

Rural areas take extra care in summer

# Local firefighters face busy season

By Mark Beal  
Reporter

For many people, summer means simply watermelon, swimming pools and the smell of suntan lotion. But for a handful of rural residents, summer means brittle old farmhouses and parched, dry grass.

It's a time to listen for the crackling of their scanners that will summon them away from dinner or work to the scene of a fire.

They're volunteer firefighters, and this is their busiest time of year. The Precinct 1 Volunteer Fire Department is one of four volunteer fire departments created nine years ago in Brazos County in a money-saving move.

Before that, rural communities had to rely on the College Station Fire Department, costing the county \$1,000 each time a truck left the city limits.

Now the county pays only \$2,000 a year for each truck belonging to a volunteer fire department in Brazos County. This covers about 25 percent of the fire departments' budgets; the remainder is raised through membership dues and donations.

The five trucks belonging to Precinct 1 stand in the driveways of firefighters' homes across Wellborn, Rock Prairie and Peach Creek. That way, they will be on hand when the volunteers are called to the 70 to 85 fires that will spring up this year between Highway 60 and the Brazos River.

Most of the firefighters say they were brought into the fire department by a sense of responsibility.

"I just figured I should help out," is the way several of them put it. Precinct 3 Assistant Fire Chief Rocky Ware says he joined after a nearby house caught on fire and only three firefighters showed up.

But for three-year veteran Billy Junek, volunteer firefighting is a way of coming closer to a high-school goal.

"I was with the (Boy Scout) Police Explorers in high school," says Junek, an employee of Junek's Grocery in Wellborn. "But I didn't have the right background for the police, so I decided to go into the fire department. Since the College Station Fire Department wasn't taking any appli-

cations, I decided to apply for the Wellborn Fire Department."

But for Precinct 1 Fire Chief Mark Lenz, it's a tradition.

"It kind of runs in the family," he says. "My dad was a firefighter for Texas A&M when they provided protection for Bryan-College Station. Then the county created the volunteer fire department and I thought, 'Hey, Daddy did it — why not me?'"

Getting in isn't hard. Junek says, "All you have to do is pay the \$10 dues and show some interest."

The 15 active firefighters of Precinct 1 meet twice a month to discuss finances and fundraising, and to make plans. Four times a year, they spend a day at A&M's Brayton Field for practice and training.

But when there's a fire, Precinct 1 treasurer Lynn Carnes says, it means dropping everything.

"When we have a fire alarm, these men have to leave their jobs to fight fires," she says.

University Policeman Robert Meyer, who is Precinct 1 Assistant Fire Chief, adds "And not too many will let them."

That makes daytime fires the most troublesome for the volunteers. Only a portion of the firefighters are able to leave work, and for the few who can leave, there may be a cost. Ware says he has had to use his vacation time to go fight fires.

Sometimes, more than one precinct must be called in to provide enough firefighters. It also takes longer to reach daytime fires.

Delays resulting from trying to get a boss' permission to leave and then from fighting daytime traffic to reach the trucks usually double the normal 10 minutes it takes to reach a fire.

To speed things up, Carnes keeps a radio system in her home. From there, she dispatches the firefighters and makes sure utilities to burning houses are cut off.

"And when they're going to be late, I make sure to call their wives," she says.

The firefighters grin when she says this; she's called their wives a number of times.

Calls usually reach her through the sheriff's office, which is the official channel to reach the volunteer



Fire Chief Mark Lenz checks the pumps on one of the fire trucks.

fire department. Sometimes, though, people will contact individual firefighters they know.

Meyer warns that alarms shouldn't be called to the city fire departments.

"If you call them, they have to call the sheriff's office," he says. "It slows things down by about 10 minutes."

If you ask firefighters what the biggest rural fire hazard is, they'll smile at each other as if they're sharing a private joke.

Then they'll blurt out — maybe in unison — "Burning trash!"

Burning trash is the firefighters' biggest headache, and over they echo the warning: "Be careful when you burn trash!"

They would prefer people call the department before burning trash, but they can hope for the best.

"Watch trash when you burn it," Meyer says. "It would be a good idea to cover it with a tarp to keep sparks from flying out."

Lenz even suggests calling the department before burning trash, but leaves so they can be ready.

# House approves measure to punish drinking motorists

AUSTIN (AP) — House members voted Wednesday for a Senate-approved bill that would allow motorists to be fined if a police officer catches them taking a drink while driving.

The tentative approval came on voice vote and a final vote is expected today.

Although the measure passed the Senate earlier, it will be sent back for consideration of House amendments.

"People who operate a motor vehicle have a responsibility to operate it in a responsible manner," Rep. Bill Blackwood, R-Mesquite said.

"And when a driver drinks in public, it becomes a public matter," he said.

Rep. Paul Moreno, D-El Paso, said, "This is just another of those bills that confuse the public. You know very well that under present law if an officer sees a driver with a can of beer in one hand he is going to stop that driver and see if he is drunk."

Moreno said El Paso members of Mothers Against Drunk Drivers

have told him the bill would just confuse the issue of punishing drunken drivers.

Rep. Ed Watson, D-Deer Park, asked, "What about these drivers who have deeply tinted windows on their cars?"

"This bill says the officer must see the driver actually consume an alcoholic beverage."

— Rep. Bill Blackwood, R-Mesquite

Blackwood said, "The officer will just have to look closer. This bill says the officer must see the driver actually consume an alcoholic beverage."

A violation would allow an officer to give the driver a written notice to appear in court and the driver would have to sign a written promise to appear.

The maximum fine that could be levied for the misdemeanor would be \$200.

One House amendment provides that it must be a "police officer" giving the ticket, not just an "officer."

Another amendment removed language in the Senate bill that inadvertently referred to children standing in a school bus, Blackwood said.

The House also tentatively approved a Senate-passed bill that would repeal a provision of the 1984 school reform act that would require teachers to be tested on their basic literacy and the subjects they teach.

Amid much controversy, the basic literacy test was given to all certified teachers in 1986. Students entering teacher training programs must pass a basic skills test and then pass a test on their subject areas before being certified to teach.

The House finally passed 131-9 and sent to the governor a bill allowing employees and members of the Texas Railroad Commission to conduct informal meetings.

# Texas Court to hear case on polygraph

AUSTIN (AP) — The Texas Supreme Court Wednesday agreed to hear arguments in a polygraph case that the Texas Civil Liberties Union has brought against the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation.

An Austin trial court declared the MHMR polygraph regulations invalid in 1984 and ordered their enforcement. However, the 3rd Court of Appeals in Austin rejected the argument of invalidity, but said the case should be sent back to the trial court to determine whether the regulations "are invalid on other grounds."

The TCLU appealed to the Supreme Court on behalf of the Texas State Employees Union.

The MHMR regulations provided that department employees may be required to submit to polygraph examination as a course of an agency investigation of alleged employee misconduct.

cut here

## Defensive Driving Course

April 27, 28 and May 1, 2

## College Station Hilton

Pre-register by phone: 693-8178  
Ticket deferral and 10% insurance discount

cut here

**Ladies & Lords**  
Dresses • Accessories • Tuxedos

Where you can buy a formal for as little as **\$49.00**

come see our new semi-formal and formal collections  
Located in Post Oak Village 764-8289  
New Spring Hours 10-8 Mon-Sat & 1-5 Sun  
New Arrivals Daily

CHECKS WELCOME

GRAMMY NOMINEE

# ERIC JOHNSON

Call 764-8575 or 764-209

LIVE MON. April 27

Advance Tickets at EASTCATE LIVE or Music Express

Here's the Scoop.  
Hand-dipped  
Blue-Bell® Ice Cream.

75¢

Buy one dip — get one free!

Pavilion — Rumours — MSC Basement Snack Bar  
Now through April 30, 1987

Fresh from the Little Creamery in Brenham.

Department of Food Services  
Texas A&M University  
"Quality First"

**AGGIE SURVIVAL KIT \$6.99**

Any medium 1 item Thin 'N Crispy Pizza and 2 16-oz. soft drinks for only **\$6.99** (plus tax)  
Offer good from April 13 - May 15  
Pizza Hut®

**\$9.99**

Any large 1 item Thin 'N Crispy Pizza and 1 16-oz. soft drink for only **\$9.99** (plus tax)  
Offer good from April 13 - May 15  
Pizza Hut®

**Pizza Hut**

DELIVERY

Let Pizza Hut help you survive those final weeks of school!

College Station 693-9393  
Campus 260-9060

Limited Delivery Area. NO COUPON REQUIRED.

**FIRST AID**

Offer Good April 13 - May 15