Holiday Cooking Tips

Each holiday season, the PVFD responds to multiple fires involving the frying of turkeys. Heat-

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ing several pints of oil to extremely high temperatures will always be a risk, but if you take the proper precautions, you can avoid severe oil burns or difficult-to-extinguish fires.

■ "Test-drive" your cooker. Fill it with water, dip the unseasoned turkey into the container and mark the correct level for the cooking oil, then remove, dry and season the bird. Replace the water with oil, heat and cook according to the instructions.

■ Always keep the LPG as far away from the open flame as possible, and check for leaks prior to using the cooker.

■ Test the temperature with a small piece of bread or potato. If it crisps quickly, the oil is hot enough.

■ If the oil starts to smoke, DON'T PUT THE FOOD IN. Turn off the heat and allow it to cool, and don't ever leave the cooker unattended - not for a minute!

■ Never throw water into the hot oil. The water will react violently.

On December 4, 2006, the U.S Fire Administration (USFA) announced the release of a report regarding December and holiday fires. The report states that between the years of 2002 and 2004, an annual average of 128,700 fires occurred during the month of December alone. The fires were responsible for an estimated 415 civilian fire deaths, 1,650 civilian fire injuries, and \$990 million in property loss.

Familiarize yourself and loved ones with the safety precautions outlined above to avoid becoming another statistic. ■



In The Spotlight

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raising the tax cap this past May. It will help us make necessary purchases and improvements today and in the future."

Huffman has lived in the Westador neighborhood for ten years and is a District Sales Manager for Zodiac Pool Care. He enjoys spending time with his wife, Ruth, a Pre-K teacher in the Spring ISD, and their two children Lesley, who is married and lives in Mandeville, Louisiana, and Harrison, a sophomore at Stephen F. Austin University.



Gerald Lunsford

Gerald Lunsford, a firefighter with the Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Department since October of 2003, remembers the very day he became interested in joining the PVFD family.

"I was doing some work around the firehouse when a call came in," said Lunsford. "In the midst of controlled chaos, the Chief turned my direction and asked if I'd like to go on the run. I jumped in with the crew, rode with them to the incident and watched as they expertly handled the situation. After that experience, there was no

going back...I was hooked."

Most men and women who get involved in firefighting are people who feel a need to give back to their community. Gerald Lunsford is no different. Being a volunteer at the PVFD is his way of serving his community and he does it well. So well that after only his first year of full service with the department he received the Firefighter of the Year award.

"It was definitely one of my best moments since becoming a firefighter," said Lunsford. "But it's really the day-to-day interaction that I truly enjoy. I love being a part of this organization. It's filled with great individuals who have given me knowledge and skills and an outlook on life that I may not have otherwise come to know."

Gerald Lunsford, a native Houstonian, has worked at Ferguson Enterprises for over four years as a lead installer - installing appliances in new construction homes and commercial buildings. Although balancing a full-time job, volunteering with the PVFD, and squeezing in a personal life can be a challenge, Lunsford wouldn't change a thing.

"I volunteer with the PVFD because it's something I love to do. I plan on staying with this fire department for the long haul."

Over the years, **Tom Wyka** -- current President of the Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Association -- has not only served his country but his community as well. After serving in the U.S. Navy from 1963 to 1969, Wyka headed to the Federal Aviation Agency where he was an Air Traffic Controller for 33 years before he retired. During that time, he also volunteered for several years as a PVFD firefighter

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INTERNET SAFETY: ARM YOURSELF WITH THE TOOLS TO KEEP YOUR CHILDREN PROTECTED

The Ponderosa VFD isn't just about fighting fires. Our role is to ensure the safety of this community, and along with emergency services, we feel it is our duty to provide you with informational tools to help combat other growing community concerns. One big one in today's tech-savvy world is protecting our children from Internet dangers.



The Internet can be an entertaining and useful tool for our children. They can access research information for homework, visit online museums, play games and much more. But along with such open access to information comes inherent danger. As parents and legal guardians, it is our job to keep our eyes open and arm our children with the information and safeguards they need to keep their online experience a positive one.

So How Do We Do That?

In response to the unprecedented growth of the Internet and its communication tools (email, chat rooms and social networking sites like MySpace and Xanga), organizations such as the ICAC (Internet Crimes Against Children) Task Force and the NetSmartz Program (developed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children) have been created to

protect our children and educate them on how to deal with the sometimes seedy side of the Internet. In conjunction with parental education, communication and supervision, you can create a positive online experience for your kids and piece of mind for you.

Why Are Kids and Teenagers So Much More Susceptible to the Dangers of the Internet?

For no other reason than age and lack of life experience, our children can be easy targets for those looking to victimize them. Immaturity and a strong desire for attention, validation and affection, coupled with a lack of caution or self-preservation can create easy prey for sexual predators, child pornographers, cyberstalkers, racist or cult groups and much more.

We teach our children to respect adults and their rules, so they may be unsure of how to deal with adult "requests" by strangers online. We must explain to them the difference between adults they can trust and those they should not. Children are also naturally curious about sex and other "forbidden" topics, and embarrassment may cause them to be hesitant to tell a trusted adult if they are approached in an inappropriate way.

Proper parental education on this subject and open communication with our children is the best way to keep them safe. In fact, according to a survey commissioned by Cox Communications and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), "fewer teens whose families have talked to them 'a lot' about online safety have an IM name or pictures of themselves on

the Internet, compared to kids whose families have not talked to them at all."

The survey results also state that "more teens who've talked to parents or guardians also ignore messages from unfamiliar people, refuse to reply or chat, block unknown senders, and report these occurrences to trusted adults." Consider the below stats to help make your decision to open the lines of communication with your children today:

- 61% of teens (13 to 17 years of age) have a personal profile on social networking sites such as MySpace, Friendster, or Xanga
- 71% reported receiving messages online from someone they don't know
- 45% have been asked for personal information by someone they don't know
- 30% have considered meeting someone that they have only talked to online
- 14% have actually met a person FACE-TO-FACE that they have only spoken to over the Internet (9% of 13-15 year-olds; 22% of 16-17 year-olds)
- When teens receive messages online from someone they don't know, 40% reported that they will usually reply and chat with that person. Only 18% said they would tell an adult.

Staying Safe on Social Networking Sites

Most Internet child predators work very diligently to gain the trust of their intended victims. They find out as much personal information as possible, allowing them to communicate with children about their hobbies, school activi-

ties, parental issues, etc. This sense of "common interests" or the feeling that "this person understands me" can create a false sense of security, opening the door to possible victimization.



The endless amount of personal information available on blogs and social networking sites is fertile ground for criminals looking to harm children. Once the predator has found the appropriate personal information and made contact, he or she has the opportunity to make their intended victim vulnerable to "grooming" and enticement to meet in person, which could have very serious consequences.

Use the tips below (pulled from the NCMC's Cyber Tip Line website) to begin educating your children on the best ways to stay safe on social networking sites:

- Never post your personal information, such as cell phone number, address, or the name of your school, or school team.
- Be aware that information you give out in blogs could also put you at risk of victimization. People looking to harm you could use the information you post to gain your trust. They can also deceive you by pretending they know you.

- Never give out your password to anyone other than your parent or guardian...not even to a friend.

- Only add people as friends to your site if you know them in real life.

- Never meet in person with anyone you first "met" on a social networking site. Some people may not be who they say they are.

- Think before posting your photos. Personal photos should not have revealing information, such as school names or locations. Look at the backgrounds of the pictures to make sure you are not giving out any identifying information without realizing it. The name of a mall, the license plate of your car, signs, or the name of your sports team on your jersey or clothing all contain information that can give your location away.

- Never respond to harassing or rude comments posted on your profile. Delete any unwanted messages or friends who continuously leave inappropriate comments. Report these comments to the networking site if they violate that site's terms of service.

- Check the privacy settings of the social networking sites that you use and (1) set it so that people can only be added as your friend if you approve it, and (2) set it so that people can only view your profile if you have approved them as a friend.

- Remember that posting information about your friends could put you at risk. Protect your friends by not posting any names, passwords, ages, phone numbers, school names, or locations. Refrain from making or posting plans and activities on your site.

- Consider going through your blog and profile and removing information that could put you at

risk. Remember, anyone has access to your blog and profile, not just people you know.

- What you write can get you in trouble in more ways than one. Remember to think before you post...outside of the discussed dangers from Internet predators, you can also face repercussions from other sources. Some students who have posted threatening words against their school or classmates have attracted the attention of law enforcement, while those who have posted inappropriate comments about school personnel have also been disciplined. **And think about this...some universities and employers are even reviewing online postings when considering potential candidates.**

- Don't let a passing comment impact your future.

In 2005, the number of visitors to MySpace was calculated at 4.9 million.¹ As of April 2006, that number had grown to over 67 million.²

Informational and Educational Sources to Help Protect Your Children

In this age of exploding technology, it's more important than ever to keep on top of the latest Internet sites our kids are viewing and communication tools they're using. If we don't, someone else might...

There are many resources, national and local, that are around to help us keep our children safe. Some of the very best are either part of or working in conjunction with the National Center for Miss-

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Internet Safety

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ing and Exploited Children. You can report suspect activity at www.CyberTipLine.com, or communicate directly to law enforcement for investigation and gain access to more information and safety tips. The NCMEC also has their own NetSmartz Program, (www.netsmartz.org) where parents, educators and law enforcement can access educational materials and view kid-friendly and age appropriate Internet safety videos.

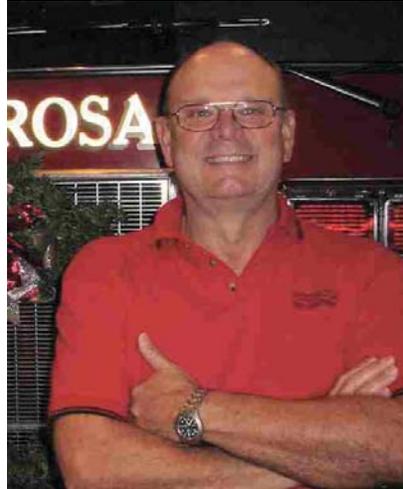
Many local law enforcement agencies have folks who work directly with the public to educate them through these or other materials. If you're interested in finding out what the Harris County Precinct 4 Constables Office has to offer, you can contact them at 281-401-6205. Stay smart and informed. It allows your children to get the best out of the Internet while helping to shield them from the worst. ■

¹ Janet Kornblum. "Teens hang out at MySpace." *USA Today*. January 8, 2006, http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2006-01-08-myspace-teens_x..htm?csp=34.

² April 3, 2006,
www.myspace.com

In The Spotlight

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Tom Wyka

and served on the Cypresswood Homeowner's board. Wyka has been on the PVFA board for almost four years.

"I really enjoy spending time with the men and women of the Ponderosa VFD," says Wyka. "They are a fine group of people with such a positive attitude toward their sometimes overwhelming responsibilities."

Not unlike the other members of the PVFA board, Wyka feels that one of the biggest challenges facing the Ponderosa VFD today is keeping and adding to their well-trained roster of volunteers.

"As our community grays, it becomes more difficult to recruit

young volunteers," says Wyka. "We are working to build a larger paid staff, but budget constraints can make that difficult. Add to that the growing population in our region, and you can understand our concerns for the future."

Along with the challenge of keeping tax rates down and quality up, Wyka feels a sense of pride that he's serving his community through such a necessary and respected organization.

"I've always felt that being a part of a community means giving something back," Wyka explains. "I chose this fire department because it means safety to the citizens in our area. There's a picture in the firehouse of a fireman sitting on the steps of a burning building with a child on his lap. It's hard to put into words what that means...but it's something good and it's something worth representing."

Tom Wyka is a state licensed home inspector and has owned his own business - HomeWorks Inspections - for the past nine years. He and his wife, Bobbi, have lived in the area for over 30 years, and have been in the same home in Cypresswood since 1977. They have two children, Brian and Angela. ■

PONDEROSA
FIREFIGHTER
HARRIS COUNTY ESD #28

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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