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Brazos Co. Pct. 3 VFD Makes Changes After Firefighter Dies in Training

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BRAZOS COUNTY We are just weeks away from thousands of firefighters from across the country coming to College Station for training. The Texas Engineering Extension hosts fire school each year during the summer.

As departments turn their attention toward training, one local volunteer department is remembering a fellow firefighter that died during training. We talked with Brazos County Precinct 3 officials about how their department is focusing on personal health.

On a summer day, like this one Jason Ware is getting ready to mow the grass at Station 2. The Precinct 3 Assistant Fire Chief knows that, in a volunteer fire department, everyone helps out.

"We volunteer for everything," laughs Ware.

It's that volunteerism that drew Dick Danes to the fire service. At 69-years-old, Dane was one of the oldest members, but it never slowed him down. Dane collapsed while latter training at TEEX in May of last year.

"There were no warnings until he told us that he didn't feel good," said Ware.

He later died at a local hospital.

Just over a year later, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's Investigation found that Dane's probable underlying coronary heart disease and stress triggered a heart attack. Dane was cleared for duty because he was limited to outside support. The training on that May evening was an introduction level course.

"Firefighting is stressful," explains Ware.

"We're always going to meet our limitations at some point. We just need to know those limitations to survive," he continued.

Several recommendations were made by investigators, including phasing in a mandatory wellness program. Something the firefighters are already doing.

"They're doing more group exercises. We've accommodated some of that exercise," said Ware.

"They're really pushing for themselves and the more and more they do it, the more people they draw in," he continued.

It was also recommended that firefighters undergo a fitness test before being cleared for duty. The department works with Texas A&M on testing firefighters physical fitness.

"The fit test costs a little bit of money but, we feel the money is worth making sure our firefighters are safe and healthy," said Ware.

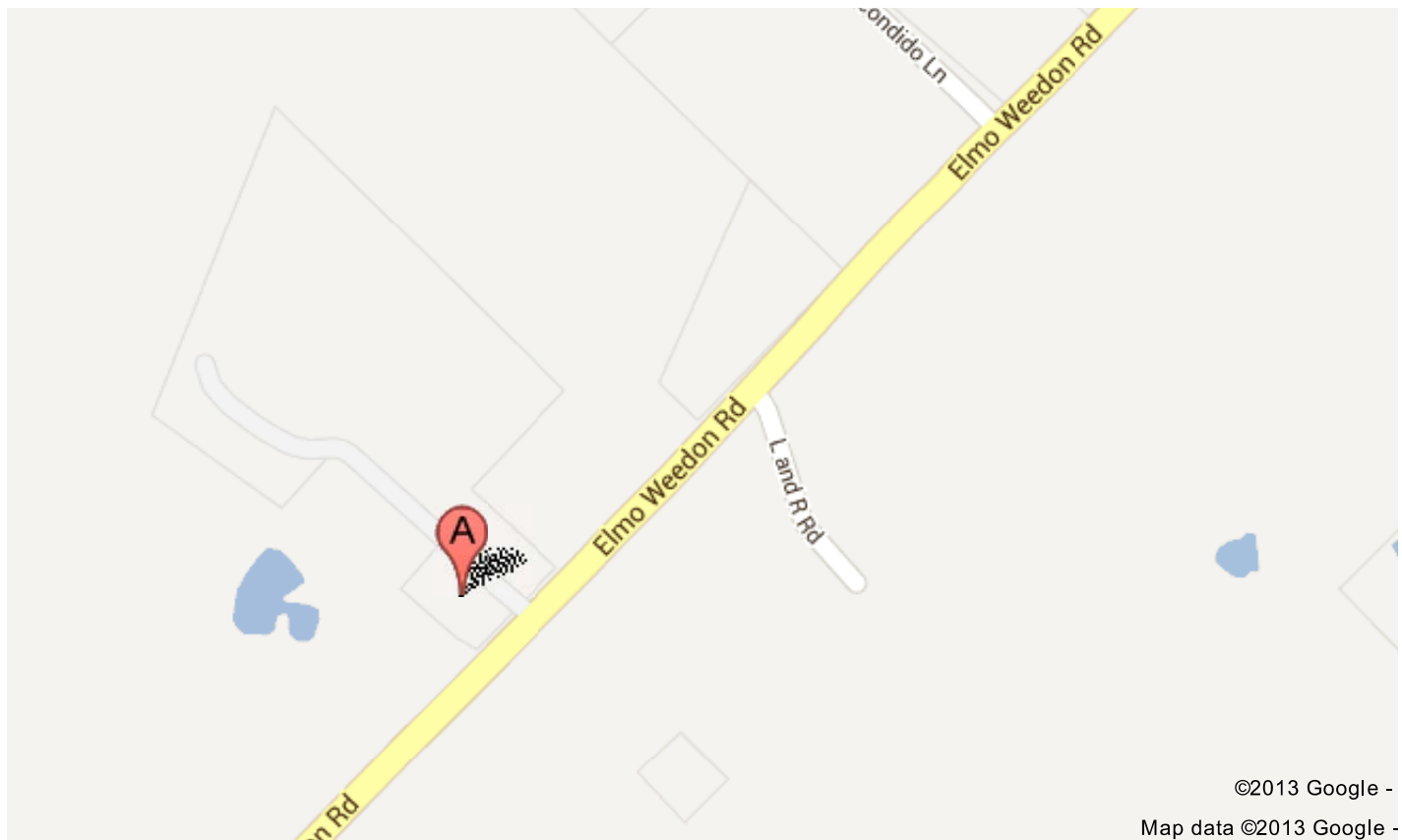
Dane's picture hangs in Station 2. A reminder that safety and health start long before the engine leaves the station.

Precinct 3 Assistant Chief Ware says they cover nearly 140-square miles and protect 6,200 residents. He says they have around 40 members in the department, but always welcome more.

Related Links

NIOSH Report - Fire Fighter Suffers Sudden Cardiac Death During Ladder Training – Texas (<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/fire/reports/face201219.html>)

Brazos County Precinct 3 Website (<http://www.pct3vfd.com/index.html>)



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