

# THE HOUSTON FIRE DEPARTMENT



## *Hall of Heroes*

Portrait Photographs Courtesy of the Houston Fire Museum



## HOUSE FIRE, 6120 COLLINGSWORTH

Medal of Valor -  
Firefighter EMT Javier Benavidez

At approximately 11:05 p.m. on March 6, 2007, the Houston Fire Department responded to a reported house fire at 6120 Collingsworth. While en route, OEC informed the responding companies that the occupants at the residence were trapped. Upon arrival, Engine 27 found a 1-story residence with heavy fire showing from the left side. Engine 27 stretched an attack line into the front door while Ladder 19 initiated a Primary Search of the structure and Engine 39 brought an attack line to back up the other companies. Firefighters took note of the fact that there was a vehicle parked in the front yard, an indicator that someone may indeed be home.

Ladder 19's crew entered the front door, taking with them a thermal imager. Senior Captain Richard Baker noted that there were two attack lines leading into the burning structure. Captain Baker ordered his Engineer/Operator to start the ventilation fan. The captain stated that visibility quickly went to zero making the thermal imager useless. He and his crew, Firefighters Mason Appel and Pete Ng, continued moving forward until they ran into several other firefighters. The small confines of the room prevented the crews from advancing any further and the heat was rapidly becoming unbearable.

With conditions deteriorating, the Incident Commander ordered all companies to evacuate the building and prepare for defensive operation. As the air horns sounded, the ceiling inside collapsed. Fire rolled over the firefighters and out the front door. Captain Baker and Ng made their way to the front door. Two firefighters ran past Captain Baker, one of whom was on fire. Engineer/Operator Jeff Jacobs retrieved a hand line and quickly extinguished the firefighter's burning turnout gear.

Captain Baker knew there were more firefighters still inside. He and Firefighter Ng reentered the structure to help their Brothers. They soon located Firefighter Appel, who was also searching for the missing firefighters. Seconds later, Appel passed an injured firefighter to Captain Baker and Ng and they carried him to the front door where other crews were waiting. No sooner than Baker and Ng turned to continue their search, Appel found Captain Hammons. Hammons had no regulator attached to his mask. Appel, Baker and Ng carried the injured captain to EMS crews waiting outside.

As the incident unfolded, Firefighter EMT Javier Benavidez could see a firefighter down from outside the burning home. Benavidez was assigned to Ambulance 39, riding in charge of patient care. With no fire fighting gear or air pack, Benavidez quickly entered the home and dragged Firefighter Cordoza to safety.

The chilling cry of a PASS device was emitting from inside the burning home. Appel, followed by Captain Baker, reentered the structure to continue their search. Another firefighter was soon located, lost and stumbling through the debris. Appel and Baker attempted to lead the firefighter to the front door but he knocked the captain to the floor and made his way out the front door. As they prepared to reenter the house, the Incident Commander informed all companies that all members had been accounted for.

Captain Hammons and Firefighters Cardoza and Johnson of Engine 39 along with Captain Salazar and Firefighter Goldstraw of Engine 27 were transported to the hospital. Captain Hammons and Captain Salazar experienced a lengthy recovery due to injuries sustained in the fire. Eventually, all of the firefighters were able to return to duty, thanks to the quick action and bravery of their comrades.





## APARTMENT FIRE, 8039 BOONE ROAD

Distinguished Service Medal -  
Captain Ricky Burleson

**T**ime is not often a friend to firefighters. The crew of Engine Co. 73 would realize that fact on the night of November 24, 2006, the night after Thanksgiving,

District 68 responded to a reported apartment fire at 8039 Boone Rd. OEC was receiving reports of people trapped. Engine 73 was the first HFD unit to arrive on scene. They reported having heavy fire visible from the second floor of a 2-story apartment building. The captain initiated a primary search and offensive attack on the fire. As they approached the burning building, civilians were screaming that there were people still in the apartment.

Acting Captain Ricky Burleson looked up and saw an adult female dangling a baby out of a second floor window, holding the baby by its arm. Thinking she was going to jump, Burleson tried to reassure her that they were coming to her rescue. Burleson instructed his crew, Firefighters Sam Pavlat and Pauly, to retrieve a ground ladder from the pumper. As the two firefighters ran back to their engine, the woman turned and ran away from the window. She returned moments later and, in her arms, she held a small child. Before Burleson had time to think, the woman held the child in the air, outside the bedroom window, and dropped her.

Captain Burleson caught the toddler and handed her to another firefighter. Burleson turned his attention back to the window. The young mother returned with another child, this one a bit older. The woman was too frightened to listen and reason with anyone. She hoisted the child over the windowsill and dropped her. Burleson again caught the child and passed her along to his crew. Once she saw that her child was safe, the mother jumped from the window.

Luckily, the mother and her two children escaped the ordeal uninjured.





## MID-RISE FIRE 9343 N. LOOP EAST

Medal of Valor -  
Firefighter Brad Ascenzi

Medal of Valor -  
Firefighter Shane Horsted

**No Photo Available**

Every firefighter will respond to one fire that he/she will never forget. Such is the case for the Houston Firefighters who responded to a building fire at 9343 N. Loop East. This fire, now commonly referred to as the “Mid-Rise Fire,” occurred during rush-hour traffic on March 28, 2007. Smoke from the blaze could be seen for miles and commuters traveling along the North Loop 610 were witness to one of the most spectacular fires in Houston in several years. Tall buildings present many challenges for firefighters. Entry, egress, ventilation and water supply are of great

concern from the standpoint of controlling the fire. Occupants of such buildings are unable to evacuate as quickly and safely due to elevator shutdown. When the elevators stop working the only other means of egress for the occupants are the stairs. Smoke will quickly fill the hallways. Unable to see where they are going and, unable to see, the occupants begin to panic. This all leads to the need for firefighters to move quickly; the one thing that is not possible for firefighters in this situation. A fire, large or small, in this type of building, has the potential to kill dozens of people in a very short time.

By now virtually everyone in the Houston area has heard about this fire. Three civilians lost their lives and several Houston Firefighters narrowly escaped from the blaze themselves. District 45 arrived on scene, reporting heavy fire visible on the 5th floor of a 6-story mid-rise building. Frantic civilians immediately swarmed the Incident Commander’s vehicle. They were informing him that people were still in the building and might be trapped. The chief immediately prepared for a large-scale rescue incident.

As firefighting companies arrived on scene, the chief assigned them a task. Even with people trapped, the firefighters still needed to develop a water supply. Some of the companies were sent to attempt a rescue via the stairs while the aerial ladders were positioned at points around the building. The firefighters entering the building at ground level were confronted with what many of them described as “the most hostile conditions they had ever seen”. Normally heat and smoke will rise, making the upper regions of any structure uninhabitable. What these firefighters found was absolute zero visibility as soon as they set foot into the building. From top to bottom thick, black smoke filled the building. The heat was unbelievably intense, even at ground level. These conditions made it impossible to establish a Lobby Control or, to move equipment into position inside the building. The stairwells were completely filled with smoke, making it impossible for civilians inside, to utilize the stairs for an exit.

This also made it impossible for the firefighters to use them for rescue purposes.

Minutes after the Incident Commander began implementing his plan of action, the OEC informed him that they were receiving calls from civilians trapped on the 5th floor. At the same time Ladder Co. 45 was in the process of rescuing 7 civilians while Ladder Co. 44 brought another civilian safely to the ground. But there were still 3 civilians unable to escape the raging inferno.

The crew of Engine Co. 8 ascended the stairs, attempting to make it to the 5th floor to rescue those 3 civilians. Several other firefighting crews attempted this same operation but each one ran low on air and was

*continued on next page*

## MID-RISE FIRE, 9343 N. LOOP EAST *cont.*

forced to abort their mission. The captain of Engine 8 and his crew made it to the 5th floor; the fire floor.

The captain, realizing they would need the protection of an attack line, sent his two firefighters to retrieve a fire hose on the level below.

When the firefighters returned, their captain was not where they left him. The two firefighters attempted to locate their captain but they were nearly out of air. Reluctantly, the two firefighters turned and descended the stairs. As they made their way down, they attempted to inform the Incident Commander of their situation. Meanwhile, the captain was declaring a "May Day." He informed the Incident Commander that he had a fire victim in his grasp but was unable to move the body alone. The captain stayed with the fire victim so long that he actually ran out of air.

Firefighters are trained different ways to escape and survive many different situations. The only problem is, there are no two fires alike. Each one presents its own unique problems. The captain did exactly what he was trained to do: he found a position that he felt would provide him the best opportunity for survival.

As the two firefighters from Engine 8 stumbled out of the building their captain attempted to remain in contact with the Incident Commander. The firefighters were insistent upon getting a new air supply and returning to assist their captain. Knowing that the two firefighters were in no condition to make such an attempt, the Division Officer ordered Emergency Medical Crews to take them to an ambulance for treatment and transport to a hospital.

Meanwhile the captain, nearly unconscious, tried desperately to remain in contact with the Incident Commander. At times the radio went silent. Those listening thought the captain was gone, then OEC informed the Incident Commander that the captain was letting them know that he was still alive by pressing the "Talk" button on his hand-held radio. Each time he pressed the button, a radio identifier would show on the dispatchers screen.

Even though he was too exhausted to speak, the captain was still able to maintain enough rational thought to remember this very simple, life-saving technique.

Everyone realized the desperate situation they were involved in. Faced with the largest fire of their careers, three civilians and one firefighter missing, the stress was obvious on their faces. Numerous failed attempts to ascend the stairs left only one other possible solution. An order was given to use Ladder Co. 20's aerial ladder to ram the large windows on the side of the building. The engineer/operator of Ladder 20 skillfully maneuvered the ladder from one window to another. After what seemed like an eternity, the captain of Engine 8 was heard on the radio telling Ladder 20 to stop. The captain had been located. Firefighters ascended the aerial ladder and assisted Engine 8's captain out of the building. He was lowered to the ground where EMS crews transferred him to an ambulance and transported him to a hospital. Sadly, three civilians lost their lives. HFD Arson Investigators arrested a female who worked in the building and charged her with setting the fire.



# HOUSE FIRE, 5826 SILVERFOREST



Senior Captain  
Douglas Berry



Firefighter  
Dennis Mobley



Firefighter  
Kyle Sopchak

## Unit Medal of Valor

In the early morning hours of February 1, 2007, OEC received a call from a civilian who stated that he was standing on his balcony and could see a house on fire in a nearby neighborhood. He estimated the distance to be approximately one mile from his location. Not having the exact address, OEC dispatched a Box Alarm to 5700 Tidwell @Antoine. Arriving companies could see a column of smoke coming from a neighborhood about 1 mile away, just as the caller stated. District 4 advised all responding companies that the fire appeared to be near Golden Forest and Antoine. OEC received more information from other callers and updated District 4 with the correct address.

Engine Co. 13 was the first arriving unit and reported heavy smoke and fire showing from a 1-story residence. Engine 13 initiated an offensive attack on the fire. Ladder Co. 4 arrived on scene and conducted a 360\* visual of the burning home to further assess the situation and look for secondary access and egress points. District 4 arrived on scene and ordered Ladder Co. 4 to conduct a primary search while Ladder Co. 67 ventilated the roof. The smoke was so thick, at this time, that the house was no longer visible from the street just a few feet away. Ladder 4 advised the Incident Commander that there was a victim trapped in the structure and they were forcing entry into the home. Ladder 4's crew located the trapped occupant in the rear of the structure and quickly removed him from the house.

It took the collective efforts of all responding companies to locate the burning home. The lack of information provided only complicated the operation and placed the occupant in greater danger.

Thanks to the fast actions of Ladder Co. 4, the male victim survived the ordeal.



# HOUSE FIRE, 1037 WALLING



Senior Captain  
Stephen Whitehead



Firefighter  
Andrew Trimble



Firefighter  
Christopher Kelly

## Unit Medal of Valor

On the night of July 11, 2007, the Office of Emergency Communications received reports of a house on fire at 1037 Walling. District 31 arrived on scene finding a 1-story residential home with heavy smoke and fire visible from the front of the structure. Tower Co. 6 received orders to initiate a primary search of the home. The crew of Tower 6 made their way to the rear of the residence, assessing the building as they went. The firefighting crew located a door at the back of the house. Forcible entry tools were needed to gain access to the interior.

With the back door open, Senior Captain Stephen Whitehead, Firefighter Andrew Trimble and, Firefighter Christopher Kelly, entered the home to begin their search. Visibility inside the structure was "Zero" and it was extremely hot. Engineer/Operator Kenny Grayson retrieved the necessary tools and started ventilating the home to release some of the heat and toxic gases. This helped improve the interior conditions tremendously. Captain Whitehead and his crew worked their way through each dark, smoke filled room. Firefighter Trimble located a female lying on the floor, unconscious. Whitehead and his two firefighters worked quickly, maneuvering over and around numerous obstacles. They carried the woman to the same door through which they entered. Emergency Medical personnel were waiting to take the victim from the firefighters as soon as they emerged from the burning home. Initially, the woman was not breathing and had no pulse. The paramedics were able to resuscitate her.

This fire exemplifies the Courage, Compassion and Commitment evident of Houston Firefighters. Without their quick and professional actions under extreme circumstances, the woman may not have had a chance for survival.



## APARTMENT FIRE, 4463 N. MACGREGOR WAY



Captain  
Terry Atchison



Firefighter  
Zachary Likins



Firefighter  
Jeremy Mays

### Unit Medal of Valor

On January 27, 2007 at 07:24, Engine 25 was dispatched to an apartment fire at 4463 N. MacGregor Way. Upon arrival, Captain Atchison observed heavy fire coming from the first floor, lapping up to the second floor. He and his crew immediately started a primary search down a common hallway. He observed heavy fire and smoke in the hallway coming from one of the apartments. Crawling approximately 50 feet, the firefighters could hear someone moaning. Not knowing where the victim was and, in zero visibility, Captain Atchison elected not to turn the nozzle on. He instructed Firefighter Mays to stay on the nozzle and protect Firefighter Likins and himself as they continued searching for the victim. After crawling past the fire, they located a female in a wheelchair. Likins and his captain had to move the patient and wheelchair down the hallway in smoke so thick, they could not see their hand in front of their face. The two firefighters exited the other end of the building with the victim.

There is no doubt the victim is alive today because of the actions of Engine 25's crew. So often, crews like Engine 25 are ridiculed by other firefighter's for being "Gung Ho" or "Crazy" but, if the crew doesn't run to the apparatus when the alarm comes in or, if the E/O doesn't drive quickly to the location or, if the crew doesn't know that particular building, the victim dies, plain and simple.



## MOBILE HOME FIRE, 927 GREGS WAY



Captain  
Jimmy Bull



Firefighter  
Thomas Atkinson



Firefighter  
Robert Pecht

### Unit Medal of Valor

At 09:35 hours on the morning of May 4, 2007, OEC received calls reporting a mobile home on fire with people trapped. The distance between Station 65 and the other responding apparatus meant that 65's crew would be working this fire alone for quite some time.

Engine Co. 65 and Medic 65 were the first arriving units. Engine 65 reported smoke showing from a doublewide mobile home. Bystanders were using a garden hose to spray water into the burning trailer house. As Captain Jimmy Bull exited the cab, civilians informed him that someone was inside the burning house. The husband of the victim was frantically screaming for someone to help her. Captain Bull, Firefighter Thomas Atkinson and Firefighter Robert Pecht stretched a 1 ¾" attack line to the front door.

Captain Bull and his crew entered the front door of the home to begin their search for the missing woman. The firefighters found thick smoke and a small fire in the living room. The victim was located just few feet inside the front door, badly burned, conscious but unresponsive. As the firefighters attempted to lift her, she became combative, making the rescue extremely difficult. Atkinson and Pecht were able to move the victim to the front door where other firefighters were waiting to administer medical care. Engineer/Operator/Paramedic Kaz Mariaz, Firefighter/Paramedic John Delbosque and Engineer/Operator Tim Wilkey rushed their patient to the medic unit and transported her to an area hospital. Unfortunately, she passed away days later.



# HOUSE FIRE, 1118 MONTOUR DRIVE



## Unit Meritorious Medal

Firefighter  
David Richardson

Firefighter  
Greg Warfield

**A**t approximately 01:30 A.M. on December 10, 2006, Medic 93 was dispatched to an "Unknown Problem" at 1118 Montour Drive. As the crew of Medic 93 approached the front door of the residence, the smell of smoke struck them. They immediately requested OEC to send an Engine Company to investigate.

Engine Co. 71 arrived on scene at approximately 01:45 reporting smoke from a 1-story residence. The captain of Engine 71 stated that he would be making an offensive attack and initiating primary search. As the captain and his crew made their way through the house, Ladder Co. 71 requested an update on the conditions. Engine 71's captain reported extremely hot conditions with heavy smoke.

Ladder 71 arrived on scene and assumed command of the incident. Senior Captain Nathan Jilek instructed his crew to ladder the house and cut a hole in the roof to ventilate the interior. The captain of Engine 71 then informed Captain Jilek that he located the fire and stated that he would not need a hole cut in the roof. Captain Jilek ordered his two firefighters, David Richardson and Gregory Warfield to disregard their orders to ventilate. The two firefighters acknowledged the new instructions and left the roof, returning to Captain Jilek.

Captain Jilek, Richardson and Warfield then entered the burning home to continue the primary search. Visibility was zero and it was very hot inside the structure; two conditions that make survival unlikely for anyone without an air pack.

As they made their way through the smoke, Richardson called out to his captain that he located a victim, an adult male. The man was unconscious but he was coughing, indicating that he was still alive. Jilek and Warfield turned back to assist Richardson. Warfield found Richardson attempting to lift the man but the "dead weight" was making the task nearly impossible. Richardson and Warfield worked together, carrying the victim to the front door where they turned him over to the paramedics. The victim, Mr. Hartley is alive and well today, due to the skill, determination and bravery of these two firefighters.



# APARTMENT FIRE, 10881 RICHMOND

## Medal of Valor

Firefighter/Paramedic

Sacha Masson

(photo not available)

In the early morning hours of April 21, 2007, District 83 was dispatched to an apartment fire at 10881 Richmond #1410. The first unit to arrive on scene was Squad 83. Firefighter/Paramedic Sacha Masson reported heavy fire and smoke visible from a 2-story apartment building. Civilians were stating that there may be people still in some of the apartment. Firefighter Masson retrieved the Haligan Tool from Squad 83 and immediately started forcing entry into one apartment after another. He entered each apartment and searched for occupants before moving on the next unit.

The call originated from apartment #1410, the unit of origin. Masson was not able to enter and search that apartment unit due to the amount of fire and smoke inside. Firefighter Masson's partner stated "The most impressive part of Masson's actions was the fact that he was able to enter and search the two units directly beneath the units on fire. The smoke and heat were intense and, burning embers were falling all around him as he forced the doors open and entered the apartment to search of victims." In all, Firefighter Masson was able to rescue 5 civilians, including 1 infant, from their units. It is very likely that numerous civilians would have been seriously injured or killed had it not been for the courageous effort of Firefighter Masson.

For his unselfish act of Courage, the Houston Fire Department hereby awards Firefighter/Paramedic Sacha Masson the Medal of Valor.



## BUILDING COLLAPSE, 941 OXFORD



### Unit Meritorious Medal

Firefighter  
Juan Guerrero Jr.

Firefighter  
Michael Mire

Old homes are a very popular purchase among those interested in restoration projects. There are several companies in and around Houston that specialize in moving these old homes from one piece of property to another. On June 7, 2007 two men, working for a one of these companies, were trapped under one such home as they were preparing to move it from the Heights.

Houston firefighters, responding to the call for help, arrived to find one adult male trapped beneath a 1-story house that was being prepared for moving. The original call for help indicated that there were two men trapped. Firefighters soon learned that one worker was able to free himself before they arrived. The second man however, was not so lucky.

Blocks were being driven into the ground to provide a solid surface to aide in the lift. Both men were working underneath the house, attempting to level it when it slipped off the jacks and fell down and sideways 18 – 24 inches. Firefighters believe the muddy, unstable ground may have contributed to the collapse.

Firefighters from Tower 6 and Technical Rescue 11 used air bags to lift the house approximately 1 inch, taking the weight of the structure off the victim. With stabilizing devices in place, two firefighters from Rescue 11 crawled under the house to assist in pulling the man out. Both of the construction workers were treated and released from an area hospital with non-life threatening injuries.



# HIGH WATER RESCUE



Captain  
Maurice Davis



Firefighter  
Christopher Smith

## Unit Meritorious Medal

Firefighter  
Joe Stakes  
(photo not available)

**F**ire Station #46 is located on Corder near Scott, in southeast Houston and is one of the busiest stations in the United States. The men and women assigned to this station are no strangers to facing danger and responding to extraordinary calls.

On October 16, 2006, storms hit Houston causing widespread flooding. More than 5 inches of rain fell in the area of Highway 288 and Loop 610. When such weather strikes, the Houston Fire Department, as a whole, experiences a surge in calls for help. Many of these calls result in nothing more than reassuring the people that everything will be fine while others may need assistance with moving to high ground.

Engine 46 responded to numerous calls to assist motorists stranded in the high water on Highway 288. While assisting these motorists, the firefighters witnessed a compact car skidding out of control on the slick southbound lanes. The car came to rest in extremely high water and started swaying from left-to-right as if it were about to roll over. Captain Maurice Davis instructed Firefighter's Chris Smith and Joe Stakes, to assess the condition of the driver. Firefighter Stakes could see that the driver was an elderly woman who appeared to be in severe distress. With no time to spare, the crew of Engine 46 made their way to the car. There was no time to retrieve and set up a tagline but they did take life vests with them. The water was chest deep with a swift current. Captain Davis and Firefighter Smith were able to stabilize the vehicle long enough to allow Firefighter Stakes to place a life jacket on the victim and remove her from the car. Once the elderly woman was a safe distance away, Davis and Smith released the car. It floated approximately 50 yards away as it was sinking. In a matter of minutes, the car was completely submerged.



# MAN ARRESTED FOR REPORTING FALSE ALARMS



## Fire Chief's Commendation Medal

### Senior Captain Ricardo Everett

On August 31, 2006, HFD received a call reporting a house on fire with people trapped at 1301 Sampson. While en route to the location, Engine Co. 508 was involved in an accident. The apparatus rolled over injuring all 4 firefighters on board. Out of concern for the crew on E-508 and, how this accident could affect the outcome of the house fire, Senior Captain Ricardo Everett started monitoring the event. Engine Co. 18 arrived on location and immediately tapped the fire out.

With an apparent false alarm, 4 firefighters injured and, an overturned pumper, Captain Everett decided to investigate. Everett pulled the tape of the original 911 call to review the information provided by the caller. During his research, he discovered that there had been numerous false alarms reported for the same address on Sampson. There were 5 false alarms made for 1301 Sampson from April 14 thru August 2, 2006. The calls were clearly being made by the same person. Captain Everett had the callers phone number traced. The number was identified as a cell phone. Everett then contacted the cell phone company and obtained the name of the subscriber.

After completing his investigation, Captain Everett contacted the Houston Fire Department Arson Division. The detailed information provided by Everett was all the Arson investigators needed to arrest the individual responsible. It should also be noted that between the date of Engine 508's accident and the date that the arrest was made, the suspect reported 3 additional false alarm calls for 1301 Sampson. HFD Arson Investigators arrested the man on September 6, 2006.

There's no way of knowing how many false alarm calls this man has made, nor is there any way to determine how many more he would have made. It's also impossible to determine how many lives were placed in jeopardy by his carelessness. We do know however, that his criminal actions on August 31, 2006 very nearly took the lives of 4 Houston Firefighters.



## BOAT FIRE, KEMAH BOARDWALK



Medal of Valor

Engineer/Operator  
Al Alnutt

**F**irefighter Al Alnutt met his friends and family at the Kemah Boardwalk to celebrate his mother's birthday on March 25, 2007. Al left the party at about 5:30P.M. He was traveling west bound on F.M. 518 when he noticed a large column of black smoke coming from the marina. Being a firefighter and seeing smoke, Al decided to see if he could help. As he drove closer, he could see a large boat engulfed in flames. People were running in circles, crying and screaming for help. A Sheriff Deputy stopped Al as he ran toward the fire. Al told the officer that he was a Houston Firefighter so the Deputy allowed Al to pass.

As Firefighter Allnutt made his way toward the boat, he noticed that one badly burned male had been rescued from the water. Bystanders were pulling a fire hose along the dock so Al took the nozzle and attempted to darken the flames. People were screaming that someone was still on the boat. The smoke and heat quickly became unbearable, forcing Al to back out. Firefighter Allnutt then turned his attention to protecting the other boats and the pier from the flames. Bystanders again started screaming and pointing toward him. Al started looking around and saw a man in the water. He ran down the pier to help the injured man out of the water. As he knelt down on the pier, the man said "Al, get me out of here." it was then that Al realized that the injured man was, in fact, a Brother Firefighter, Frank Critchet, assigned to Fire Station #76 on the "B" shift. He an Al worked together there and became friends. Al tried to grab Critchet under his arms and pull him from the water but this method caused Frank too much pain, Al then grabbed Frank by his jeans and lifted him from the water. Al remained at Critchet's side until EMS crews arrived.

Frank Critchet suffered burns to more than 85% of his body. He spent the next two months in the hospital and remains off duty to this day.



# IIAH FIREFIGHTERS OF THE YEAR



Captain  
Mark Griffiths

Senior Captain  
Richard Chandler

**T**he Independent Insurance Agents of Houston (IIAH) named HFD Dispatchers Senior Captain Richard Chandler and Captain Mark Griffiths as the Firefighters of the Year for 2007.

These men were selected from several other deserving finalists for their efforts during the mid-rise fire at 9343 N. Loop East on March 28, 2007. The Independent Insurance Agents of Houston in conjunction with the Houston Fire Department, have been awarding the Firefighter of the Year for 30 years to recognize those firefighters and paramedics who go above and beyond the call of duty in emergency situations.

Fire Alarm Dispatch is far different than any other form of dispatching. Fire Alarm Dispatchers are far more aware of the level of urgency and equipment required to complete a given assignment. Emergency incidents do not allow firefighter the luxury of time. The officers in charge are often forced to make life or death decisions "Right Now!" Captain Eric Abbt's "May Day", along with his gasping breaths for fresh air, was heard by the entire city. The Communications Officers and OEC Call Takers were on the telephone with civilians, unable to escape the inferno, up to their last breath. There cannot be many situations more gut-wrenching than those. Yet, through it all, we hear the calm voice of the Communications Officer on the radio. That calm voice is often the very thing that helps a victim survive a seemingly hopeless situation.

