Captain David Martin balances his work with the Cy-Fair Volunteer Fire Department, a full-time job, and spending time with his family.
While a variety of skills and strengths are needed to fight fires, these courageous Cy-Fair firefighters all have one thing in common: They are dedicated to helping others in their worst moments. Their commitment to their community makes them some of Cy-Fair’s hottest firefighters.

**A Big Red Truck**

“It’s every guy’s dream to grow up and drive a big, red truck,” says Sam Dyson, a captain with the Cy-Fair Volunteer Fire Department (Cy-Fair VFD). A diagnosis of diabetes when he was 4, coupled with an emergency response to his home helped nurture the notion of helping others as a career. His father was a paramedic, and Dyson’s twin brother joined the department while in high school. Then, Dyson applied in 2004 after attending Thursday meetings that include continuing education courses and fire safety drills.

It takes about six months to complete the cadet classes and become certified by the State Firemen’s and Fire Marshals’ Association. “Anyone 16 years old to 65 can complete the course and assist in some way, as long as you have the time to commit,” Dyson says. “I wish I’d joined earlier.”

As a volunteer, Dyson covers nights, weekends, and holidays when the paid staff is off. He also works a 10-hour day job in commodities trading. His presence at global web conferences can be required at any moment, just like the fire calls. “In either case, I have to respond to a crisis, but between the two jobs, there’s rarely a good time to sleep,” Dyson says and laughs. He looks forward to challenges and enjoys problem solving.

**Dogged Determination**

Denise Corliss manages projects for a natural gas company and volunteers for the Cy-Fair VFD’s Station 7. When it first opened in Fairfield in 1995, her husband Randy joined. Corliss jumped in a few years later and approached the fire chief about adding a canine department.

As part of the state’s search and rescue team, Texas Task Force One, Corliss wanted to extend her expertise as a dog handler. Enter Aid’N, (officially known as Aid’N the Search) the golden retriever she trains with several times a week. “Most departments can’t afford to have dogs, but why waste a resource I already have?” says Corliss. In any instance when people are missing, Aid’N will search for their scent, barking to indicate a find.

Corliss coordinates a liaison to respond to other organizations, mainly fire and police. Sometimes, she may be deployed farther afield as when she traveled to New York after the Sept. 11 attacks. “It was an honor to be able to go,” Corliss says. “We enter at a traumatic point in people’s lives, during accidents or fires, and it’s a privilege to help make it better.”

**Balancing Family & Firefighting**

Over a decade ago, David Martin took a CPR class during his wife’s first pregnancy. Their teacher volunteered with the Cy-Fair VFD, and Martin soon signed up. “A driving force was wanting my child to look up to me and be proud,” he says. “I don’t shy away from things.”

As a father of two boys now and with an IT job at a financial firm, Captain Martin has endured plenty of sleepless nights since. “Sometimes, I just get off the (fire) truck, and then have to go to work [at my day job]. Luckily, I have some leeway to work at my home office, but I don’t abuse it.”

Volunteer numbers at the stations ebb and flow because of moves and family commitments, but hover around 30 members. “Firefighting becomes part of you,” shares Martin. “It’s important to set parameters as a family of when to go out and serve the community and when to serve your family first.” Still, the firefighters’ bond of shared experiences creates a special kinship.

**Making a Real Difference**

Kerri Bierwagen, a full-time mom of three boys, attended a citizens fire academy in Jersey Village before becoming a volunteer with the Jersey...
Village Fire Department. “I’d already been a PTO president, a fundraiser – all the usual jobs — and wanted to get rid of all the petty drama for something real,” she says. “There are no greater people to work with here.”

Since completing the initial training, she earned her basic and then intermediate EMS training. Calls to duty during dinner are routine, and the family has learned to finish up without her. Bierwagen admits that her greatest challenge is being small, but others help out. Each individual brings a unique skill set to make a team, and like other firefighters, she thrives on stimulation and variety. “I get nervous before a call, but our response is a disciplined drill,” she shares. “When the pager goes off, we rely on our training. It can be hard at 2 a.m., but they called 911 because they need help.” Her husband Jay jokes that her family can always call 911 if they really need her.

A Rewarding Career

Rob Missall began his career in the military running ambulances. To retain his medical training, he volunteered as a firefighter while working for an oil company. In 2000, he transferred his industry training skills to become a training officer with the Jersey Village Fire Department, as well as assistant chief of EMS.

Volunteer stations use a small crew to cover a lot of talents. “Whether it’s a rope rescue or car extraction, it’s a challenge, but it’s also what makes the job great,” says Missall. He adds, “Mostly, it’s training, readying equipment, cleaning up, and a willingness to smile after the no-glory jobs for the long haul. I feel fortunate getting paid to do this job. It’s the volunteers that amaze me - keeping up their training and their day jobs in order to help others.” His favorite poster says it all: Part-time heroes, full-time rewards.

GAIL G. COLLINS enjoys writing stories about people - always learning something new - and thanks Rob for the station tour of the Jersey Village Fire Department.

EDITOR’S NOTE: This is just a sampling of the many brave men and women who volunteer with our local fire departments and keep Cy-Fair safe.

Sam Dyson joined the Cy-Fair VFD after his twin brother volunteered years before as a firefighter in high school.
Kerri Bierwagen joined the Jersey Village Fire Department after attending a citizens fire academy.

Aid’N helps the Cy-Fair VFD search for anyone missing during a fire, tracking their scent and barking to indicate a find.

Kerri Bierwagen and Rob Missall are proud to serve in the Jersey Village Fire Department.
Meet Cy-Fair’s Firefighters

David Martin
- Works with Cy-Fair Volunteer Fire Department at Station 9
- Married to Andie with two sons, Tyler, 8, and Caleb, 10
- Has a border collie named Maverick
- Has lived in Cy-Fair for 15 years
- Loves giving back to the Cy-Fair community by volunteering

Denise Corliss
- Works with Cy-Fair Volunteer Fire Department at Station 7
- Married to Randy, who is also a firefighter
- Has two working dogs, Bretagne (retired) and Aid’N, plus a Lab, Coleman
- Has lived in Cy-Fair for 15 years
- Loves Cy-Fair’s community atmosphere and friendly people

Kerri Bierwagen
- Works with Jersey Village Fire Department
- Married to Jay with three sons, Steven, 17, Matthew, 14, and Jacob, 10
- Has two dogs named Minnie and Copper
- Moved to Cy-Fair in 1988
- Loves that Cy-Fair is a small town within a big city

Rob Missall
- Works with Jersey Village Fire Department
- Married to Robyn with a son, Cole, 7
- Has two Dalmatian mixes named Junior and Lady
- Has lived in Cy-Fair for two decades
- Loves helping his neighbors in an emergency and following up with them

Sam Dyson
- Works with Cy-Fair Volunteer Fire Department at Station 4
- Recently married Kristen on May 7
- Has a dog named Jade
- Grew up in Cy-Fair, as did his parents
- Loves that there is still a small-town feeling in Cy-Fair

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