



# DISTRICT FIREFIGHTER HARRIS COUNTY ESD #28

## ESD FACTS

- Fire is the third leading cause of accidental death in the home; at least 80 percent of all fire deaths occur in residences.
- About 2 million fires are reported each year. Many others go unreported.
- Careless smoking is the leading cause of fire deaths.
- In the first six months of this year, PVFD responded to more than 700 fire, ems and mutual aid calls.

### HCESD #28

#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Curtis Cook** - President  
Ponderosa resident

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## Ponderosa VFD Headquarters Has Become a Neighborhood Landmark



After 10 years of careful planning, the Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Department headquarters become a reality in 1998, and is now a showcase for state-of-the-art fire fighting skill and equipment. Thanks to an outstanding, forward-thinking Board of Directors, the organization was poised and ready to acquire land when it became available at a surprisingly affordable price in 1992, well under market value. The dream was finally on the drawing board.

With the assistance of experienced firefighters and an architect who serves as a volunteer Board member for Harris County ESD #28, the facility began to take shape. The process of designing a highly functional building that would accommodate live-in fire fighters, include electrical generation capabilities, and also be home to the organization's administrative team, finally moved through the construction phase.

The completed PVFD structure incorporates more than 19,000 square feet and was built at a cost of \$1.6 million, financed over 15 years at a rate of 5.676 percent. Thanks to the very generous efforts of the Board member/architect, much of the construction materials and fixtures were acquired at very favorable prices. The construction manager and administrative assistant also donated hundreds of volunteer hours to help complete the project within the projected timetable, *under budget and without any increase in taxes.*

Today, the Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Department headquarters proudly stands as a monument to cooperation and ingenuity. ■



*From the Chief's Desk...*

## **AN INNOVATIVE PAST IS PROLOGUE...**

In December, 1972, a few dedicated individuals decided a fire station was needed in the area of I-45 and FM 1960 to serve the new, growing area. This group started with nothing -- no fire truck, no fire station, and no money.

Money was raised through donations and a two bay fire station was constructed in the Ponderosa Forest subdivision. The station was known as Spring station number three. A 1972 Ward LaFrance pumper was the station's first engine. A pierce mini-pumper joined the fleet in 1975. In 1976, the Ponderosa became its own department.

Two additional bays and an upstairs training room were constructed in 1977. The majority of the construction was done by the firefighters. A light rescue truck was added to the growing fleet in the same year. The late seventies saw



the addition of another Pierce pumper (our first top mount pump panel) and our first ladder truck -- a 75" American LaFrance. The area was growing and we were running over 50 calls a month.

In the early 80's, we acquired two new pumpers to replace the original apparatus. The fast-growing Cypresswood/Cypressdale area emphasized the



need for another station to shorten response time. Andy Meyer (Fire Marshal at the time) took on this project and Station 2 came online and expanded our capabilities.

By the mid-80's, a Pierce 95' platform and a Pierce heavy rescue vehicle were in our stations. At this point, we saw the need to replace our fund-raising mechanism -- donations -- with a rural fire protection district. The cost of apparatus, the need for budgetary planning, and the need to boost the commitment from the business community dictated this move.

During the 1990's, we constructed Station 3 to serve the Inverness Forest, Northview and Willow West subdivisions along with the grow-

ing apartment complexes. An emergency services district replaced the RFPD in the mid-90's. Throughout this decade, apparatus replacements were made to keep up with fast-moving technologies. A 100 ft. platform truck replaced our old platform in 1999, and a new rescue truck replaced the 1986 model at the end of August.

We are deeply proud of the steady growth of our fire fighting capabilities over the past quarter Century -- from one station with one truck making 50 runs a year to three stations with seven apparatus making 1500 runs a year. At every step along the way we had but one objective -- to be prepared to respond in the shortest possible time to the emergency needs of the residents in our service area utilizing skilled, highly trained personnel and the latest in fire fighting and rescue technology.

This level of capability does not just occur -- it is the result of careful long-range planning, extensive continuing education, and the unwavering support of the community we serve. Ponderosa has met the challenges in the past, and has the commitment to do so in the future. ■

**Chief John O'Gorman**



# Wildfire!

Based on a first-hand report by Jim Luplow

“I was fortunate to be able to participate in the recent firefighter exchange program between the Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Department in Houston,” explained Jim Luplow, “and the Campbell County Fire Department in Wyoming. This program allowed four firefighters (two went in July, two in August) from the PVFD to travel to Wyoming to operate as part of that department for a week. Campbell County will send four of its firefighters to the PVFD later in the year.”

“Participating along with me in the exchange were Dustin McDonald, career firefighter; Richard Reeg, volunteer, owns own construction company; and Ray Palcic, volunteer, who owns his own construction company. The participants took along their own issued gear and got the wildland gear -- pants, shirt, hard hat, gloves, and back pack -- in Wyoming.”

The program is based on an innovative concept that was started by the International Association of Fire Chief’s, Volunteer



Chief’s Section. The men selected to make the trip are “seasoned” enough to handle totally different fire emergencies and to bring back information about strategies and techniques to pass along through training to other PVFD volunteers and career firefighters.

“The main focus for us was to learn about wild land (woods/brush) fire fighting. The PVFD covers a relatively small (13 square miles), but highly populated (50,000 people) area and is geared toward structural fire and rescue operations.

The Campbell County FD covers a very large area (5,000 square miles) with a limited population (40,000 people) and spends much of their time fighting large wild land fires. The goal of the program was to exchange ideas and techniques between the two departments.”

“Upon arrival in Gillette, WY, we were taken to the main fire station where we would be living for the next week. The Chief took us on a tour of a small portion of the County, and we met some of the department members who were out mopping up a grass fire from the previous day. While driving around with the Chief, we made a couple of EMS calls assisting the local ambulance service. At 4:30 a.m. the

following morning, we responded to a house fire in Gillette. We helped extinguish the fire and were able to show the guys from Campbell County a few new techniques which they hadn’t seen before.”

Later that day the, the team



was sent to assist a department in the next County with a medium sized brush and timber fire...that was three hours away. This particular round trip took 12 hours.

After settling into the routine of the everyday operations, the firefighters ran a few minor calls, and then a thunderstorm struck with dry lightning striking and starting several brush fires. Jim and Ray, along with three CCFD members, were deployed to a brush fire in the middle of a large cattle ranch. By the time the team arrived, about 100 acres had burned and it was spreading fast in the wind.

“The five of us were not going to be able to stop it,” Jim said, “we called for help and concentrated on the edges and keep-

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# Windisch Receives National Recognition

Harris County Fire and Emergency Services CEO/Fire Marshal, Fred C. Windisch has been honored as the **Volunteer Fire Chief of the Year** by *Fire Chief Magazine*. Windisch was recognized for his leadership with the Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Department where he had served for 15 years before taking the assignment as Fire Marshall.

Windisch began his volunteer fire service career in 1972 in his hometown of Staunton, Illinois. After being transferred to Houston in 1975 by his employer, Shell Oil Company, Windisch joined Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Department where he worked his way up through the ranks.

Starting in 1985, he spent a decade as Fire Chief -- with 1995-96 spent as Assistant Chief -- and then returned as Chief until January, 2000 when he became the Chief Executive Officer of the Harris County Fire and Emergency Services Department (formerly the Fire Marshal's office).

Windisch has earned recognition through the years for his aggressive advocacy for fire prevention education in the community, for maintaining state-of-the-art readiness in both equipment and personnel, and for important legislative initiatives to promote fire prevention and public safety.

During his leadership at PVFD, the organization gained a national reputation for excellence and innovation. Among his accomplishments as Chief is the design and construction of an impressive new station, completed on time and under budget; the creation of an Emergency Services District in 1996; and the recruiting and development of a highly trained team of professional and volunteer firefighters.

In his current assignment -- which covers an area of over 1050 square miles of unincorporated Harris County with a population of over 950,000 residents who are protected by 29 volunteer and combination fire departments --



**Fred Windisch**

Windisch is in the process of reorganizing the Department's structure and operations and adding fire fighter training and public education. A new \$9.3 million Sheriff's and Fire Training Academy has been designated and groundbreaking is scheduled for later this year or early next year.

Scott Windisch, Fred and Theresa Windisch's son, is also a firefighter and now continues the three-generation family tradition of firefighting, and now serves as Deputy Chief of Ponderosa VFD.

## Wildfire!

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ing it away from some small buildings and wells. There were several other fires that the CCFD was fighting at the same, so the help didn't arrive until 90 minutes later."

"By the end of the day, the fire had grown to 1500 acres. We spent the night sleeping at the fire scene and started working to mop it up during the following morning."

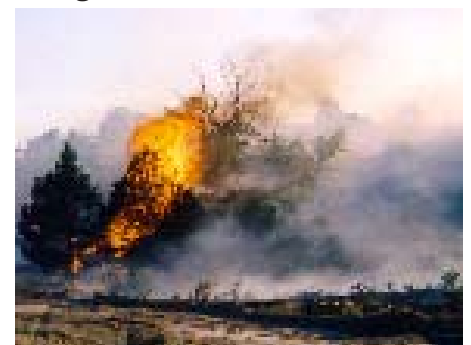
By that afternoon, winds had picked up and the fire took off again, burning another 1000 acres. By the time the fire was finally out -- four days later -- it had consumed 4000 acres and had

been fought by over 75 fire fighters from many different agencies.

"The exchange allowed us to learn about how to set backfires with drip torches and establish fire lines; which types of terrain are suitable for fighting the fire -- and which to stay out of. We learned how difficult it is to coordinate a large fire when there may be 10 or 15 different units spread out over several miles. And, we saw how the weather conditions greatly affect the fire...how a sudden wind change can be very dangerous. With wildfires, we found out, you had to plan 6 to 12 hours ahead. If you call for an aerial tanker to drop water, for example -- at an

expense of \$10,000 -- it takes about 90 minutes for it to arrive."

"The exchange was a very worthwhile undertaking," Jim reports. "We experienced a lot of things that will make us better firefighters." ■



*Jim Luplow is a volunteer firefighter as well as a police officer with HPD. He is married and has one child.*

# The Art of Fire Fighting...

Visitors to PVFD Station 1 are often surprised to discover an original painting hanging in the lobby. The palette is soft blues and the smudgy charcoal color of dense smoke, and the subject is urgent and compelling -- a firefighter struggles to free the hose which is snagged by debris on a burning building as flames lick the structure below him.

**“Snag in the Rafters,”** painted by John “Gusty” Gustafson, was inspired by an actual event witnessed by the artist. An apartment fire flared up on March 24, 1992 and Ponderosa responded promptly to battle the blaze, raising ladders to access the second floor and the smouldering roof. As one of the firefighters was pulling a hose into position in the rafters to extinguish stubborn hot-spots, he had to release the hose before continuing the task at hand.

The scene made a searing impression on Gustafson,



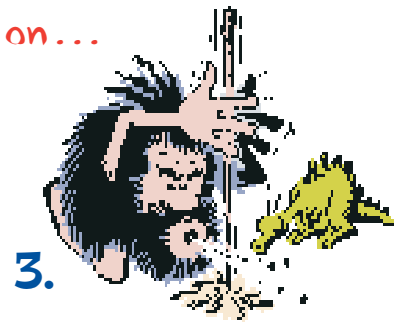
and he drew some comparisons between the firefighter and an astronaut on a solitary spacewalk, joined to his ship by the umbilical cord lifeline.

Gustafson points out that he used some artistic license in his painting, because it was necessary to depict less smoke so the dilemma of the firefighter could be

clearly seen. The artist is a Houston native who has a strong background in art and photography, but has no formal training in painting

The painting, which was initially on display for the Station opening in 1999, is now generously on loan to Ponderosa VFD by the artist. ■

Fire has been a force for good or evil since the dawn of time...  
It just depends on which side of the stick you're on...



# So, what does it cost to equip a fire department?

Among the long list of things most of us take for granted is the incredible amount of money it takes to outfit a fire department. Sure, we don't need their services every day, but just ask someone who has experienced a fire at their home or office, if it does ever happen to you, you want the best trained firefighters, the fastest response time, the most current equipment, and the latest in technology to be there for you.

Fortunately, the Harris County Emergency Services Dis-

trict #28 has made a long term commitment to excellence across the board. This involves careful long range planning and the scheduled replacement of the well-used fire trucks, thorough continuing and special education for career and volunteer firefighters, and staying current on advances in technology.

Here are some typical prices for clothing, electronic equipment, high-tech rescue aids, fire trucks, and critical communications equipment.



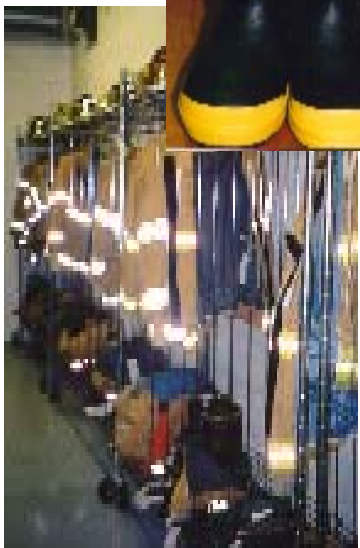
***Dressed (and Equipped) for Firefighting Success!***



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Firefighter's  
Boots  
\$88.00



Bunker Coat	\$588.00
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(leather)	\$210.00
Firefighter's Hood	\$40-\$140
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**Aerial Tower Ladder Truck --  
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# Fire Prevention Saves Lives



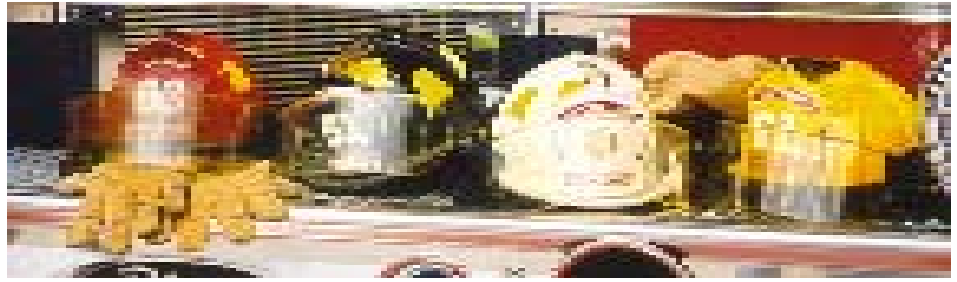
Fire Prevention Week goes all the way back to the Great Chicago Fire, which occurred on October 9, 1871. While the origin of the fire has never been determined, popular folklore blames Mrs. O'Leary's cow for kicking over a lamp that ignited the conflagration. Amazingly, the infamous fire destroyed more than 17,400 acres in 27 hours and killed more than 250 people.

On the fire's 40th anniversary, the organization of fire Marshals that evolved into the International Fire Marshals Association, IFMA, sponsored the first Fire Prevention Day. Since 1922, National Fire Prevention Week is observed the Sunday through Saturday period in which October 9th falls.

This year's theme -- "**Fire Drills: The Great Escape!**" -- addresses home fire escape planning and practice. Since this program was initiated three years ago, the National Fire Protection Association has documented 58 lives saved -- 35 of them under age 12 -- as a direct result of families' participation in "The Great Escape!"

The basic messages the program communicates are that

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## MEET YOUR PONDEROSA FIREFIGHTERS...

**MITCH HUBBARD** has been with Ponderosa for 11 of his 28 years. Mitch graduated from Westfield High School and went on to Harris County Community College for EMT/EMT-I basic level courses. He is currently working on a Fire Technology Degree at Houston Community College. In addition to service with PVFD, he is a firefighter/driver for The Woodlands Fire Department. Never content with the status-quo, Mitch has pursued a number of specialized training opportunities to enhance his fire fighting skills. He gained certification as a Rescue Specialist through TEEEX, and has also completed courses in high-rise rescue, vehicle rescue, trench rescue, confined space rescue, and Haz-Mat. Mitch will tell you that fire and rescue "is" his life and, for now, he devotes most of his waking hours to his career. Why does he do it? "That's a very simple question," he explains. "It is fun and exciting and it's cool to be able to help people."



**DUSTIN MCDONALD** joined PVFD while he was a senior at Westfield High School. "I was hanging around with the wrong kids, and joining the fire department gave me a whole new perspective on things and actually kept me out of trouble," he explains. "After graduating, I joined the Coast Guard and served for four years as a damage controlman, stationed in New York and Los Angeles. Having trained in Marine fire fighting in the service, when he left the Coast Guard he earned his EMT and fire fighting certification at Texas A&M University. He

worked for a year at the Port of Houston, and then became a career firefighter with the Conroe Fire Department and returned as a volunteer member at PVFD. If you ask Dustin what he does in his spare time, he doesn't miss a beat before answering, "Volunteer."

That may change before too long, however. Dustin and his wife Amy are expecting their first child in May, 2001. "We're really excited about this," Dustin grins, "and I know I'll be spending more time with my wife in the months ahead...and that's fine with me." When he does have some leisure time, Dustin says he is an avid outdoorsman and, given the opportunity, loves to do some hunting or fishing. ■

## FIRE PREVENTION

Continued from page 7

fire can spread through your home quite rapidly and it is critical that all family members know how to respond immediately when the smoke alarm sounds.

1. Locate two escape routes from each room -- first the door, second a window. If you have a second story consider buying fire escape ladders.

2. As you exit, close all doors behind you to slow the spread of fire and smoke.

3. If exit is blocked by smoke or fire, use your second exit to escape. If you must escape through smoke, stay low and crawl under the smoke to safety. Crawl on your



Fire Dept. Emergency Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Smoke Alarm



## "We don't just fight fires..."

This touching scene was captured by a Houston Chronicle photographer, at a major apartment blaze that destroyed some resident's homes. Ponderosa Firefighter **Gerald Matthews** comforted this young girl when he returned her favorite doll that she thought was lost in the flames. The gentleness, care and concern so poignantly etched on his face in this memorable moment is characteristic of the men and women who dedicate their lives to emergency services. ■



\* Reprinted by permission, Houston Chronicle

hands and knees, not belly, because heavier poisons will settle in a thin layer on the floor.

4. If you live in a high-rise building, use the stairs – never the elevator – in case of fire.

5. Choose a meeting place a safe distance from your home and make sure every family knows this.

6. Make sure the street number/address of your home is visible to

firefighters.

7. Once outside, call 9-1-1 immediately from the nearest phone, or use a portable or cellular phone you can grab quickly on the way out.

8. Practice your escape drill at least twice a year.

9. NEVER go back inside a burning building! Once you are out and safe, stay out! ■

**DISTRICT**  
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HARRIS COUNTY ESD #28

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