



No portion of this article may be reproduced without
express written permission of Style Publishing Group, LLC.
©2007 • All rights reserved.



Style Publishing Group
P.O. Box 1676
Frisco, Texas 75034
Phone: 972.335.1181
Toll Free: 877.781.7067
Fax: 214.722.2313

E-mail: info@friscostyle.com
Web: www.friscostyle.com

Ad Sales: (972) 335-1306



Students learn to extract victims from cars

photo provided by Frisco Fire Department

Citizens with Courage

By Wendy Crooks

AS KIDS WE PRETENDED to be doctors, policemen or even firefighters. Of course, our make-believe scenarios couldn't really portray the precarious situations these heroes actually experience on a daily basis. As adults, when we think of firefighters, we generally picture the situations we've seen on television or in the movies. Many of us can only imagine going into a burning, smoke-filled building.

Each year, however, a small group of Frisco residents decide to do more than imagine what it's like to be a firefighter. They experience it firsthand. They become very familiar with the workings of the Frisco Fire Department as they bravely take part in the Frisco Citizen's Fire Academy.

According to Fire Chief Mack Borchardt, the nine-week program was developed to teach citizens about fire safety, education, what the fire

department does, and how their tax dollars are being spent. Chief Borchardt marveled at how the class has evolved over time. The original class consisted of a small group of citizens who were interested in getting to know more about their community. The Chief said he had known almost everyone in the class for years and it was taught only one time a year. Now, the class is comprised of an average of 20 – 30 people, held twice a year and not know any of its participants. While the class has grown exponentially over the years, one thing has remained the same. The Citizen's Fire Academy continues to reach out to community members and educate them about fire safety and the intricacies of the Fire Department.

Participants in the classes today range from 17-80 years old and have different motivations for taking the class. Some take the class purely to

educate themselves about fire safety. Some to become more active within the community. Others take it because they are considering a career as a firefighter or an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). After completing the class some participants go on to be elected officials. According to Chief Borchardt, the class now truly represents a cross section of our community. He remembered fondly some of the participants from the last group who attended the class. "We had a large group from the Frisco ISD who attended together. Ironically enough, they were by far the biggest class of 'cut-ups' we've had so far."

They might have been cut ups, but they learned what they needed to know. Ginny Patterson, one of the Frisco ISD employees who participated in that class, described her time with her coworkers by saying, "We did have fun." She got very animated when describing the nine-week class, what she learned, and what it meant to her to be able to go through the program. "I'd wanted to take the class for years because I volunteer for



EMT Training

photo provided by Frisco Fire Department

the city of Frisco quite a bit and hoped it would help out with being part of the community.”

Within the first two weeks, Ms. Patterson said that she had a much deeper and greater understanding of what firefighters go through, the commitment they have, and what they will encounter each day. They give each student a pager to carry so they will receive the same calls the firefighters do. Ms. Patterson said this really made her aware of the frequency that these firefighters get called out.

By looking at the Academy overview it appears there is a lot of classroom time. The syllabus lists: the history of the Frisco Fire Department, EMS and ambulance operations, hiring and training process, fire ground operations, fire prevention education, and arson investigation. It isn't until the seventh week that it lists 'Vehicle Extrication and Burn House Demonstration' and even that doesn't paint the full picture. "I thought the class would be very classroom-oriented, instructional. I still can't believe all the things we did. It was a lot of hands-on

stuff," explained Ms. Patterson. Her favorite part of the class was the Burn House Demonstration. "We were able to go into a burning building. I was amazed that within only a few seconds you can't see in front of you at all. It was my favorite part, but it was also the scariest. I really think now I am better prepared to deal with a fire situation if I ever have to."

An additional perk to attending the classes is riding on the trucks with firefighters one night. "We learned how to put on gear quickly and I really enjoyed seeing the determination and concentration the firefighters had as they received the calls and prepared to get to the scene," Ms. Patterson recalled.

While the Burn House Demonstration was her favorite part, climbing the 10-foot truck ladder was the most challenging aspect of the class for Ms. Patterson. A "Fear Factor" episode comes to mind trying to picture her climbing that steep ladder. "Everyone was so encouraging, though. The camaraderie was amazing. The firefighters were so patient and really made us feel like we were part

of the team. We learned to work as a team and we all cheered each other on." Ms. Patterson said that working with the "Jaws of Life" to take apart a car was also an eye-opening experience. Like many, she assumed that the windows were just smashed in but was surprised to learn that there is truly an art and methodology to breaking the glass.

Another very impressive aspect of the program seemed to be the personal stories that some of the instructors told the participants. Ms. Patterson learned of people who perished senselessly because they were either careless or lacked basic fire safety knowledge. "I immediately went out and bought candle warmers to use instead of burning my candles like I normally did. Now I even give candle warmers as gifts."

Captain Brian Lynn has been a firefighter for 13 ½ years in Frisco and has assisted as an instructor since the inception of the Citizen's Fire Academy. His primary focus has been teaching the proper usage of fire extinguishers, public relations, and public education. "One thing that surprises most of the participants is not only the number of things that we have to train for but also the amount of work that we do outside of actually responding to emergencies," explained Captain Lynn. Firefighters work diligently to educate children by visiting schools, speaking to groups and conducting CPR training, First Aid training, working with the clown program and much more. "Educating children is actually easier to do because we can get to them at their schools. Reaching adults is our bigger challenge," said Captain Lynn. The biggest benefit to taking part in the Citizen's Fire Academy is that people learn how to prevent accidents. "Our saying in the fire station is, 'Prevention through education.' The more people we have, the more we can educate."

The Frisco Citizen's Fire Academy is held in the spring and fall and is free to those who live or work in Frisco. For more information or registration, call the Central Fire Station at 972.335.5525 or visit their website at www.friscofire.com.

Wendy Crooks is a freelance writer living in Plano.