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# safety town

by natalie medigovich

**WHEN FRISCO FIRE CHIEF MACK BORCHARDT GETS A GOOD IDEA**, the 30-year fire department veteran and Frisco native has a hard time letting it go. Such is the case with a children's Safety Town, something Borchardt has wanted to build in Frisco for the last ten years. His wait is coming to an end now that the city has increased in population and raised the funds.

A Safety Town is "a place where children learn real life strategies for dealing with emergencies while developing a positive attitude towards safety," according to the fire department's website. Safety Town is a reduced-scale child-sized model of a city where children come to learn hands-on how to protect themselves from hazards like getting out of a (simulated) burning house or crossing the road on a (pretend) busy street. Injury prevention can also be taught in scenarios such as what to do around matches, lighters, lit candles or frayed electric cords--all in a completely safe and supervised educational environment that is also fun.

Borchardt saw his first Safety Town in Longview, Texas in the early 1990s and couldn't stop thinking about how wonderful it would be to take that idea—and run with it—in Frisco. A picture of him in front of one of Longview's mock buildings sits on his desk in his office at Central Fire Station as a constant reminder of his dream.

*Fire Safety Town in Canada  
photos courtesy of Frisco Fire Department*

"Longview's Safety Town had a pedestrian and bike safety area and a room that filled with (non-toxic) smoke to teach kids what to do," Borchardt remembered. "It was a great idea and they did a great job. It's not my new concept. I have seen others in Irving and Abilene too, and stumbled across three in Ontario, Canada. The Waterloo Region has been around the longest and is incredible. Most of the pictures from the (fire department's) slide presentation come from Canada."

While waiting for city officials to approve his idea, Borchardt continued researching Safety Towns across the country, taking from them what he thought were the best ideas and tweaking or creating others. Borchardt was also in search of the perfect location for his creation, hoping to find a spot close to an existing fire station in Frisco.

When Frisco's \$197 million bond election passed in September 2002--the largest in the booming city's history-- the ball started rolling and Borchardt was able to dust off his files and photographs.

Frisco Fire Department's Safety Town will be located adjacent to Central Fire Station, just south of Main Street between Woodstream Drive and Gary Burns/Spur 33, west of Preston Road. A new fire station will also be built on this site, with the old fire station building to be turned into a Fleet Services and Safety Training building. The goal is to open the new and improved Central Fire Station along with the state-of-the-art Safety Town simultaneously, cementing the link between the two.

Roughly two acres of land will be devoted to the estimated 20-building Safety Town, scheduled to break ground late this year and open in fall or winter 2005. Three rows of various buildings separated by realistic roads with intersections and landmarks await the curious and eager population many in the area are quickly learning to cater to: children.

Children can expect to learn safety drills in a variety of classroom and non-traditional settings regarding potential safety hazards. Internet safety and where to take cover for severe weather training are some examples of indoor precautions planned. A simulated railroad crossing area, power line transformer area (with a toy inside the fencing and a pretend cat for added realism) will be offered. Bike

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and pedestrian safety demonstrations will allow kids to personally navigate roads, separated by medians complete with tollbooths, road signs and streetlights.

Though only half of the electric powered vehicles will operate at one time, 24 kid-sized jeeps and bicycles and even two specially designed tricycles (allowing special needs children to partake in the learning) will be on hand. Injury prevention will be showcased in other areas such as a kitchen equipped with a stove, microwave and sink (with empty poisonous cleaning containers underneath). A two-story house complete with living room, bedroom and upstairs bathroom will be used to demonstrate fire safety and exit drills. A mock fast food restaurant, grocery store, police and fire department, city hall and church buildings will all be a part of Frisco's Safety Town neighborhood. All will be designed, built and painted to resemble the real thing on a 5/8 scale.

Each of the local renditions of the buildings in Frisco Fire Department's Safety Town will be constructed out of real materials and wired for heat and air conditioning as well as Christmas lights for special events.

Unlike its predecessors, Frisco's Safety Town is not totally supported by sponsors, but does have sponsorships available to help enhance and prolong the fire department's planned programs. Frisco's Safety Town also has an exclusivity clause for sponsors ensuring their advertisement effectiveness. About half the buildings already have sponsors, as do the concrete roadways, lighting and signage.

"We do believe it will be very successful," said Chief Borchardt. "I never doubted the concept being valid for education. We are going to marry the curriculum to the building. At this point Safety Town is a community education outreach."

Frisco Independent School District is one of the many organizations that stand behind and support what Borchardt

has planned. They have already agreed to set up field trips for children in first through fifth grades. Borchardt quickly added that private schools and home-schoolers are also welcome, as are all children.

Borchardt's goal is to integrate businesses into sponsoring some special events and develop community participation as well as offer civic organizations opportunities to host activities for safety awareness.

The Fire Chief is also looking for several volunteers to assist Betty Grimes, previously a 911 educator for the city of Plano, who will supervise Frisco's Safety Town once it is up and running. Volunteers will be necessary to host the groups expected to visit Safety Town.

"There are some towns out there who wouldn't let you try something like this," Borchardt said with a big smile. "Frisco is a very friendly town. In all honesty, I would have never expected the support we've had and the enthusiasm with all these ideas taking off. I am pretty excited, to say the least."

"No matter what I've said, it is Frisco's Safety Town, not mine or the Fire Department's," Chief Borchardt added, noting that admission will be free of charge for school-aged children. A very nominal fee is expected to be charged for special events or summer programs to help recoup costs. Borchardt concludes, "It's gonna be slick."

For more information on Frisco Fire Department's Safety Town, log onto [www.friscofire.com](http://www.friscofire.com).

*Natalie Medigovich is a freelance writer living in Frisco.*



*Rendering courtesy of Frisco Fire Department*