



# P O N D E R O S A

# FIREFIGHTER

## HARRIS COUNTY ESD #28

**Ponderosa Volunteer  
Fire Association, Inc.  
Board of Directors**

**Tom Wyka** - President  
Cypresswood resident

**Dan Vogel** - 1st V-P  
Westador resident

**Steve Sheridan** - 2nd V-P  
Inverness Forest resident

**Rick Windham** - 3rd V-P  
Fire department representative  
Ponderosa resident

**Bill Wurdeman** - Secretary  
North Forest resident

**Brandon Huffman** - Treasurer  
Westador resident

**HCESD #28  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**Dan McDermott**,  
President  
Ponderosa Resident

**Mike Jones**,  
Vice President

Northview Resident

**Edson Dronberger**,  
Treasurer, Westador resident

**James Chatterton**,  
Secretary  
Cypresswood Resident



**How Does PVFD Get Your Emergency Calls?**

Do you ever wonder how emergency calls in our area get directed to the appropriate emergency services department? Who handles the initial 9-1-1 call? And where does it go from there? These are important questions. Well-trained communications center professionals and a quick response can mean the difference between life and death.

**What happens when you call 9-1-1?**

A 9-1-1 call in Unincorporated Harris County is initially answered by the Harris County Sheriff's Office. If a caller in our area needs Fire/EMS support, the call is immediately transferred to the Cypress Creek Emergency Medical Services (CEMS) Communications Center. Trained professionals at the CEMS Communications Center take the call and ask a series of protocol questions. Once these questions are answered and the caller's location and phone number are received, a response is sent to the appropriate emergency services department. If necessary, the call-taker will provide life-saving care and safety instructions prior to the arrival of emergency responders.



**What can you tell us about the CCEMS  
Communications Center?**

The CCEMS Communications Center was originally established in 1986 as the FM 1960 Area Emergency Communications Center - a joint dispatch center serving CCEMS and the local 1960 area fire departments. CCEMS purchased the Communications Center in 1999 and still owns the center today.

In addition to Cypress Creek EMS, West Harris County EMS, the Harris County Haz-Mat Team, and the Harris County Fire Marshal's Office (arson investigation and inspection services), the CCEMS Communications Center also serves nine local area fire departments including Ponderosa VFD.

In 2006, there were 37,549 calls dispatched from the CCEMS Communications Center and 2007 projections of 41,000 appear to be on target. What does this mean? It means the importance of a well-managed, well-trained Communications Center staff is paramount to the safety of this community. Luckily, the PVFD is working with one of the best...

*Continued on page 3*

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF..

Due in large part to your support in last year's election to increase the tax cap, the Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Department has been able to acquire a number of items and plan for the purchase of additional items and improvements necessary to bring you the BEST services possible.

We recently began an important project -- which will take about two years to complete -- aimed at equipping all fire apparatus and command vehicles with on-board computers tied to the dispatch center via radio link.

When a response is generated, the address and other data will automatically be loaded into the fire truck computers to show the specific location. Depending on the type of property, a site specific map and picture will be available on the screen and a GPS option will automatically track the response route (area map data includes west, north and east Harris County and some of Montgomery County). We look forward to finalizing the installation of all computers and utilizing this impressive technology in emergency situations.

The safety of our firefighters is an absolute imperative in our operations. We recently purchased and installed on apparatus,



twenty-six new handheld radios, allowing every firefighter using an air pack to have direct radio communications. In addition, we are involved with the Harris County Fire Marshal's Office in procuring a federal grant that will provide all firefighters in unincorporated Harris County with personal alert safety systems - radio linked to the incident commander.

### Upcoming Improvements

■ **Replacement Fire Hose:** Like a lot of routine items, we have had to delay replacement hose due to budgetary restrictions. This year, we will be able to replace some of the hose and we have plans in place for a necessary annual re-supply.

■ **Protective Clothing:** It used to be that protective clothing en-

sembles were less than \$1,000 - but those days are gone. Protective clothing is now over \$2,300 per firefighter (not including the \$2,500 air pack). Additional funds generated from the tax cap increase now allow us to replace the gear on a regular basis.

■ **Additional Firefighters:** We have hired three full-time firefighters with this year's budget and look to hire additional staff in the future. With the continuing decline of volunteers, this hiring process has become even more important.

Thanks again for your support of the PVFD. Without it, these important improvements would not have been possible.

### IS YOUR HOME AT RISK OF FLOODING?

A flooded house or business can be devastating, and with the area's continued growth and rapid development, the threat of flooding is becoming all too real, even to folks not previously thought to live in flood-prone areas.

New floodplain maps -- recently released by Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCFCD) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)-- will be used to establish flood insurance premiums and to help guide in effective land-use planning. If you don't already have flood insurance

-- get it today! Remember, homeowners' insurance doesn't cover flood losses. (See Flooding article on page 4.)

To obtain more information about this important topic, please visit the HCFCFCD website, [www.hcfcfd.org](http://www.hcfcfd.org), [www.tsarp.org](http://www.tsarp.org), and [www.FloodSmart.gov](http://www.FloodSmart.gov). ■

## ***Do you or a loved one have special needs? If so, sign up for 2-1-1 today***

During a time of emergency, especially a natural disaster, preparation is key. For those with special needs, this is even more important. The Harris County Office of Emergency Management encourages all special needs persons in the Houston/Galveston area and along the Texas Gulf Coast to register with 2-1-1. By providing appropriate information to the folks at 2-1-1, public safety and transportation agencies will be made aware of your individual disability, medical, mobility, or other dependency needs to assist you or your loved one during an emergency evacuation.

Download your special needs registration form from the Harris County Office of Emergency Management website ([www.hcoem.org](http://www.hcoem.org)) or dial 2-1-1 today for registration assistance, 24/7, from specially trained operators.



**Need assistance to get out  
before a disaster hits...**

**Dial 2-1-1**

A public service message by Harris County Judge Ed Emmett & Clear Channel Outdoor

## **9-1-1 -- CCEMS Communications Center....Continued from page 1**

### **Management you can count on.**

Successfully managing an emergency dispatch center like CCEMS requires someone with emergency services and dispatch expertise, grace under pressure and a true commitment to their community. The CCEMS Communications Center was lucky to find someone with all of those qualities...and more.



**Dan Shelor**, Manager of the CCEMS Communications Center,

recently answered a couple of questions for us about what he does and why he does it.

Here's what Dan had to say:  
***How has your past (and current) experience prepared you for the unique responsibilities of this position?***

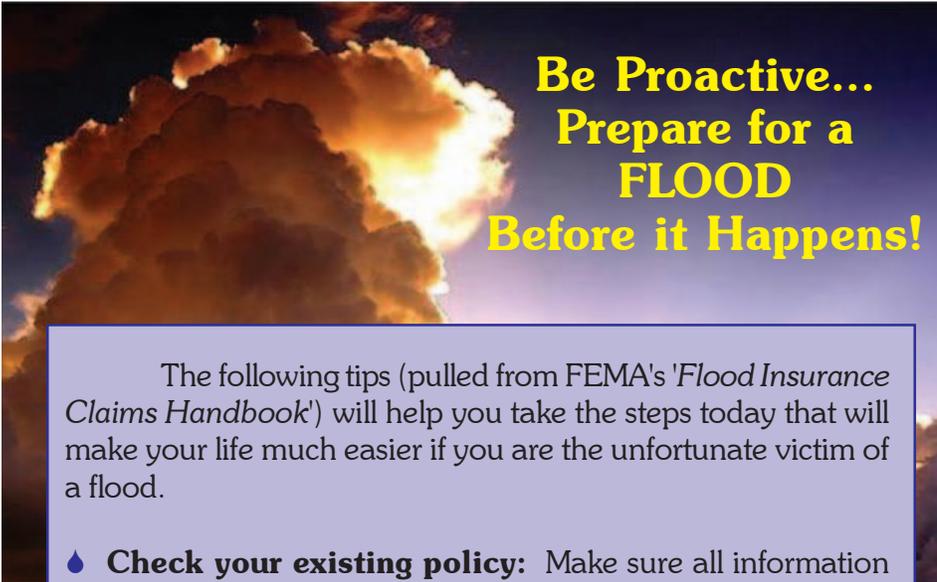
I've been involved in the emergency services arena for 20 years now. I became a firefighter with the Champions Area VFD in 1987 and am currently their Assistant Chief, and I've been an EMT with Cypress Creek EMS since 1988. I also worked as a dispatcher for the FM 1960 Area Emergency Communications Center from 1988 to 1994, and was a police officer with the City of Bellaire PD from 1994 to 2005. I recently became a reserve arson investigator with the Harris County Fire Marshal's Office.

***Sounds like you stay very busy! How do you juggle it all?***

Juggle is just it. I have to put on different hats at different times, but the bottom line is I love what I do, so I work hard to do it well. I was honored when CCEMS Executive Director, Brad England, asked me to take on the management position at the CCEMS Communications Center, and I'm proud that he felt I could handle all the responsibilities that come with it.

Personally, I've got to thank my wife, Marie, for all her support. She makes life easier for me and is working hard herself as a stay-at-home mom to our new, beautiful seven month-old daughter, Morgan Marie.

The members of the PVFD would like to thank Dan and his staff for all their hard work. We are proud to call you our partner! ■



## Be Proactive... Prepare for a FLOOD Before it Happens!

The following tips (pulled from FEMA's 'Flood Insurance Claims Handbook') will help you take the steps today that will make your life much easier if you are the unfortunate victim of a flood.

◆ **Check your existing policy:** Make sure all information is correct, including information about your mortgage company. If you have refinanced with a company other than the one shown on your policy, call your insurance agent or company representative right away.

◆ **Prepare lists and documentation:** If you've purchased contents coverage, make it a priority to make a detailed list of your home or business' contents and/or your personal property. Include: (1) Date and place of purchase; (2) Model number; (3) Serial number (for large appliances); (4) Descriptions; (5) Original purchase costs - with receipts if possible; (6) Photos or videos of your home's interior and your personal property.

◆ **Secure important papers:** Keep originals of important papers in a safe place, preferably in a bank safe deposit box. Papers should include contact information for your agent or company, important receipts, your flood insurance policy and documentation on your personal property and the contents of your home. Keep copies in your home or business in the safest, most accessible place possible that is not subject to flooding. The detailed documentation will make filing your claim much easier.

◆ **Talk to your insurance agent:** Call your insurance agent or company representative to discuss the particular requirements for reporting a flood claim...they can vary from company to company. Knowing how to proceed now can save a lot of effort and frustration later.

◆ **Plan an emergency contact:** Be sure to share an emergency contact address and phone number with your insurance agent and family. After a flood, you may be unable to stay in your home or be contacted at your home phone number.

## Your House is Flooded... What Do You Do?

The flooding of your home or business can be an overwhelming experience, but being prepared and taking quick action can decrease stress levels and get you on the path back to a normal life. Whenever possible, take these steps immediately following a flood:

◆ **Contact your agent or company representative to report your loss:** All flood insurance policies require you to give prompt written notice of loss. Have readily available the name of your insurance company, policy number and a phone number and/or email where you can be reached.

◆ **Separate your property:** Your policy requires that you separate damaged property from undamaged property - but don't throw anything away until an adjuster has seen it. If local law requires you to get rid of items, take pictures before disposing of them and keep samples for the adjuster to see.

◆ **Make a list of damaged contents:** If you've purchased contents coverage, make a list of damaged property. If you prepared comprehensive lists before the flood, this should be relatively easy. List the quantity of each item, a description, brand name, where purchased, its cost, model



and serial number (where appropriate) and your estimate of the loss amount. Attach bills, receipts, photos and any other applicable documents.

◆ **List areas of structural damage:** As you look over your property, make a list of any areas of structural damage you want to point out to the insurance adjuster.

**Stay safe! Flooding can bring unseen dangers.**

During a crisis, your top priority is keeping yourself and your family safe. Consider the following precautions when faced with this unfortunate situation:

◆ **Remember the phrase: Hide from the wind and run from the water!** If waters rise in your house before you can leave safely, move to the highest level necessary - even the roof. Take extra clothing, your radio, a flashlight and, if possible, food.

◆ If you have time, turn off electricity at the breaker or fuse box and close the main gas valve and keep the power off until an electrician has inspected your system. If you hear hissing or smell gas, leave immediately and call the gas company. Using your home phone or cell phone inside the house could spark an explosion.

◆ Keep away from downed power lines and other electrical wires - electrocution is a major cause of death in floods.

◆ If sewer and water lines are damaged, don't use toilets or sinks. Call a plumber. Until you're told the water supply is safe, boil water for five minutes before drinking it or preparing food.

◆ Throw away water-damaged foods, including canned goods.

For more information about what to do before, during and after a flood, check out FEMA's website at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov). ■

## ESD #28 Board Member Spotlight: Dan McDermott



"Emergency Services District (ESD) #28 has a contractual agreement with PVFD to provide fire and emergency services to a population of 47,000 in our area," said ESD #28 Board President, Dan McDermott. "But our role is really much more than financial. It is just as important that we help Chief Windisch and all of his people meet the needs of the department and this community with our support, understanding, communication and execution."

McDermott was appointed to the ESD #28 Board in October 2002, and elected Board President in September 2005. A Ponderosa Forest resident for almost 25 years, Dan is now, and has been for many years, an active member of his community. Whether launching the first "Evening of Excellence" -- recognizing academic excellence -- at Spring ISD or serving this fire department and community throughout his time on the Board, McDermott is a willing participant in making this community the best it can be.

"When asked for your help, you either respond to a need or take the easy way out," said McDermott. "One can always rationalize why they don't have the time, but when it gets down to it, you have a choice."

Married for almost 27 years, Dan and wife Becky made the unorthodox decision six years ago that Dan would change careers - leaving his corporate consulting job to become a stay-at-home-dad. That decision has paid off. Their three children are not just getting by, they are thriving: Oldest daughter, Meghan (23) graduated with a Broadcast Journalism degree from the University of Houston and is now a morning news anchor at the CBS affiliate in Tyler; son, Patrick (20), is a Sophomore and Nuclear Engineering major at Texas A&M University; and youngest daughter, Colleen (18), is a Theatre major in the Honors College at the University of Houston.

We thank McDermott for choosing to put time and energy into the well-being and success of this department and we hope he continues to do so for many years to come.

"The members of PVFD are willing to risk their lives everyday for our children," said McDermott. "That's what it boils down to...people. That's why the ESD #28 Board members do what we do." ■

# PVFD Firefighter Spotlight...



## Jeff Windham

Jeff Windham, a 28-year veteran of the Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Department, is a respected member of the PVFD team, and, among other things, an invaluable asset in ensuring the brave men and women of this department stay safe and injury-free.

"The PVFD has been blessed in its history to have never suffered a firefighter death or serious injury," said Windham. "If there's a legacy I'd be proud to leave behind, it would be passing on the knowledge and experience to help prevent future injuries and maintain PVFD's excellent safety record."

From his life as a volunteer at this department, to his educational background and professional career, safety is a recurring theme in Windham's life. In 1986, he earned a degree in Fire Protection and Safety Engineering

Technology at Oklahoma State University, and in 2001 he completed the MBA program at Texas A&M University. He has worked for many years in the petro-chemical industry as a safety, fire protection, and emergency management professional and has, over the years, served as an officer, Chairman, and Emergency Response Specialist in the Channel Industries Mutual Aid Association (CIMA). CIMA, comprised of around 100 industrial facilities, municipalities and governmental entities with interests along the Houston Ship Channel, is one of the largest and best-organized emergency response mutual aid organizations in the world.

Windham stresses the importance of firefighter safety as often as he can, a passion that is, ultimately, a dedication to protecting our most valuable asset - people.

"As I've grown and matured, the most important lesson I've learned really has nothing to do with firefighting...it has to do with people," said Windham. "I've learned to respect their differences and to appreciate their individual contributions. From the officers of our Association and Tax Board who direct the business, to the Fire Department Officers who lead our current membership, to the newest recruit firefighters who are ultimately the future of this department...it takes them all to make this team work as successfully as it does."

Windham is just as dedicated to his family as he is to his fellow firefighters. He enjoys relaxing at home with his family, cooking outdoors, watching Aggie football and teaching three and four-year-olds in the Small World Sunday School at Fellowship of the Woodlands. Windham and his wife and best friend, Lynn, are proud parents to their three daughters, Amber (23), Amy (21), and Cara (17), and the proud grandparents to two-year-old granddaughter, Madison. In the coming years, Jeff and Lynn hope to travel and spend as much time as possible with their children and grandchild .



## Rick Windham

Following in his older brother, Jeff's, footsteps, Rick Windham has dedicated his career to fire service. In 1980, at the age of 15, Rick joined his brother and the other firefighters of PVFD as a

junior member.

"It didn't take long for Rick to be bitten by the same bug that got me," said Rick's brother, Jeff. "I'm so proud of him, what he has accomplished, and the fire service leader he has become."

For some time, the lives of Rick and Jeff paralleled each other. After graduating from Southwest Texas State, Rick also attended Oklahoma State University and earned a BS in Fire Protection and Safety Engineering Technology. While attending OSU, he worked for the International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA), just as his brother had, and after graduation, Rick, too, began a career as a fire protection and safety engineer in the petro-chemical industry. But in 2000, after ten years with BP, Rick decided to pursue his love of firefighting full-time. He left the petro-chemical industry and accepted a position as Deputy Chief of Training with The Woodlands Fire Department, where his major areas of responsibility include training and safety, EMS and special operations. Rick and his family also moved back to Ponderosa, and in 2001, after almost 13 years, he returned to PVFD as a volunteer.

"I really thank PVFD for providing me with great role models, including Fred Windisch, John O'Gorman, Walter Laich, and of course, my brother," said Windham. "When a serious knee injury in high school took me away from my life of sports, the discipline and fellow members at PVFD kept me from heading down a bad road. Fire service in general has given me more than I can ever explain - a sense of pride in what I do, self confidence, self discipline and an exciting career that I truly love...you just can't

beat that."

Windham has been married to his wife, Chris, for 18 years, and they have two wonderful boys - Sam (11) and Jake (8). Chris works nights as an emergency nurse at Houston Northwest Medical Center and is very active in the Ponderosa Elementary PTO and the Texas Emergency Nursing Association.

"I would not be where I am today, doing what I love, without the support of my wife," said Windham. "Not many women would support, much less encourage their husbands to leave a good-paying job to pursue one of lesser means. I truly thank her for that."

When not working at The Woodlands Fire Department or volunteering at PVFD, Windham likes to spend time with his family - chauffeuring his boys around - and enjoys taking classes to broaden his knowledge base and continue to improve professionally.



## Joe Spitzenberger

At the age of 16, Joe Spitzenberger may be one of our youngest members, but he's no stranger to PVFD. Son to Anthony Spitzenberger, PVFD's Assistant

Chief, and former member Rhonda Spitzenberger, Joe has been a presence at the fire department since the day he was born.

"I was raised in this world," said Spitzenberger. "My dad always brought me to the fire station and let me join him on the fire engine when there were calls. I can't remember a time when I didn't want to be a firefighter."

Spitzenberger, who became a Jr. Firefighter at the age of 12, is working on his fourth year in the department. He was the only Jr. Firefighter in his recruit class and has many fond memories of that time.

"The training period taught our class how to work together," said Spitzenberger. "We were some of the first recruits to use the burn tower and we really became a team by working together to navigate training courses, like the SCBA (Self Contained Breathing Apparatus) maze. Graduating with my recruit class - in front of family, friends and the other firefighters - was one of my most memorable moments since joining the department."

When not volunteering with PVFD, Joe, a student at Klein Collins High School, concentrates on his school work, is involved in the ROTC and likes to stay in good physical condition by playing football -- which he has done as long as he's been firefighting.

"As my Dad says, 'no pass, no firefighting'," said Spitzenberger. "That keeps me focused!"

In the future, Joe hopes to become a full-time firefighter with the Houston Fire Department (hopefully working at the same station as his father) and a Captain or Chief at PVFD. Watch out Chief Windisch...looks like he's well on his way! ■



# HEY KIDS...CAN YOU FIND THESE WORDS THAT WILL HELP YOU ESCAPE A FIRE ALIVE?

(Answers on our website: [www.ponderosavfd.org](http://www.ponderosavfd.org) in the Kid's section!)

Find the hidden words within the grid of letters.

M	T	G	K	L	Z	S	E	J	S	Q	Q	C	H	E
L	P	O	R	D	L	M	V	D	I	A	R	H	V	K
A	T	G	Z	S	L	O	H	M	I	A	F	I	U	F
C	H	F	T	T	J	K	R	O	W	H	V	E	I	D
P	I	O	V	G	G	E	S	L	S	R	T	R	T	R
E	P	S	C	U	W	D	J	T	U	E	E	N	F	Y
E	B	R	O	H	M	E	N	S	S	F	P	V	O	D
K	U	C	N	L	S	T	U	N	I	E	T	J	S	D
N	R	A	J	O	L	E	Y	G	N	K	S	H	P	R
J	N	W	D	M	W	C	H	K	U	E	X	A	O	E
O	E	K	O	M	S	T	R	M	E	S	V	A	G	T
D	S	F	E	F	E	O	M	A	T	C	H	E	S	A
N	P	R	L	R	H	R	N	H	E	A	T	J	J	W
C	I	N	A	P	T	N	O	D	F	P	O	V	L	E
F	S	U	D	A	L	Y	Q	X	X	E	P	X	J	S

BURN  
CRAWL  
DON'T HIDE  
DON'T PANIC  
DROP  
ESCAPE  
FIRE

FIREFIGHTER  
GASES  
HEAT  
HOSE  
KEEP CALM  
MATCHES  
ROLL

SAFETY  
SMOKE  
SMOKE DETECTOR  
STOP  
SURVIVE  
WATER



**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!**

NONPROFIT  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
HOUSTON, TX  
PERMIT NO. 1