



# P O N D E R O S A

# FIREFIGHTER

## HARRIS COUNTY ESD #28

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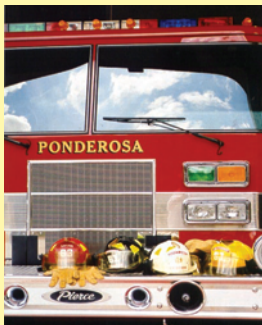
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## New Technology to Help in Reducing Emergency Response Time

When responding to emergencies, time is of the essence. Minutes, even seconds, can mean the difference between life and death. So, as you might imagine, one of the most challenging and frustrating issues for emergency responders is...you guessed it...traffic!

In an effort to reduce the impact of these costly delays, several emergency response agencies and emergency services districts partnered with Harris County to begin a five-year project. The plan? To minimize mobility issues by installing and operating a high-technology-based traffic signal preemption system. Unlike the current optical preemption system - which merely recognizes our presence and gives us a green light with no consideration for corridor coordination - the new system uses GPS, radio links, fiber optics, dispatch data, and individual vehicle activation to communicate with TranStar, the region's transportation mobility management team.

Harris County Engineering is in the process of installing a network of fiber-optic communications links to TranStar which will help to "adjust" various traffic corridors and assist in traffic signal coordination. The Louetta corridor will be our first installation, consisting of nineteen intersections between Ella and FM 249.

### The 4-1-1 on High-Tech Traffic Signal Preemption

This latest emergency preemption technology works by allowing the TranStar mobility system to recognize when and where emergency vehicles are navigating toward an emergency. GPS predicts the speed and location of the vehicle, "tells" the next few intersections that something is about to occur, and the corridor adjusts its timing to minimize traffic disruption. The system is so intelligent, in fact, that it knows when a turn signal is activated, and provides us with a green arrow turn light without disturbing more traffic signals ahead.

The vehicle radio link assists in the coordination, the fiber optics link directly to TranStar, and the computer servers and software at TranStar do

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# MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF...

As we look ahead to the new year, we also look back at the marked improvements and challenges of 2008 in an effort to continue to run this department in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

## Payin' at the Pump...

As you can imagine, the price of oil has had a ripple effect in all of our operations. While we are currently experiencing a reduction in fuel costs, this past year's supply was anything but economical. Literally everything we purchased was affected by the price of energy. In fact, our 2008 fuel budget will cost us about \$12,000 more than originally planned for, and our apparatus maintenance costs have increased. As a result, our 2009 tax rate will be slightly increased from 7.9 cents to 8.115 cents per hundred dollars of evaluation. For a \$150,000 property, the increase will equate to about \$3.22 per year.

## Staffing, Equipment & More

In 2008, we added three more full-time firefighters to our stable of professionals, and we are in line for a federal grant that will pay a significant portion of the cost for three additional firefighters (for a five-year period). We continue to maintain an outstanding workforce, with 90% compliance on having all of our volunteers state basic certified - adding to the confidence that our responders are trained and committed to helping you.

We ordered a replacement ladder truck for delivery in April 2009, and purchased land for relocating our number two fire station located within the Cypressdale Subdivision. The new property is on Louetta near Sorrel Ridge.

A federal grant has also been awarded to us in the amount of \$125,000 to pay 90% of the costs/installation of a driving simulator (similar to what airline pilots



**Chief Windisch**

use). The simulator will help ensure our new drivers are fully-versed and tested prior to getting behind the wheel of the big rigs, and our seasoned drivers are able to hone their skills on a regular basis.

During Hurricane Ike month (September), we responded to 192 emergencies - a new record -- and during October, we rivaled Hurricane Rita month with 152 responses. The increased population and mobile society has certainly affected our overall responsibilities.

We wish you well for the New Year and beyond. Our country is facing some difficult times, but we are strong and we shall overcome.

**P.S. Please don't buy any fireworks!**

*J. C. Windisch*

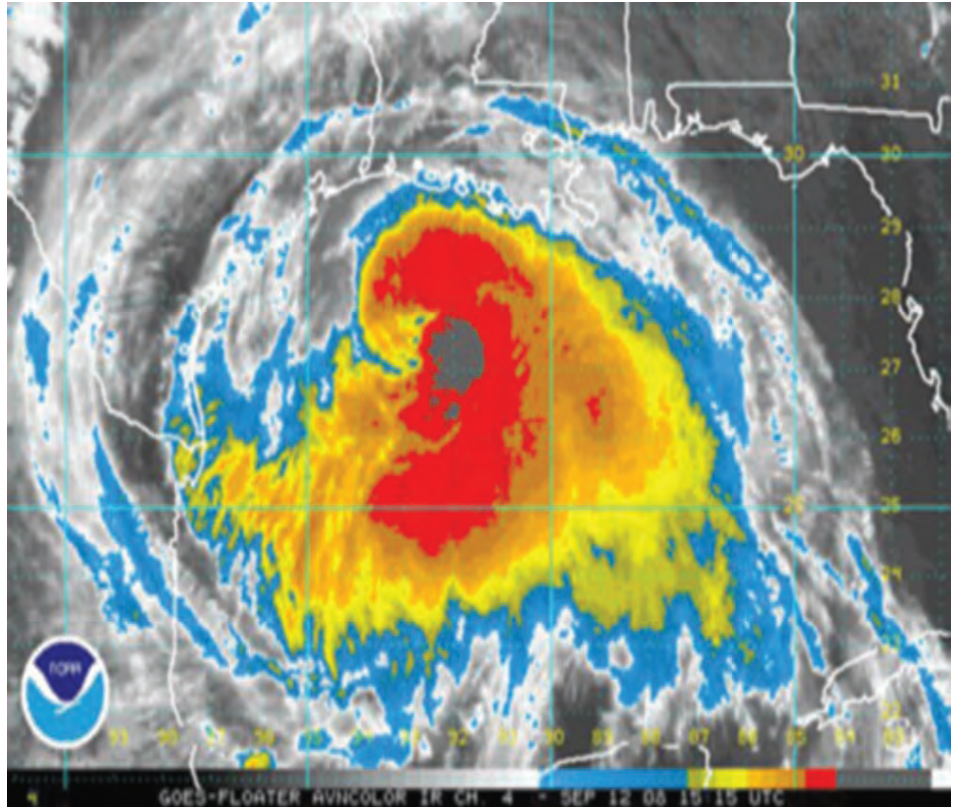


# Teaming Up Against Hurricane Ike

On September 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike slammed into the Texas coast and headed our way...bringing with it rain, destructive winds, weeks of power outages, and a whole lot of clean up!

Although the Ponderosa Fire Department does not have the ability to restore power (believe me, we wish we did), we are proud to say that our local governments, including Fire, EMS, Water Districts and Subdivision Homeowner Associations, did a fantastic job handling their responsibilities!

The Ponderosa FD was as prepared as possible, and it paid off. There were absolutely no service interruptions once sustained winds dipped below 45 mph. From the moment it was feasibly possible, our crews worked feverishly to open the roads for our emergency access and your needs. In fact, we had almost all the streets cleared of downed trees by 4:00 p.m. on September 13th, and outside of one channel that was destroyed (and has since been replaced), our radio system network worked flawlessly. The Cypress Creek EMS communications center was actually "overstaffed", and



had an impressive twenty-six ambulances on the street...amazing!

In a nine-day period following Hurricane Ike, we tallied up 111 responses, many of which were fires. In only one instance was there major damage in our district (to a home in the 1700 block of Castlerock in Ponderosa east). A call to respond to the fire, which was caused by unattended cooking in the middle of the night, was delayed due to compromised home phone and cellular communications. The home and its contents were totally destroyed, but thanks to smoke detectors, all occupants made it out alive. It's just another reminder to keep those devices in working order. They really do save lives.

We want to take this time

to thank the crews once again for their service and dedication. We'd also like to acknowledge the continued support of you, our community. From well wishes to much needed meals, you kept us going when the days (and nights) seemed so long.

Thanks also to the Westador Community Emergency Response Team, our water districts (and their generator backups), the Harris County Office of Emergency Management, the Harris County Fire Marshal's office, and of course, our full roster of paid and volunteer staff. Unfortunate events such as Hurricane Ike sometime teach us how very important it is to have an involved community. It certainly paid off in this instance, and we hope you continue to stay involved in the future. ■



# Is Your Child Involved in Illegal Street Racing?

From time to time, we hear about a horrible accident suspected to be caused by “street racing”. The key word here is **suspected**. Street racing -- defined by Wikipedia as “a form of unsanctioned and illegal auto racing which takes place on public roads” -- is admittedly difficult for law enforcement to “bust”. Participants are quite savvy and often have sophisticated scanners to warn them of approaching police vehicles. By the time law enforcement arrives at a location, the area is clear. And in the case of accidents, suspected street racing is hard to prove.

Take, for example, the recent and fatal accident on FM 1960 that claimed the lives of two Klein Forest students and an elderly woman. It was widely reported that the young man driving his father’s sports car was racing another car down the busy thoroughfare when he skidded out of control and hit -- head on-- a 74-year-old woman. Bryan Cotton, a Discount Tire employee near the crash scene, was quoted in an October 25th *Houston Chronicle* article as saying, “I knew the second I heard it that there was no way anyone was going to survive that wreck. The sound put a chill down my spine.”

Police did question the driver suspected of racing the car that eventually lost control, but he denied being involved and said he just observed the crash. Although witnesses did see the two cars “revving up” at a light - proving “street racing” was the cause of the accident will be difficult at best. In many cases, lack of clear evidence or witness testimony results in the accident being classified as the



result of “excessive speed”, and not specifically “street racing”.

One of our own, Junior Captain, Rick Reeg, responded with the Ponderosa FD rescue team to a reported vehicle accident with entrapment — the devastating wreck on FM 1960 — and has seen his share of similar wrecks in the past. He knows all too well the difficulties in not only proving street car racing, but also in getting young men, especially, to truly understand the dangers.

“There really have to be some preventative measures put in place,” said Reeg. “If you’re a parent of a young man (from sixteen into his 20’s), and you provide him with a high speed sports car, he’s going to speed. It’s in their blood. It’s what they want to do. So the best thing is to eliminate, as best as possible, that temptation. Yes, they need transportation, but they don’t need a race car. And there should be pretty steep consequences at home for speeding tickets.”

When it comes to signs your child may be involved or

interested in street racing, Reeg says to look at their cars or listen carefully to their requests for “upgrades” or “improvements”.

“Are they requesting known racing components be added to their car’s engine or elsewhere on the vehicle,” said Reeg. “Requests like wide, low profile tires, race car gadgets, modified steering wheels. These are all signs of an interest in racing, and can be extremely dangerous. Many “modified” steering wheels have no airbags, so you can imagine the consequence of a high speed wreck with no protection. Parents might even consider -- as a preventative measure -- modifying the engine computer control system to set limits on speed and RPM.”

Reeg also suggests that if your child has an interest in racing, avoid spending money on sports cars and fancy components. Instead, take them to sanctioned race tracks, where a safe, controlled environment allows them to satisfy that urge without endangering their own lives or those of friends and other innocent drivers.

“There are many places,

especially in Texas, to enjoy legal track racing,” said Reeg. “Nascar has a number of sanctioned events for the fraction of the cost of a souped-up sports car. And if this type of thing still doesn’t do the trick, maybe you can take them on a drive down FM 1960 to the median where a painted cross now displays ‘rest in peace’.”

“Young folks assume they’re invincible,” he continued. “Sometimes they have to be shocked into realizing they’re not. At prom time each year, we put on a number of ‘reenactments’ in conjunction with the DARE program. What we show can be gory and hard-hitting, but these kids need to know that they can seriously injure themselves or their friends, or possibly even die. We feel that this in-your-face approach really has an impact on their thinking, and we hope it saves lives.”

Speaking of drinking and driving, street car racing does not live alone in its illegality. Where there is street racing, there are generally other illegal activities taking place.

According to a December 2004 U.S. Department of Justice guide put out by their Office of

Community Oriented Policing Services\*, the following problems often accompany street racing, and must be addressed together and separately by local law enforcement:

- Auto theft
- Assaults (including assaults in retaliation for failure to pay racing bets)
- Cruising
- Curfew violations
- Drunken driving and driving under the influence of drugs
- Gang-related activity
- Insurance fraud (related to racers betting on outcomes)
- Illegal vehicle modification (e.g., smog control alteration)
- Illicit gambling
- Noise complaints
- Public intoxication / urination and other public order offenses
- Theft and fencing of auto parts
- Thefts from autos
- Trespassing
- Vandalism and littering

The state of Texas enacted harsher penalties for street racing in 2003. The new law made street racing a more serious violation, punishable by up to six months in jail and a \$2,000 fine for both drivers and passengers, and



up to a \$4,000 fine and one year in jail if the driver was intoxicated, had an open container of alcohol in the vehicle, or had previously been convicted of the same offense, and up to a \$500 fine for spectators. But, as stated earlier in this article, this offense can be difficult to catch or prove. As parents, friends and loved ones, we must be aware of the signs - and the devastating consequences - and work with our kids and local law enforcement to try to eliminate those dangers.

\* U.S. Department of Justice - Office of Community Oriented Policing Services; *Problem-Oriented Guide for Police Problem-Specific Guide Series, No. 28; Street Racing* by Kenneth J. Peak and Ronald W. Glensor.

## Drunk Driving and the Holidays...

As you might suspect, drunk driving arrests AND alcohol-related crashes rise during the Holiday season (Thanksgiving through New Year’s). In addition to the normal rate of offenders on our roads, special events, holiday parties and extended time off from work often put additional folks out there who don’t normally drink. Drinking and driving is **always** dangerous, but for those who don’t

often imbibe, alcohol can cause impairment much more quickly. Add these folks to the road, and the results can be devastating.

According to MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving), drunk driving is “the most frequently committed violent crime in our country. And in Texas, this crime is committed more frequently than in any other state.”

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)



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# Ponderosa Firefighter Spotlight...



**Jim Luplow**

After two key events during the 1995 Christmas holiday: a fire at his mother's home and the dramatic response to a gas leak down the street from his own house, Jim Luplow finally decided to pursue his interest in firefighting.

"After the crew finished the gas leak call, I went by the station and talked to some of the guys," said Luplow. "A couple of months later, I was in Firefighter training."

The rest is history. Luplow has been with PFD for twelve years now (as a firefighter, Station 3 Captain, and currently as a Station 3 Lieutenant). And, as if serving his community through firefighting isn't enough, Luplow is also a full-time Sergeant with the Houston Police Department and has been in the Marine Corps Reserve for over eleven years. In fact, he recently returned from thirteen

months of active duty...half of that time was spent in Iraq.

"I was stationed in the city of Haditha (population 80,000), northwest of Baghdad, near the Syrian border," said Luplow. "Seeing how hard people had to work just to survive reminded me how fortunate we are in the United States."

It also reinforced his commitment to helping those in need. Although his time at PFD has had a few challenging moments, namely the expansion of Station 63 and the construction of the fire training field back in 2002, the majority of his experiences are well worth the time and potential sacrifices.

"Six or seven years ago, I went to a local locksmith shop," said Luplow. "As the clerk was making my keys, I realized that he was the same man who had suffered a heart attack a few months earlier. We'd responded to his call, performed CPR on him for quite some time, and saved his life. To see him there, alive and going about his daily activity, was really fulfilling. It's why we do what we do."

At 39, Luplow plans on staying active in firefighting as long as his health permits, and will likely retire from HPD in about fifteen years.

"Getting up the day after a big fire hurts a little bit more each year!" said Luplow. "But it's what I love, and I'll do it as long as I possibly can."

In his rare time off, Luplow enjoys reading and spending as much time as he can with his wife, Jackie - a 4th grade teacher, and his 14-year-old daughter,



**Mat Mason**

For Mat Mason, a career in emergency service wasn't only a dream, it was a family tradition. A firefighter for ten years, and an EMT for seven, Mason was taught the value of serving his community by those closest to him...his parents. In years past, both his mother and father were volunteers with the Harris County Emergency Corps (HCEC) and Cypress Creek EMS. His mother eventually moved on to teaching emergency medicine, and his father is now a volunteer for Waller County EMS as a Field Supervisor.

"I have always wanted to be a firefighter," said Mason. "Even as a kid, I preferred to hang out at the local fire station and was in awe of the big, red fire trucks! I enjoy what I do. I enjoy helping people. And I wouldn't dream of doing anything else."

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Mason joined Ponderosa FD two years ago, after competing for one of two open full-time positions.

“The process was tough,” Mason stated. “But I made it, and it was well worth the effort.”

Mason is an EMT, a Certified Fire Fighter, and the C-shift, full-time Lieutenant. Further proving his passion and commitment to this career, he also volunteers for Champions Area Volunteer Fire Department as a Safety Officer.

“When I’m not at Ponderosa FD, I’m likely at Champions Area VFD,” said Mason. “They are my homes away from home...my extended family...my fellow brothers and sisters; and they are people who share my same core values...to protect and serve in any way possible. I’m doing what I love to do, and I hope to continue to do so for many years.”

Ponderosa FD appreciates Mason’s commitment and service and we look forward to standing by his side throughout all the challenges and triumphs to come.

In his “off-time”, Mason enjoys spending time with family and friends, and squeezing in a few precious hours of sleep!



### Tyler Leach

Tyler Leach, a graduate of Klein Collins High School and a soon-to-be graduate of paramedic school, joined the Ponderosa Fire Department as a cadet in 2003. He is currently a Lieutenant and one of three full-time firefighters hired on with PFD in 2007. He is a Texas Commission on Fire Protection certified firefighter, advanced certified with the State Fireman’s and Fire Marshals Association, and an EMT.

Like many others, Leach became interested in firefighting when he watched some volunteers jump into pumper truck and race off to an emergency.

“One day it just hit me, and I drove over to the local fire station to put in an application,”

said Leach. “I was too young to join the fire department in my district (Spring VFD), so I joined the junior program at Ponderosa and eventually went through their fire academy. I’m so grateful it happened that way. I sincerely feel this department is the elite choice, and I’m proud to be a part of it.”

Early on as a volunteer, Leach decided firefighting / paramedics was his career of choice.

“I enjoy the lifestyle of the fire department,” said Leach. “I truly look forward to coming to work, knowing that this day will be nothing like the last. It keeps the boredom down and the level of excitement up. And to be involved in a profession that has such a positive impact on the community is an honor and a privilege. There’s do doubt this is what I want to do.”

Twenty-two year-old Leach has one brother, Jason, a dentist in Tuscon, and his parents, David and Donna, are retired and have lived in Mexico for the past three years. Leach enjoys hunting, riding Harley’s, floating the river, and generally going on vacation any chance he can get.

“It’s an important aspect of life,” said Leach. “To get out there and explore.” ■



## Sparky Says...

- Keep candles away from decorations and other combustible materials, and ALWAYS use a ceramic plate under the candle.
- If you’re using a space heater, make sure it carries

the mark of an independent testing laboratory, and be sure fixed space heaters are installed by a qualified technician...there should be a 36-inch space clearance between space heaters and anything that can burn.

- Have fireplaces, chimneys and chimney connectors inspected annually by a professional, and cleaned as often as inspections suggest. Use only wood that is seasoned to reduce creosote buildup.
- Make sure your fireplace has a sturdy screen to prevent sparks from flying into the room. Allow fireplace ashes to cool before disposing in a metal container.
- NO FIREWORKS, PLEASE!



## Drunk Driving

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statistics show that **1,569 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes in Texas in 2006, and more than 63,500 people were injured.** We ask that you do your part this season, and throughout the year, to bring down these startling numbers. The life you save could be your own or that of a dear friend or loved one. It matters. Don't let a few drinks and poor decision making change your life forever.

Please seriously consider the following tips offered by MADD to stay safe this Holiday season and beyond:

- If you drink, don't drive, no matter how little you think you have had.
- Designate a driver before you arrive at an event or party.
- If hosting a party, make sure to set rules on drinking and driving. Offer to provide a ride home or a place for guests who drink to sleep.
- Educate family, friends and co-workers about the risks of drinking and driving. Provide them with pamphlets or give MADD information and statistics to help bring awareness to the drink-

ing and driving problem (go to [www.madd.org](http://www.madd.org) for information).

- If possible, avoid driving during the early and late evening hours during the holiday season. Protect yourself and passengers by wearing a safety belt at all times, in case of a crash.

Here at the Ponderosa Fire Department, we see the tragic results of drunk driving all too often. If you do choose to drink, please do so responsibly and **DO NOT** drive. Also, look out for signs that others on the road may be impaired, such as noticeable weaving, bumping lane lines, no turn signals, or driving without headlights. If you run across someone you suspect, call 9-1-1 to report the driver and keep your distance.

***We wish you the safest of holidays, and we look forward to serving you in the new year.*** ■



## Traffic Signals

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magic to give us a green light. In the future, installation may also include real-time signage to alert motorists to various road and traffic conditions.

This major project will end up encompassing about 210 intersections within the Cypress Creek EMS district. Fire district partners include Champions FD, Cypress Creek FD, Klein FD, Spring FD, and Ponderosa FD. All of our fire department and EMS agency emergency services districts are providing the funding for this two million dollar project.

A special thank you goes out to Harris County Judge Ed Emmett, Commissioner Jerry Eversole, Harris County Engineering and Fire Marshal Mike Montgomery for their support in this very important, beneficial and life-saving project. ■

**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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This publication is intended for the residents within the Ponderosa VFD service area. If you received it in error, we hope you'll still read it and utilize the fire safety information.

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