



# FIRE DEPARTMENT CONNECTION

For and About the Employees of the Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department

## Healthier, Stronger JFRD on the Horizon

Those of you who have benefitted from Tom Fonger's expertise and motivation know the truth.

"You've got to be ready and willing to change," said Fonger, JFRD's fitness and wellness director.

As an exercise physiologist, Fonger has been leading people toward their health and fitness goals for more than 30 years – 10 with JFRD, eight with Life Scan. But assessing each firefighter's physical condition and then creating a course of action for positive change is merely the beginning.

"Consistency is huge," Fonger said. "If you're not consistent, you're on a roller coaster."

### Wellness & Fitness Leadership

Fonger admits there is no easy answer to achieving consistency. He's seen countless people begin with the best intentions, but then they struggle to make fitness and good nutrition a lifestyle. They make some progress, but then lose momentum for a variety of reasons, and often have to face starting over again.

"I think all you can do is provide the opportunity, put out the information, and when people are ready, hopefully they'll take advantage of it," he said.

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Tom Fonger, JFRD's Wellness and Fitness Director, Training Academy District Chief Kris Jolly and Darrin Anderson from the National Testing Network discuss the academy site's set up for the new Candidate Physical Agility Test that prospective employees will have to pass before getting hired. Fonger will also have a lead role in the JFRD Wellness Program which is expected to launch this spring. JFRD members will participate voluntarily.

## Chief's Corner

You can find inspiration on each page of this month's *Fire Department Connection*.

Over the years, we have published stories about firefighter fitness and wellness, and now JFRD is once again taking the lead by creating its own in-house program, complete with medical diagnostics. Even better, Chief of Training Gail Loput is bringing it to your fire station. This month's cover story describes how the JFRD Wellness Program will work.

Inside, we cover the voluntary efforts of Station 35's crew to upgrade their facility. We know there are many stories of JFRD firefighters making similar improvements, and 35's is the latest in our Station Spotlight series.

Then there's JFRD Retiree Jimmy "Jammer" Morgan. He completed his career in 2012, but only on paper. You'll learn how much the job still matters to Jammer when you read about his recent role in designing the new Command Van.

JFRD just hired 36 recruits. Though their graduation usually brings the most joy, it's also a thrill to get that chance to fulfill your career desire. Try to remember the excitement you experienced when you got hired.

The story of California Firefighter Thomas Pitman will also inspire. He cycled cross country to honor a fallen firefighter and to raise awareness about an issue that public safety professionals face.

Finally, there's a progress report on the Firefighter Cancer Initiative. Based at the University of Miami, this program is among the fire service's strongest advocates in terms of health and cancer prevention.

**Kurt Wilson**  
**Chief of Department**



## Marine Demo for ARFF Conference

In late January, Jacksonville hosted the Aircraft Rescue & Fire Fighting Training Alliance's Leadership Conference at the Hyatt downtown. Chief of Department Kurt Wilson delivered opening comments at the four-day event. The Hyatt hotel is situated on the St. Johns River northbank, and more than 200 fire service members attended the conference. On one day, many of them were treated to a water demonstration by JFRD's Marine Section during a lunch break. The conference had representation from 90 departments worldwide, according to Beth Hendel, chairperson for the ARFF Working Group and a Deputy Chief with the City of Phoenix Fire Department in Arizona. The conference included 35 exhibitors, six military fire departments and members from departments in Hawaii, India, Singapore and the United Kingdom. JFRD used a drone to video record the boats, and Capt. Eric Prosswimmer edited the content to create this photograph.

# ‘We’re Working Everyday on Something’

## Station 35’s Group Endeavor

Capt. Ryan Weakland knows just how good Station 35 can look. He was assigned there when the new facility opened in 2006.

His return to 35, this time as Station Captain, coincides with a station rejuvenation of sorts.

“All these projects were underway when I showed up. I’m just helping in the efforts,” said Weakland, referring to numerous ongoing improvements championed by the existing crew under the guidance of Rescue 35’s Capt. Jason Maddox.

That stained carpet in the bunk room and weight room? Gone, and replaced with wood-textured tile. Those tired looking interior walls? Now they are freshly painted; so are the doors throughout the station. The old, tired bunk room lockers got a fresh coat of



paint, too. And Station 35’s longstanding patch has also returned big time, but more on that in a moment.

One of the biggest tasks has been landscaping 35’s sizable front yard and pond, which includes numerous shrubs and massive Oaks, as well as cattails in the pond.

“Yard day is an all-day event. Removing old shrubs, removing landscaping and cattails and also trimming trees will make it look a lot nicer around here and will make yard day a little easier on everyone,” Weakland said, adding that the crew of Ladder 1 provided an assist on removing some of the heaviest overgrowth, among

other tasks. The result is a tidy looking exterior and several waist-high, neatly stacked piles of the trimmings awaiting trash pickup.

Weakland can certainly appreciate the hard work. He came from Station 22, a location where lawn day takes about an hour. Another outdoor endeavor at 35 is pressure washing the station exterior, including light poles, and cleaning the entire apron.

“We are working everyday on something,” said Weakland, who recently installed additional fitness equipment in the bay. Just after mentioning that, he was meeting briefly with a contractor to replace several door handles throughout the station.

Station 35’s kitchen counter area, which is mostly gray, is accented with piano black ceramic tiles on the backsplash wall to the bottom of the

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# Command Van In Service

Eng. Jeff Feltman (left) is the senior Engineer temporarily assigned to JFRD's new Command Van, which was placed in service in February. Feltman was part of the new apparatus' design team along with Retired Eng. Jimmy "Jammer" Morgan (right), who drove the 1998 version of the specialty vehicle. Operations Division Chief Keith Powers, Assistant Chief of Services Richard Reichard and Battalion Chief Darin Hooten also participated in the design.

Jimmy Morgan cares so much for JFRD and the Command Van that he came out of retirement twice to tend to the apparatus he drove for eight years.

The first time was five years ago when the van was on scene at a train derailment. Back then, it wasn't staffed full time and the incident commander knew Morgan could fix any issues that had crept in since the van's dormancy. Morgan happily volunteered.

A few years passed and Morgan was once again in demand. "When Jeff called me, I said 'You're kidding, right?'" Morgan recalled.

Eng. Jeff Feltman was serious when he told Morgan that JFRD's Administration wanted him to help design the new Command Van. "For them to trust anything I had to say was a dream beyond belief. I feel like I've reached the top of Mt. Everest," Morgan said.

The design and construction took about a year and several visits to the Frontline Communications plant in Clearwater. JFRD placed the van in service in February. Feltman, Eng. Ryan Haynes and Eng. Arthur Gray are temporarily assigned as drivers. Feltman said their immediate priority is creating a user manual and achieving proficiency with the van's features.

## COMM VAN SPECS

**Freightliner chassis and cab**

**39 feet long bumper to bumper**

**13 feet, 6 inches tall**

**9 work stations and 14 TV monitors**

**45-foot telescoping mast**

**Satellite equipped (phone, internet, TV)**

**Weather station with display console**

**Remote-controlled video camera**

**Thermal imaging camera**

**4 air conditioners, 2 heaters**

# Comprehensive Cleanup at Station 35, Renovations Indoors

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cabinets. The tiles will be extended to the ceiling. "Extending the backsplash to the ceiling will help keep the walls cleaner and will also look good," Weakland said.

The day room has an interesting accent: a large rendition of Station 35's patch. Recreated by Rescue 35's Eng. Robert "RJ" Shelsea, the patch's centerpiece is a superhero-esque firefighter with a mustache as big as an engine's front bumper and a chest and biceps of similar magnitude.

As Weakland was describing all of the crew's accomplishments, he was also expecting his third child within a matter of hours. He was looking forward to a few weeks with his newborn son and had no worries about 35's continued renewal while he's off work.



Rescue 35's Eng. Robert "R.J." Shelsea super-sized the station's patch on the wall in Station 35's dayroom.

## New Wellness Program Goal is to Help People. It's Not Punitive

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With the emerging JFRD Wellness Program, that opportunity is about to grow. Scheduled to launch this spring, the program is consistent with IAFF and NFPA wellness and fitness standards. Fonger will lead a team of 18 JFRD members who are Peer Fitness Trainers. They are certified through the American Council on Exercise and many of them also have an advanced education in fitness and/or nutrition. About one third of them are Mayo Clinic-certified to administer pulmonary function tests (PFT).

The Peer Fitness Trainers will canvass the department and help JFRD members to achieve their personal fitness and wellness goals. And they'll do so in the fire station.

"The units won't be going anywhere. We're coming to them. This will be very convenient for the field," said Division Chief of Training Gail Loput.

She's been developing the wellness program for about three years, including a successful quest for a \$700,000 grant to fund most of the program.

The program's trainers will record baseline data on each participant and track progress so JFRD members can understand if they're reaching their goals or need to make adjustments.

"The whole goal behind this is to help people. It's not punitive," Loput added.

Participation in JFRD's Wellness Program will be voluntary, except for the PFT and Mask FIT tests. The program will replace LifeScan screenings. It includes a diagnostic component to assess biometrics such as blood pressure, body mass index, cholesterol, triglycerides and glucose. Those results will remain confidential to comply with federal privacy laws, such as HIPAA. However, the results

of the PFT, the Mask FIT test and a special blood screening for HazMat Techs will be reported to the department to fulfill OSHA requirements.

Loput stressed that JFRD's Wellness Program is a health screening and your results should be forwarded to your primary care doctor or a specialist. Training Academy Capt. Erika McManus, a nurse practitioner, and Capt. Brielle Barnhill, a registered nurse, will oversee the pulmonary function testing and biometric screening component of the JFRD Wellness Program. *Fire Department Connection* will cover their roles in a future issue.

Loput believes the in-house nature of the JFRD Wellness Program will result in stronger department-wide participation. The program could even become a potential lifesaver.

"We want to identify issues before they become a problem," Loput said.

## Welcome Recruit Class 1-19



Thirty-six recruit firefighters began their JFRD careers on Feb. 4. They'll spend the next couple of months at the Training Academy and, in early March, they will further their training by also riding with in-service companies before entering the field in the spring.





Photo by Capt. Eric Proswimmer

JFRD members surround California Firefighter Thomas Pitman (lime green shirt, in front of Rescue 71's side door). Pitman cycled 36 consecutive days from San Diego, Ca. to Jacksonville Beach to honor his colleague, fallen firefighter Cory Iverson, who died December 2017 while fighting the Thomas Fire. The wildland conflagration destroyed 282,000 acres and more than 1,000 structures. Pitman's cross-country ride also raised funds for the foundation which Iverson's widow started. It provides a support network for first responders coping with PTSD and other emotional difficulties associated with the fire service and law enforcement. JFRD members who cycled with Pitman along his Baldwin to Jacksonville Beach stretch include Retiree Ken Alderman and wife Heather, Lt. Dominique Bartley, Lt. Tom Crow, Lt. Mike Peery, Eng. Steve Rohman and Eng. Michael Yee.

## CA. Firefighter cycles Coast to Coast for Friend

His bicycle is small. The skinny seat is really small. But California Firefighter Thomas Pitman's heart is huge.

In fact, it stretches from coast to coast.

Determined to honor the memory of his friend, who is a fallen firefighter, Pitman cycled cross country from San Diego, Ca. to Jacksonville Beach in 36 days. He began Jan. 1, and members of JFRD's bike team escorted him from Baldwin's Rails to Trails to Jacksonville Beach on Feb. 5.

Before officially reaching the shore of the East Coast, Pitman visited IAFF Local 122 to accept the Jacksonville Firefighter Charities' \$500 donation to the Iverson Foundation for Active Awareness. Its namesake is Pitman's friend CAL FIRE Engineer Cory Iverson who died in December 2017

while battling the Thomas Fire, one of California's largest wildland fires. The blaze destroyed approximately 282,000 acres and more than 1,000 structures in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties.

Iverson's wife, Ashley, started the foundation to assist first responders to cope with the stress and other emotional difficulties that can accompany the profession, Pitman said. About two months after Iverson's passing, Pitman began planning his 2,500-mile excursion. His fund-raising goal was one dollar per mile. When he reached Jacksonville, his tally was \$12,000.

Pitman said he chose Jacksonville Beach because the path was the most direct route to the east coast. Along the way, he visited 23 departments, often spending the night and enjoying

a meal. He described his marathon as "the most fraternal experience" of his fire service career. Pitman camped outdoors one night and stayed in hotels for the remainder of his travel.

He said he "got lucky with the weather" and overcame 10 flat tires and one broken spoke. His mother and uncle flew to Jacksonville to greet him at his oceanfront finish. CAL FIRE's Battalion Chief Pat Walker, vice president for Local 2881, San Diego District, also came to Jacksonville. Local 122's President Chief Randy Wyse also greeted Pitman at the foot of Beach Boulevard, as did several members of JFRD's Bike Team. Pitman cycled by himself the majority of his ride east. He said JFRD was the only fire and rescue department that actually rode with him. He flew back to California the next day.

# U.M.'s Firefighter Cancer Initiative Enters Fifth Year

By Lt. Sheryl Rodgers, Engine 11

Chairperson, JFRD FACE Team

The University of Miami Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center launched its groundbreaking Firefighter Cancer Initiative in 2015. Its driving force is a dedicated team of 15 doctors and researchers who collaborate with fire and rescue departments statewide to specifically study firefighter exposures to carcinogens and cancer risks. Initially, the team participated in ride-alongs and focus groups to better understand our culture, duties, and communication style with one another. Then they began developing methods for cancer prevention, screening, and early detection for firefighters.

In the Initiative's first year, more than 1,600 firefighters participated in a cancer survey. It launched in Palm Beach County as the Annual Cancer Survey and Blood Sample project. Researchers designed it to provide the most comprehensive survey of firefighter cancer risks and cancer rates in South Florida. Some of those same firefighters also participated in cervical and colorectal cancer screenings, environmental sampling projects, and an educational campaign to increase awareness about prevention and early detection. The Annual Cancer Survey has now expanded statewide. It is completely confidential, and participants receive a follow up survey annually to track their health and become aware of any changes. You can help the researchers – and yourself – by participating in the Annual Cancer Survey at this link: [www.tinyURL.com/ACSfirefighter](http://www.tinyURL.com/ACSfirefighter)

Perhaps the most important project of the Firefighter Cancer Initiative is the Personal Exposure Reporter (PER). It allows firefighters to keep an online

and confidential record of their individual exposures or potential exposures to carcinogens using any smartphone or computer. This reporting is critical to helping researchers understand cancer risks among firefighters. The University of Miami maintains all PER records and does not share the information with any fire department, union membership, or government agency. Any firefighter can create his or her own PER and can access a record of their exposures at any time using this link: <http://per.miami.edu>

Speaking of exposure, in 2016, the Initiative conducted the Determining Occupational Uncertainty in Sources and Exposures (DOUSE) Firefighter Gear Pilot Study. This research collected measurements of carcinogens (including diesel exhaust) from firefighters and their turnout gear to determine the actual risks of firefighter exposure to dirty gear. Researchers used skin and gear swabs, a dye study to track the spread of contaminants, and air sampling to collect data from gear that was off-gassing. This study was a basis for protocols for proper, post-incident gross decontamination of turnout gear and equipment, storage and transportation back to the station, and proper cleaning after exposure as well as measures for prevention of further contamination between incidents.

Other projects emerging from the Firefighter Cancer Initiative include the development of wearable technology to determine which carcinogens have the highest levels during a fire, the utilization of breath samples for detection of biomarkers and volatile organic compounds, and the development of home-based colorectal and cervical screening kits to aid firefighters in early detection of these specific cancers.



Dr. Alberto J. Caban-Martinez teaches at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. He also is Deputy Director of the Firefighter Cancer Initiative. Caban-Martinez visited Jacksonville last year and shared some of the initiative's research.

Learn more about the Firefighter Cancer Initiative at: <https://umiamihealth.org/sylvester-comprehensive-cancer-center/research/firefighter-cancer-initiative>

*JFRD's FACE Team, through the Florida Firefighter Safety and Health Collaborative, keeps JFRD members informed about the Firefighter Cancer Initiative and its efforts and recommendations to reduce the occurrence of cancer among Florida's firefighters. We hope to drastically reduce or eliminate this epidemic in our profession for future generations of firefighters. We hope that every JFRD member will continue to support this effort by implementing these recommendations so that we can continue to effect positive change in the lives of our members.*



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