

Safety problems with County Fire Dept.

Volunteers in need of proper equipment

by Scott Griffin
Battalion Staff

There is a major problem in this county that threatens the lives and homes of many people. That problem is with the archaic Brazos County Volunteer Fire Department. Members of the precinct 4 squad say working for it has become a dangerous job.

Vance Riley, assistant precinct chief and member of the squad for the past two years, says neither proper equipment nor training are available for the volunteer firefighters — 15 of whom are students at Texas A&M. Most of those from the precinct are members of the campus emergency care team.

The students became involved in November 1980 when they found out that the county fire department needed help. They talked to Precinct Chief Vin Phelps about students who were interested in working for the department.

Phelps said he was more than happy to have them. There were only 10 students in the original group — the other 5 were added later.

The students, most of whom did not have any firefighting training, seemed set for an exciting and dangerous job. But they encountered some major problems, some of which still exist.

The first of the problems was lack of equipment — mainly protective clothing and gear.

Firefighter David Philips explains:

"Most of the suits and boots are brought in by the volunteers themselves. They (the county) only provided a few suits — and those don't meet federal safety specifications."

Philips added that the helmets used by the group also do not meet federal standards. The helmets are made of thin plastic and resemble a hard-hat, only with a wider brim. Most of the helmets have no face shields. The shield is important because one of the greatest dangers to firefighters is objects that hit them in the face.

The most crucial pieces of equipment lacking, though, are air packs, small tanks of compressed air with face masks used for breathing when in extremely smoky areas.

Riley says the precinct has no air packs and therefore is restricted from fighting fires in such areas — even when trying to rescue someone.

Because of the lack of equipment, some firefighters are forced to work in dangerous areas with minimal protection.

Another problem encountered by the new firemen was the communication system, which hasn't changed since they have worked in the precinct.

When a fire breaks out, the fireman on duty calls the others by phone. The men say this sys-

tem is extremely ineffective because the quickest response time to an alarm is about 25 or 30 minutes.

The biggest weakness of the department, however, is the trucks. The truck used by Precinct 4, one of the best in the county, is run-down and out-of-date. The truck has many faults, the firemen say, mostly linked to age:

- The hoses are too short. Precinct 4 has only 200 feet of hose. The average fire truck is
- equipped with 2,500 feet, says Philips. He adds that most of the hoses are bought second-hand and break easily.
- The pressure gauges on the water tank don't work.
- One of the bleeder valves on the tank is broken. This means that the tank can pump water at only half of its capacity.
- The truck has no revolving lights to warn cars or people of its approach. The only lights on the truck are four dim flashers on the back and two on the front.
- The brakes often fail.
- The truck has no oil pressure or water temperature gauges, windshield wipers or horn. These failures have occurred since its last inspection in August and the truck is now unable to pass inspection.
- The drive shaft has fallen out of the truck on some occasions, not only stopping the truck but also the water pump since it operates from the engine.
- The truck's maximum

speed is 55 miles per hour. This slows the response of the crew.

Why can't the problems be corrected immediately?

"The county doesn't have enough of a tax base to help us," Riley says, adding that the county "gives us only \$1,500 a year to maintain the truck."

The only other funds that the unit receives are small benefits and donations, Riley says.

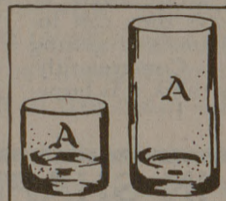
One lifesaver to the precinct has been some small, non-pumping trucks donated by the Texas Forest Service.

While most of the calls handled by the precinct deal with small grass fires or mobile home fires out of the College Station and Bryan city limits, the possibility does exist for a larger home or building to go up in flames.

"The county doesn't have enough of a tax base to help us. They only give us \$1,500 a year to maintain the truck," assistant Precinct 4 chief Vance Riley

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Mexican writer to speak here

by Lezlee Hinson
Battalion Reporter

award-winning novelist Raul Hinojosa will lecture today on "Mexican-American Literature: Past and Present."

The lecture, which will be held at 7 p.m. in Room 204C of the C. Evans Library, will include a reading from Hinojosa's latest novel, "Rites and Ceremonies."

Hinojosa is considered the most prominent Mexican-American novelist. His book "Generaciones y Semblanzas" received the American Literary Award for the best American novel — the Premio Casa de las Americas — in 1976. He also won the national award for Chicano literature the Quinto Sol Prize — for

"Estampas del Valle" in 1972.

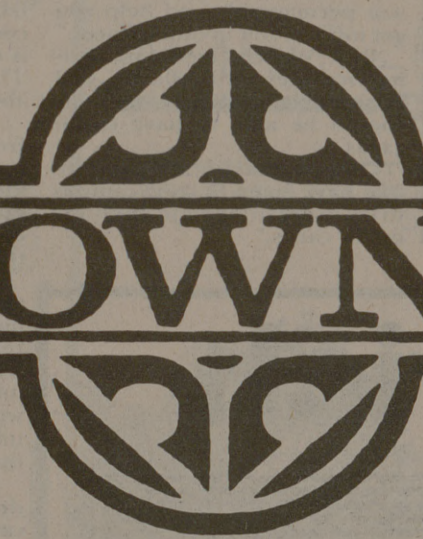
A master of satire, humor, and understatement, Hinojosa has nurtured his characters through generations in the history of his fictional Rio Grande Valley town — Khalil City, in Belken County.

Fluently bilingual, Hinojosa is currently an English professor at the University of Texas at Austin.

Several of Hinojosa's books, including "The Valley," "Rites and Witnesses," and "Mi Querido Rafa," will be available for autographing at a reception in Room 145 of the Memorial Student Center following the lecture.

Admission to the lecture and to the reception is free.

The lecture is sponsored by the English department.



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