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The shouts of an energetic two-year-old exploring his new home ended with a sickening thud that made Claudia Mair's heart sink. Running to the second story banister overlooking the foyer she saw something that still makes her voice break when she recalls it.

"Stu had climbed into a playpen and was looking over the banister, standing on stuffed animals that were in the playpen and he flipped over and fell onto the marble floor," she said.

Mair feared the worst because Stu was silent. "They say when your child has an accident and they can't cry, that's when you know they're hurt. I ran to him and he was laying there, his eyes rolling in his head, blood coming from his mouth because he'd bitten his tongue," she said. "I picked him up and told my husband to call 911. The whole side of his face was misshapen, it looked like a piece of putty someone had punched." Fairview Volunteer Fire Department responded to the emergency call. "They seemed to get there in moments," Mair said.

Captain Mickey Blain was the first to see Stu. "His mother came running out with him in her arms, he seemed lifeless," Blain said.

In situations like this, there is a window medical professionals refer to as the "Golden Hour". If Stu received extensive emergency treatment within that window, his chances of survival and recuperation increased. Fairview volunteer firefighters, who are also Emergency Medical Technicians, stabilized the toddler immediately. The CareFlight helicopter was called in to fly him to Children's Medical Center of Dallas.

Blain did all he could to assess the child's condition. "He wasn't responding to anything, his name, pain. So I asked his mother if she had a nickname for him, she said it was Boo. I started calling him Boo and one of his eyes opened up."

That slight response gave the captain hope the youngster might have a chance.

Stu Mair was flown to the hospital where he eventually underwent brain surgery, as well as extensive facial reconstruction. Today, he's a healthy nine-year-old.

"You can't even tell this happened to him," his mother said. "We were blessed that the Fairview Fire Department is as well-trained as it is, I truly believe they saved his life."

Each year on the Fourth of July, as a way to recognize how well this frightening situation turned out, Mair asks the firefighters who helped save her son to take a photograph with him. Each year there's nothing but smiles all around. "That's what this is about, knowing you've done something that made a difference in someone's life," Blain said.

Currently, nearly two dozen people are making a difference in the Fairview Volunteer Fire Department. Each has a full time job, with professions ranging from emergency room doctor to product development manager. They put in 40-50 hours a week at their regular jobs then, in some cases, another 10-20 hours as volunteer firefighters. According to Fairview firefighter Glen Francisco, the thread that connects each of them is a desire to serve.

"It takes people who understand a chain of command, who can follow orders under pressure, people that recognize it's a dangerous situation, people who are of a humble head and humble heart. These people make an incredible sacrifice," Francisco said.

According to Chris Barron, executive director of the State Firemen's and Firemarshal's Association of Texas, thousands of folks make that sacrifice, with about 1800 volunteer fire departments across the Lone Star state. In fact Barron says more than 75 percent of all fire departments in Texas are run by volunteers.

"These are citizens who feel a need to contribute something to society, who put in extensive hours of training to be able to save lives and property," he said.

The minimum amount of training needed for basic certification to be a volunteer firefighter is 160 hours. The men and women who work with Fairview's department have that and a whole lot more under their belts. Stop by on a Sunday and you'll see the fire station bays filled with volunteers going over equipment. Come by Monday and you'll see the same faces training in new response techniques. Swing by the following day and you're bound to see some of the same volunteers bunking at the department, spending the night in a trailer behind the firehouse so they'll be available for a call. Last year they responded to nearly 300 calls for help.

These folks spend so much time training and volunteering in emergency services, according to Fairview Fire Chief Dick Price, if they chose, many could make it a career.

"Sixty-five percent of our members are certified to be full time, paid fire fighters. We train as professionals, we operate as professionals and work to have our customers see us as professionals."

That's one of many differences you'll find in this department. Citizens are looked at as customers. "People call us because they have a need for our services. Anything from injury accidents, to heart attacks to a fire or a lost child. They have a need. We are there to service them. We need to understand they're the ones paying the bills," Price said.

In 2006, that bill was \$451,000, quite a budget for a volunteer department. Price said sixty-five percent of that goes to keep a full-time, paid ambulance crew at the station house 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The remainder goes to the fire department's maintenance and purchase of new equipment.

You can have unabated desire to serve the community, but if you only have a bucket and hose to do it, it won't happen. Chief Price, a businessman, explained this to the Fairview City Council, presented them with a well-detailed, well-explained list of what was needed to keep the city safe. They understood it, accepted it and provided Price with firefighting gear that makes some local paid departments envious.

Take a look at their "Quint" a combination pumper truck and aerial unit. It has a 75-foot aerial ladder, ground ladders, a 1500-gallon-per-minute water pump, a 500-gallon water tank as well as hoses and a rescue unit that can carry heavy extrication equipment including the jaws-of-life. High tech gear is in their arsenal as well, including a thermal imaging camera that helps them find fires not easily seen in some structures.

Chief Bill Hawley of the Allen Fire Department gives Fairview Fire Department a nod for both its professionalism and cutting edge gear.

"The first time I saw their equipment I was amazed at the level they have. The Quint, as well as the rescue vehicle they just picked up, they're top notch, they'll hold their own with any fire department in the country. They have apparatus that is at the level of any department, paid or volunteer, in the area."

The thermal imaging unit can be utilized in a number of ways. One is to track down people who may be trapped in a burning building.

"It allows you to see through the smoke, I can see everything in the house. If someone tried

to crawl out of the house, we actually see their trail," Blain said. "Typically kids think they can hide from a fire, their initial reaction is to hide under a bed or in the closets. With the thermal imager if we come into a child's room and there's a trail on the floor into the closet, we know they're most likely hiding there. It allows us to do our job quicker."

This device has proven itself useful in others ways as well. Attorney Kevin McGinnis was returning from church on a rainy night with his family when their alarm company called him and warned him of problems at their home. When they arrived he had the family wait in the driveway.

"I went into the house, heard some crackling in the ceiling, then I went outside and saw lighting had hit our chimney and had caught something on fire," he said. "I went back into the house, into the attic and there was smoke everywhere, I could smell it, but there were no visible flames and the only smoke was in the attic."

Firefighters arrived with the thermal imaging unit and in a matter of minutes, they found hidden flames burning in an upper attic the McGinnis family didn't even know existed.

"It had burned virtually every beam and board, but it was starving for oxygen because it wasn't an open attic, McGinnis said. "The thermal imaging camera saw where the fire was and two men with axes chopped through my daughter's bedroom wall. Flames leaped out at them and a fire fighter with a hose put the fire out."

McGinnis said if the fire had burned any longer, it would have reached a flash point and burned the entire house.

Chief Price recalls how both McGinnis and his wife were surprised at the extent of damage in the house, or more precisely the lack of it. "She said 'this isn't nearly as bad as I thought it would be! I saw you guys walking in with hoses and axes, I thought the entire inside of my house was destroyed!'" The thermal imaging unit allowed emergency responders to go precisely where the flames were.

The family was equally amazed at how the fire fighters kept apologizing for the damage they did cause, including a heart felt "I'm sorry" from one burly fire fighter for stepping on a blanket as he knocked out the blaze in the wall of their daughter's bubble gum pink bedroom. That kindness and dedication to protecting the Fairview's 6800 residents is well recognized by fire departments in both Allen and McKinney, towns that have mutual aid agreements with the city.

"They understand it's all about training, it's a constant process to keep everyone on the department up to the level needed," McKinney Fire Chief Mark Wallace said. "When people approach us and they're interested in fire fighting, we recommend they go to the Fairview Fire Department to get their start."

Chief Hawley of Allen has seen first-hand the quality of fire fighter Fairview turns out. "We hired one young man who started with Fairview and he's been an outstanding employee," Hawley said

The ultimate vote of confidence comes from another Fairview emergency responder, Fairview Police Officer Nick Lovren. "If I was out here on the road hurt, I'd want my fire department to come and help me."

Fairview wants to find more firefighters of that caliber to help fill out their roster. Continuous growth, like the planned commercial center at Stacey Road and Central Expressway affirm the growing need for volunteers. They have twenty-two helping out now. They need thirty-two.

"We're looking for people. At one time we turned away people from outside a five-mile radius because of response time. Now we have trailers behind the department where people can sleep and respond immediately," Chief Price said. In other words, you can live outside of

Fairview and still be a part of their volunteer fire department. “The training costs them nothing out of pocket. We pay for their gear, their training, and their insurance. They provide time and dedication, we provide everything else.”

The initial training consists of classes at Collin County Community College combined with time spent at the fire department, an investment of about 20 hours a month.

And don’t think this opportunity to serve the community is limited to men. Kimberly Woods is a fire fighter/paramedic who donates her time to Fairview.

“I enjoy working with these guys, the chief wants us to maintain a professional standard from the way we dress to the way we train and operate,” she said.

Her reason for joining is very simple; she wants help. “I want to make a difference in somebody’s life, at least try. If I can give back someone’s dad, brother, uncle... It’s a sense of fulfillment.”

Why do others dedicate 20 hours a week to this town? Well, probationary firefighter Brian Gardner, a risk management consultant, does it to honor a 14-year-old boy who died in an auto accident. Gardner’s blind son received one of the boy’s corneas and can now see his father as he heads out the door responding to emergency calls.

Then there’s Dr. Stacey Wyrick who spends his days as an emergency room physician at Presbyterian Hospital in Allen. He wants to be there to respond when people are calling for help – giving a hand is part of his nature.

Lt. Steve Frank, a chief technical officer with a high tech company, is a third generation firefighter – it’s in his blood.

Despite the risks, the investment of time, the willingness to drop all they’re doing to assist families they don’t even know, despite all this, it’s something they thrive on. To them it’s a brotherhood that gathers with one intent – to protect others.

If people doubt they’re capable of taking on a challenge like that, Kimberly Woods, a tiny waif of a woman, sees it differently.

“If I can do it, you can do it,” comments Kimberly. “If you’re willing to work hard, prove yourself, pick up heavy equipment, sweat, get dirty. If you want to make a difference in someone’s life, this is for you.”

If you’re interested in becoming a member of the Fairview Volunteer Fire Department, you can reach them by calling 972-562-0522, extension 25. You can also reach them online at www.fairviewtexas.org