



# DISTRICT FIREFIGHTER HARRIS COUNTY ESD #28

Summer 2003

## 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.
- Careless smoking is the leading cause of fire deaths.
- In the first five months of this year, PVFD responded to more than 600 fire, EMS and mutual aid calls.

### HCESD #28

#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Curtis Cook** - President  
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## Ponderosa Opens Impressive New Training Center

Another Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Department dream has become reality with the completion of a brand new, state of the art training facility located behind the department's Station 3 on Imperial Valley. The 4-story tower is situated on a pad of concrete and asphalt in a 3-acre tract that was donated to the department in 1992 and offers unique training capabilities for current team members and new recruits.

According to Jim Luplow, Station 3 Captain, "We started planning for the center five or six years ago. We realized that we needed more indepth training options for our firefighters, and it was getting harder and harder to find locations where we could do live fire situation training. With the new facility, we can do rappelling off the roof, we can simulate a 4-story elevator shaft rescue, and we can train in a 2-story confined space simulator. We also have a roof ventilation simulator and two fire rooms.

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*This newsletter is intended for the residents served by Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Department. If it reached you in error, please disregard.*

PROVIDED AS A COMMUNITY SERVICE TO PROMOTE FIRE SAFETY AND PREVENTION

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## From the Chief



Time flies when you're having a great time! I was recently elected Fire Chief filling the role that I served 1985 – 1995, and 1996-2000, and I am delighted to be back. The future has many challenges and opportunities, and we will continue to strive for excellence in everything we do.

The Ponderosa VFD is a very special organization, one that has achieved national recognition,

and consistently demonstrates high performance in our activities. Our success is due to the dedicated members who give so much for so little.

Being the Fire Chief is similar to steering a large ship, combining the philosophies and actions to guide the team forward in emergency response, daily operations, and developing a vision of the future. Our Boards of Directors continually provide support and direction to keep us on track. The net result is that the entire team works together to solve problems and provide our “product” – fast response and quality services.

In the old days, we responded to less than 1,000 calls per year, today we respond to over 1,500 annually. Our insurance rating has improved from a 4 to a 3, and that means reduced homeowner and business insurance

rates.

Our new training center will further our commitments to better service, and our apparatus replacement program will maintain our state of readiness — we must be ready and able to respond when you call for help.

The PVFD is undergoing a transition from an all-volunteer to a combination system with some positions receiving remuneration. The responsibilities continue to increase and we must maintain our high performance services. Specific staff positions make our challenges just a little bit easier to overcome.

The future is bright, our members are motivated, our citizens respect our services, and we believe that the Ponderosa VFD will be here for you, every second of every day.

*Fred Windisch*

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## What is the ISO...and how can ISO ratings save you money!

The Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Department was recently rated by the Insurance Service Office (ISO) and achieved a **3** rating.

The ISO is an auditing company that compiles data from almost 45,000 fire departments nationwide for its Public Protection Classification. They evaluate each department's defense capability based on three major categories: Water Supplies - 40%; communications - 10%; and Fire Department Operations/Staffing - 50%. The ISO assigns a protection rating from 1 to 10, with Class 1 being the best, or “ex-

emplary fire protection.” These classifications are shared with insurance companies and are used



to determine the availability of property insurance coverage, and

used by insurers to determine premium rates.

Ponderosa was previously rated a 4, and the upgraded rating was effective January 3, 2003. Building and fire codes, including fire prevention inspection processes, is not available in unincorporated areas of Texas yet, and this impacts the rating. Harris County is, however, pursuing a fire code at this time.

Some insurance companies may use Harris County Emergency Services District #28 in the rate listing, so please contact us (281-444-8465) if you have problems

verifying this new rating with your insurance carrier. ■

# Teaching Kids About FIRE...

According to the United States Fire Administration (USFA), each year about 300 people are killed and \$280 million in property is destroyed in fires attributed to children playing with fire.

Here are some things parents need to know so they can teach their youngsters about the dangers of fire to help minimize the risk of injuries and firesetting behavior in the future.

## **Just the facts...**

- Children of all ages set over 100,000 fires annually. Approximately 20,000 of these fires are set in homes.
- Children make up 20% of all fire deaths.
- Over 30% of the fires that kill children are set by children playing with fire.
- At home, children usually play with fire in bedrooms, in closets and under beds. These are “secret” places where there are a lot of things that catch fire easily.
- Too often, child firesetters are not given proper guidance and supervision by parents and teachers. Consequently, they repeat their firesetting behavior.



## **It takes PRACTICE...**

All parents know that young children need constant supervision. Even with the best of intentions, however, kids can carry a pack of forbidden matches into their hiding place to see what hap-

pens when they strike them. Children under five are especially curious about fire. Often what begins as a natural exploration of the unknown can lead to a deadly tragedy.



Keep matches and lighters out of harm's way in a secured drawer or cabinet, and encourage your children to tell you when they find or encounter matches or lighters you may have missed.

Be alert to evidence that youngsters have played with fire. Be on the lookout for burned matches in favorite “hiding” places. Take the mystery out of fire by discussing the dangers to life and property. *Fire is a tool, they need to understand...not a toy.*

In a fire emergency (see page 8) smoke makes it very difficult to see and children are often frightened when they see a large figure looming through the haze making strange muffled noises through their breathing apparatus. Teach children not to hide from firefighters...they are there to save young lives.

Develop and practice a family home fire escape plan, going through it carefully...step by step. They should be familiar with the lifesaving practice of STOP, DROP AND ROLL if their clothing should catch fire. Teach them how to crawl low on the floor be-



low the smoke, and to get out of the house as fast as they can...and to STAY OUT.

Installing working smoke detectors throughout the home in strategic places increase the chances that family members will get out alive. Check the batteries regularly and change them twice a year (at the start and end of daylight time is a convenient, easy to remember schedule -- change your clock, change your battery).



Make sure that youngsters recognize the sound of the smoke alarm...and that they know immediately what to do when they hear it. Recent TV investigations have suggested that sleeping children do not always wake up when smoke alarms sound. Nevertheless, the vast majority of fatal fires (60 percent) occur in *homes without smoke alarms*. And a majority of those deaths that do occur in homes with smoke alarms are a result of dead or missing batteries.

Smoke alarms don't last forever. Replace your smoke alarms every 10 years. ■

## Training Center

Continued from page 1

The facility has its own underground 12,000 gallon water “draft” tank that minimizes water usage by putting the water back into the system after pumping exercises. There are also connections to an inside water distribution system -- like in many high rise buildings -- that allows the firefighters to connect hoses inside the tower on the various floors.

Station 3 was built in 1993 and, during the training center construction, a 20 ft. extension area was added for a training room, sleeping quarters and work out room, along with another 20 parking places at the side of the building. The new tower was built at a cost of \$200,000, the site development added another \$200,000, and the station upgrade cost roughly \$100,000 for a total project cost of about half a million dollars.

Chief Windisch says that they are discovering new training uses for the center every time it is used. “Not only are we able to give our firefighters an excellent exposure to a full range of fire and rescue situations here, but if we are called out during a drill, we can leave the equipment as is, lock up and return after the call to resume the training exercise. We sure couldn’t do that in ‘outside’ locations.”



**In a simulated roof rescue, the firefighters get the victim into a basket, onto the truck’s ladder, and bring “Rescue Randy” gently down to the ground.**

**Below right... Firefighters rescue “Randy” from a burning room.**

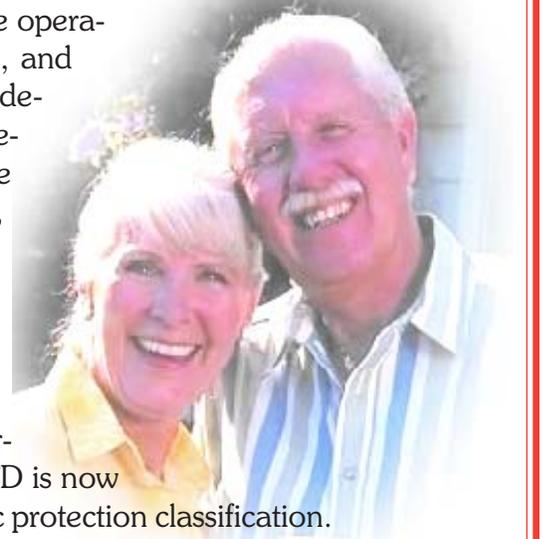


## New Property Tax Reduction...

Emergency Services District #28 Commissioners adopted an exemption for property owners over 65 years of age. The first \$25,000 of residential evaluation will be exempt from the six cents tax rate later this year when the tax rolls are certified.

Treasurer Dan Dronberger (Westador) said, “We have the opportunity to give some tax relief to our citizens who are primarily on fixed incomes, and we believe there will be no service reductions based on our calculations.”

District #28 funds the operations of the Ponderosa VFD, and President Curtis Cook (Ponderosa) pointed out, “With the recent improvement of our fire insurance rating schedule, and adding this exemption to over 1,600 homes, there will be cost reduction.” Curtis reminds our residents and business owners to be sure that their insurance agents understand that the Ponderosa VFD is now rated a “3” on the ISO public protection classification.





## MEET YOUR PONDEROSA FIREFIGHTERS...



**Tony Spitzenberger** has always known that he would be a firefighter; his career was simply never a topic for debate. Originally from a small town in South Dakota, Tony relocated to Houston in 1972 when his dad, who worked for Shell Oil, was transferred to the company’s corporate office. He remembers the early days in the Ponderosa service area when it was actually safe enough to ride his bike on “Jackrabbit Road”, while many of the side roads were gravel and not yet paved. His family lived across the street from Ponderosa Station 1, and by 1979, Tony had hung around the firefighters persistently enough to become the first junior member to ride along without a parent accompanying him. He says that like many other firefighters and paramedics, he was a huge fan of the TV show “EMERGENCY!” as a child and credits “Gage,” “DeSoto” and “Station 51” with helping to spark his career interest. While attending Westfield High School, he became a Junior Lieutenant and remembers being “called out” of class to fight fires. Tony graduated from

Texas A&M Fire School in 1986. Having spent 13 years with the City of Houston Fire Department, he was recently promoted to Captain. As a volunteer with Ponderosa, he served as Fire Marshal for seven years with responsibility for statistics reporting, assessing fire scenes before calling in outside investigators, and assisting in their investigations. Later, following his election to Assistant Chief – Operations, he was responsible for overseeing the construction of all three stations and the new training facility. He is certified in Technical Rescue, HazMat, in Scuba and Rapelling, and as a Paramedic. Tony and his wife Rhonda, who met as PVFD members, have three children. His long-term goal is to retire as Senior Captain or Chief after 30 years service with the City so he can relax and enjoy their future grandchildren. In his virtually nonexistent spare time, Tony enjoys hunting and fishing.

**Robert Logan** also lived across the street from Station 1, and started hanging around the station when he was eight years old. His career path was cemented the first time he saw a fire truck. He took a course after high school to become a Paramedic, and went on to graduate from the A&M Fire School. In 2001, Robert accepted a job with Houston Fire Department as a Paramedic/Firefighter. In reality, he now has three jobs – with Houston, Ponderosa and as a CCEMS Paramedic and dis-



patcher. Robert received the Dispatcher of the Year Award in 2000 and 2001. “I actually DO have a life,” he explains, but he spends a lot of it sleeping, preparing for one of his jobs, or just catching up. This young man leaves little to chance, and has specific goals and objectives laid out for himself and his career. He intends to “go as far as he can go” in all his assignments, and aggressively strives for whatever is “next.” He likes achieving positions of increasing responsibility, and while he admits to being something of a “control freak” about assignments, he says he has the confidence that he can do the job right. During the major 2-alarm fire at Springwoods United Methodist church that cold night in 2000, Robert served as Command for battling the fire. He is also credited with rescuing an elderly lady during a fire at the Chestnut Park Apartments. With the living room ablaze, he searched the bedroom and finally found her lying unconscious on the bathroom floor. When people ask him why he is a firefighter, he is quick to respond that he “would not be happy doing anything else. I love this job, it is everything I ever wanted to do.” Originally from Brooklyn, NY, this 23 year-old has already bought his first home and works around the house as a “hobby.” ■



## READY TO HELP IN AN EMERGENCY...

### *In search of Columbia debris*

On January 16, 2003, the news from NASA was typical of a successful shuttle launch, as Columbia's 16-day mission left the launch pad at 10:39 a.m. EST and headed for an orbit 180 miles above earth. Within eleven minutes, the shuttle had already reached an altitude of almost 70 miles and its crew began their many in-flight assignments.

The mission called for the seven astronauts to complete research in physical, life, and space sciences, and to conduct approximately 80 separate experiments that comprised hundreds of samples and test points.

The astronauts worked 24 hours a day, in two alternating shifts throughout their 16 days in orbit. One of Columbia's important tasks on this mission was to preview and evaluate CloudSat, an advanced radar system designed to measure the properties of clouds. It will provide the first global measurements of cloud thickness, height, water and ice content, along with a wide range of precipitation data linked to cloud development.

NASA's Earth Science Enterprise is dedicated to understanding the Earth as an integrated system and applying Earth system science to improve prediction of

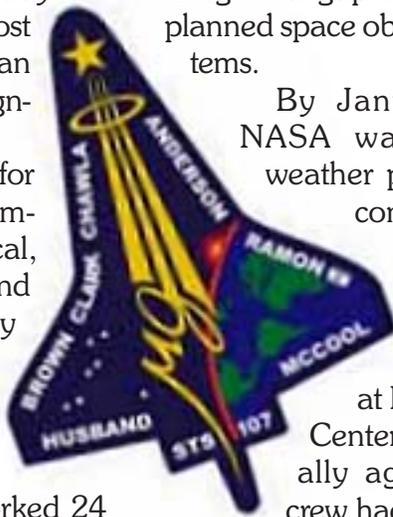
climate, weather, and natural hazards using the vantage point of space. This particular experiment was designed to improve weather prediction models by measuring cloud properties from the top of the atmosphere to Earth's surface, filling in a gap in existing and planned space observational systems.

By January 28<sup>th</sup>, as NASA was looking at weather projections and considering which runway for Columbia to use for the 62<sup>nd</sup> shuttle landing at Kennedy Space

Center, it was generally agreed that the crew had "far exceeded

folks' expectations from a science standpoint."

At 8:57 a.m. EST on February 1, 2003, Columbia neared the Arizona-New Mexico border and Shuttle Commander Rick Husband began slowing the orbiter down in preparation for landing. About three minutes later, communication with the shuttle was lost while it was flying at an altitude of about 203,000 feet in the area above north central Texas, and traveling approximately 12,500 miles per hour (Mach 18). At 9:45 a.m. EST NASA officially confirmed that the shuttle and its crew were lost.



On February 1, 2003, the crew of Columbia headed for home and instead ended up occupying a tragic place in America's space exploration history. As President Bush said during his brief memorial remarks, "The crew of the shuttle Columbia did not return safely to Earth; yet we can pray that all are safely home."

### **NASA Calls for Help...**

Almost immediately, a call went out for volunteers to help locate sites where parts of the spacecraft might have come to rest throughout east Texas. NASA explained that there were approximately 24, 300 tiles and 2,300 flexible insulation blankets protecting the outside of the orbiter. When maximum heating occurs about 20 minutes before touchdown, the scientists explained, temperatures on these surfaces reach as high as 3,000 degrees F. Recognizing the debris would clearly be a challenge.

The painstaking search of the main 2400 square mile search corridor was executed through the combined efforts of NASA, FEMA, Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. and Texas Forest Services. Individuals from these organizations, aided by local authorities and landowners, have worked long hours under arduous conditions over difficult terrain, to recover Columbia debris.

Among those who responded was **Daniel Vogel**, a



Lieutenant for Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Department. In 1995, Vogel had purchased a lake house located near Toledo Bend and had planned to visit the property before hearing of the shuttle disaster. So instead of having a relaxing weekend, he called the NASA command post and brought along some help to search in the Sabine National Forest, near Hemphill, Texas.



Vogel, along with Ponderosa VFD members Pat Casner, Andrew Threet, Jim Schultz, and Jason Washington, joined others gathered at the Command Center from NASA, the FBI, law enforcement agencies, and the Forest Service to get their instructions. The day was miserable – with a steady rain that found its way into protective clothing and hindered the search teams. Using the GPS – global positioning system – they walked in lines into the woods. The ground was covered with soggy fallen leaves, and a misty

fog hung suspended in the air, creating a somber, almost eerie atmosphere for their sad task.

“There were between 80 and 120 people in our group,” Vogel explained. “We walked into the woods at about 10 am. and left at about 5:30 p.m. We were exhausted, but our team managed to find 4 pieces of debris, and marked them for NASA to retrieve. We were glad to have been able to help.”



By April 16, 2003, Ground search teams had completed 78 percent of their primary search area, airborne spotters had finished 80 percent of their assigned areas, and underwater search operations finished their tasks. More than 70,000 items, weighing more than 78,000 pounds, about 37 percent of the Shuttle, by weight, have been delivered to the Kennedy Space Center for use in the mishap investigation.

A Columbia Recovery Office (CRO) has been established at Johnson Space Center, Houston, to assume responsibility for recovery management and community liaison. The Disaster Field Office in Lufkin, Texas, the central planning and command center for the search, was expected to close in early May.

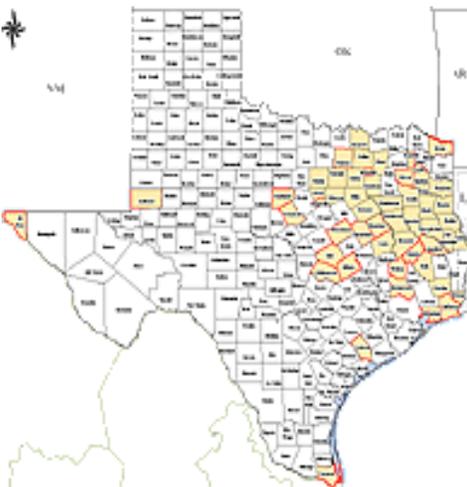
“The response to the Colum-

bia tragedy has been simply overwhelming. Private citizens, local, state and federal agencies have worked so hard to help us get to this point,” aid NASA Administrator Sean O’Keefe.

“NASA cannot thank the communities and our government partners enough for what they have done to aid the accident investigation. We have retrieved a large percentage of Columbia, and that will go a long way toward helping solve the puzzle of what happened February 1st. All the participants will forever be a part of the NASA family, and we will try to honor them by returning to flight safely, and as soon as possible,” O’Keefe said.

### Facts concerning the Columbia Recovery effort as of April 16, 2003.

- After ten weeks, in excess of 13,000 ground recovery team personnel have searched over (76%) of the 621,000 assigned acres.
- Ground and air personnel have searched more than 2.1 million acres.
- Searches have also been conducted in New Mexico, Nevada, Utah and California for suspected debris.
- More than 90 federal, state and local agencies have participated in the recovery effort.
- Estimated completion time for search operations is expected to be between April 30 and May 14, 2003.
- The main debris search corridor is a 10-mile wide by 240-mile long area, extending from Ellis County, Texas to Toledo Bend Reservoir on the Texas, Louisiana border.
- The Texas primary search field has been narrowed to 19 counties in East Texas. All known debris in Louisiana has been picked up.



## What do you know about FIRE...and how to survive one?



Every day in America, families experience the horror of fire. Unfortunately, too many people don't understand fire, and therefore don't really know how to protect themselves or their family members. Each year more than 4,000 people die in this country and more than 25,000 are injured in fires -- many of which could have been prevented.

The United States Fire Administration (USFA), a division of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), believes that fire deaths can be reduced by teaching people the basic facts about fire...so here are some simple facts that explain the particular characteristics of FIRE.

■ **FIRE IS FAST!** There is little time in which to make decisions. In less than 30 seconds, a small flame can get completely out of control and turn into a major fire. It only takes minutes for thick black smoke to fill a house. In minutes a house can be engulfed in flames. Most fires occur in the home when people are asleep. If you wake up to a fire, you won't have time to grab valuables because fire spreads too quickly and the smoke is too thick. There is only time to escape!

■ **FIRE IS HOT!** Heat is more threatening than flames. A fire's heat alone can kill. Room temperatures in a fire can be 100 degrees at floor level and rise to 600 degrees at eye level. Inhaling this super hot air will scorch your lungs. This heat can melt clothes to your skin. In five minutes a room can get so hot that everything in it ignites at once...this is called flashover.

■ **FIRE IS DARK!** Fire isn't bright, it's pitch black. Fire starts bright, but quickly produces black smoke and complete darkness. If you wake up to a fire you may be blinded, disoriented and unable to find your way around the home you've lived in for years.

■ **FIRE IS DEADLY!** Smoke and toxic gases kill more people than flames do. Fire uses up the oxygen you need and produces smoke and poisonous gases that can kill. Breathing even small amounts of smoke and toxic gases can make you drowsy, disoriented and short of breath. The odorless, colorless gas fumes can lull you into a deep sleep before the flames reach your door. You may not wake up in time to escape.

■ **WHAT YOU CAN DO TO SURVIVE A FIRE...**in the event of a fire, remember time is the biggest enemy and every second counts. Escape first, then call for help. Develop a home fire escape plan and designate a meeting place outside. Make sure everyone in the family knows two ways to escape from every room. Practice feeling your way out with your eyes closed. Never stand up in a fire...always crawl low under the smoke and try to keep your mouth covered. NEVER return to a burning building for ANY reason...it may cost you your life. Having a working smoke alarm dramatically increases your chances of surviving a fire. Practice your home escape plan frequently with the whole family...it can happen to you. ■

**DISTRICT**  
**FIREFIGHTER**  
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in your smoke detectors!**

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