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2007 PERSON OF THE YEAR

MACK BORCHARDT

BY DEANN DALEY HOLCOMB

LINING THE WALLS of Frisco's new Central Fire Station are distinct photographs of firefighters, past and present, in action fighting fires or in rescue situations along with happier times at fundraisers or parties. Looking at these photographs brings a broad smile to the face of Frisco Fire Chief Mack Borchardt.

He is a humble man and family, friends and co-workers will tell you he is totally dedicated to being Frisco's fire chief but he will be the one to say that those who work side-by-side with him are the people he thinks are true heroes. Standing proud, Chief Borchardt, who has been Frisco's fire chief since 1979, can tell you the story behind each photograph.



Chief Borchardt at the scene of an auto accident

photo provided by Mack Borchardt

“Lots of good folks doing a very good job,” Chief Borchardt quietly replies.

With his office now in the new, state-of-the-art Central Fire Station, Chief Borchardt has witnessed and experienced the many changes that happen to a growing community and its public service.

It was a modest beginning for Chief Borchardt twenty-eight years ago when he began his career as fire chief. The main fire station was a small, shed-like building in downtown Frisco. It wasn't even big enough to house all of the city's fire trucks. Once branded the “Fastest Growing City in Texas,” Chief Borchardt has watched Frisco grow from a small population of a couple of thousand to more than 95,000 residents today.

“It has been a huge change to go from a small town to the growth of the city and where it is today and I have learned that you have to be willing to change to make it all work,” stated Chief Borchardt. “We looked at other departments and brought new ideas into Frisco. We have worked hard to make those ideas work best for Frisco.”

He adds, “Some may ask, ‘Why are

you doing it this way in Frisco,’ and I'll tell them they have to go on a little faith that it is going to work.”

The main fire station was a small, shed-like building in downtown Frisco. It wasn't even big enough to house all of the city's fire trucks.

FRISCO NATIVE

Being one of those rare Frisco natives, Chief Borchardt grew up on a farm on the western boundary of the Frisco city line. His family later sold the acreage and his grandparents purchased one of the first lots of land sold in Frisco.

“My father was a farmer and my mother was a teacher,” Chief Borchardt said. “I lived on a farm, worked the farm and, when I grew up, I wanted to be a farmer. I reflect back now on how everything has

evolved and that was what I loved doing, being a farmer, while some boys dream of being a policeman or something like that when they are small.”

Right before college Chief Borchardt's father, Aubrey Borchardt, passed away at the age of 68. Chief Borchardt was only 19-years-old at the time of his father's death and it was difficult for him.

“My father had a strong work ethic and was a very proud man. When he became ill I remember my mother, Ruth, stepped up and took care of the family,” Chief Borchardt said. “My father was a quiet, but strong man and he had those strong values of small town America.”

EARLY ENDEAVORS

Chief Borchardt went on to graduate from Frisco High School and attended East Texas State University, known then as A&M Commerce. In 1973 he left college and returned home to Frisco where he worked for an appliance and air conditioning business before branching out on his own.

“You might say I was the Maytag man in Frisco,” Chief Borchardt said, laughing.



*Borchardt family photo (left) photo from Frisco STYLE archives
Wedding photo for Chief Borchardt and Allison Nethery (above)
photo provided by Mack Borchardt*

He married, but later divorced. He has two children from his first marriage, Jenny now 33 and Wes, 31.

"I am so proud of them," Chief Borchardt said. "Jenny works as a nurse and Wes works in housing construction and is quite good at it. Jenny is married to Darrin Murray and they have two children Garrett, 7, and Kate, 5, my first grandchildren."

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER

Then one of those rare events happened that can change a life forever. Chief Borchardt made a decision that started him on the path to where he is today.

"I always wanted to give back to the community and at the time organizations like the Jaycees were looking for members, but I decided I would join the Frisco Volunteer Fire Department. I figured I wasn't one of those guys that wear business suits," Chief Borchardt said. "When I tell that story now I am usually wearing a tie and everyone looks at me funny."

Chief Borchardt recalls fighting his first fire was much more difficult than he

expected.

"I remember jumping in the fire truck, heading to the fire and my next recollection is that someone handed me a hose and told me to go in and fight the fire and not to come out until I had put the fire out, so in we went," Chief Borchardt said. "It was scary but then your adrenalin is so high that you don't have time to be scared or think about fighting the fire. But something else scared me even more – I discovered I loved it."

FIRE FIGHTER

Although Chief Borchardt initially became a volunteer fireman as a commitment to his community, he realized where his heart and his future were and that was being a fireman.

"It struck a cord in me," Chief Borchardt said. "I was never very athletic, but I was competitive and that appealed to me, the challenge of fighting fires. I think that was one of the reasons for the turn of events in my life. My competitive spirit and the challenge of firefighting – that was it for me."

Chief Borchardt left his work in the

appliance and air conditioning business and became a firefighter with the McKinney Fire Department. He still continued his volunteer service with the Frisco Fire Department.

PUBLIC SERVANT

As Frisco slowly continued to grow, Chief Borchardt left McKinney and returned to Frisco. In 1981, he was hired as the Frisco City Administrator where he worked for a little more than five years. He also handled the duties as the Frisco volunteer fire chief.

"By 1981, Frisco was growing and there were a few sub-divisions coming in but there is nothing like what we have seen in the last couple of years. Although there was confidence at some point the city would grow, under state law Frisco was not big enough yet to hire a City Manager so the Mayor was chief executive officer and I remained as the city assistant," Chief Borchardt said.

As Frisco's population increased, then Mayor Bob Warren initiated the search for a City Manager and George Purefoy was hired in 1987.

"I think at the time some of the elected officials were worried that I might want to be City Manager, but I knew I was not knowledgeable enough to do the job and it wasn't where my interests were," Chief Borchardt said, laughing as he continues.

“The reality is there wasn’t anyone in Frisco who wanted that City Manager to come as much as me. The city council hired George Purefoy as Frisco’s new City Manager and I met him the first day he was there and soon knew he was perfect for Frisco.”

FRISCO FIRE CHIEF

The city council then offered Chief Borchardt the position of full-time fire chief.

“I think at that point they felt Frisco was growing enough that they needed someone full time and because of my past training at the Frisco Fire Department and being a volunteer fireman, they thought I should continue as fire chief,” Chief Borchardt said.

Meanwhile, Chief Borchardt had been single for a long time, until 1997 when he met and married Allison Nethery.

“We met in front of the Frisco post office,” Chief Borchardt said. “Allison was going to the post office and I was going into the cleaners. We were good friends for a long time before we married.”

The Borchardt’s now have two children, 7-year-old Alexa and MacKenzie, 6.

“Everyone should love their job as much as Mack does and for him it is all about giving back to a community that has been so good to him throughout his whole life,” Mrs. Borchardt said. “He loves Frisco, the fire station, the employees and the firefighters; he considers them to be his extended family. He worries about them because in life when you get older you realize you are not quite superman and he realizes things can happen and he appreciates them and their families.”

Deputy Chief Lee Glover said Chief Borchardt always is reaching out with a helping hand.

“The Chief would do anything for anybody,” Deputy Chief Glover said. “We are always trying to stay ahead of the game and we are always looking at what

other communities are doing, not just in Texas but across the country. If something bad has happened in another community he stays on top of it to do everything he can to make sure it doesn’t happen in Frisco.”



Chief Borchardt with his daughters, Alexa & MacKenzie

photo provided by Mack Borchardt

Deputy Chief Glover adds, “You tie your shoes tight in the morning because you never know what you are going to be doing. He gives you a project and expects you to take off with it.”

In 2000 the 1.7-million square foot Stonebriar Centre opened in Frisco and became a shopping magnet with anchor stores like Nordstrom, Sears, JC Penney and Foley’s (now Macy’s). The mall features a national hockey league sized ice rink and a 24-screen AMC Movie Theatre, forever changing the landscape of Frisco. Next came the Dr Pepper Ballpark, home to the Frisco RoughRiders followed by the Texas Tornado and FC Dallas coming to town. The explosion continued with the Frisco Conference Center and Embassy Suites Hotel.

As city leaders scrambled to try and ease road congestion and deal with the

growing population, the fire department also felt the punch of the city’s overwhelming growth. Chief Borchardt felt challenged to maintain the city’s public service despite congested fire stations and the need to upgrade equipment.

“I call it ‘opportunity,’” Chief Borchardt said. “We had bond money approved by the voters to build the former Central Fire Station in 1987 and then in the mid-90s another bond election was passed which allowed us to build Fire Station #2. A lot of people wondered why we built it where we did but we knew the mall was coming and we felt that it would be needed there. Soon after, Station #3 was built at Legacy and Warren Parkway.”

To understand the tremendous growth Frisco has experienced, all one need do is look at the Fire Department budget. In 2000 the Department operated on a budget of a little

more than \$3 million dollars and seven years later the budget is near \$14 million.

“One of Chief Borchardt’s best attributes is his willingness to change due to changing circumstances. Obviously with Frisco growing from a population of 3,000 when Mack first started with the city in 1981 to more than 95,000 today, a lot of changes have occurred in the city,” said Frisco City Manager George Purefoy. “Chief Borchardt has built the Fire Department from an all-volunteer force to the primarily paid department it is today. Mack has been willing and even eager to change his management style to be a better supervisor with the changes brought on by the young firefighters coming into the department today.”

Chief Borchardt laughs as he recalls those past days, “I look back now and I didn’t have time to worry about it, I just

*Flash the Fire
Department clown
with young fans
photo provided by
Mack Borchardt*



knew the next wave was coming and we had better be ready.”

The Fire Chief is convinced that the advance planning by city leaders was critical to Frisco’s success. While you might only consider city services as buildings, roads and medical key components affected by the fast track growth of the city, the fire department joined the list of public services affected by Frisco’s changing environment.

“We looked at Lewisville and Plano and what happened when they opened their shopping malls, but their growth took as much as five to ten years while here in Frisco the opening of Stonebriar was an economic engine for Frisco within two years,” Chief Borchardt said.

“Our city leaders take a tremendous amount of pride in providing high level service in the community from city hall to our firefighters and, when the challenge came, we were ready. Within the fire department from the time we started out as a volunteer fire department to when we became a career fire department to where we are today, I think the forward vision has allowed us to meet whatever

challenges we faced from the growing population. We just did it.”

These challenges didn’t deter Chief Borchardt and his staff from being awarded the Insurance Services Office ISO-1 certification in 2000, making it one of only six cities in Texas to be awarded the recognition. Frisco joined the ranks of 36 cities nationwide to achieve this honor. ISO recognition means that the Frisco Fire Department is an established and well-trained work force with equipment and infrastructure support able to respond to any emergency at any time.

“I think it set the bar for who we are and what we are, and what we can do as a team,” Chief Borchardt said. “I think it’s a true reflection of a well-managed city. It’s reflected in the quality of the construction we had underway to improve our fire facilities and it was a fire department-driven rating that I am very proud of. We provided the services with the resources we had while at the same time notified our elected officials about what we might need for the future.”

PATRIOT

The shocking events of 9/11 when terrorists flew two planes into the Twin Towers of New York City’s World Trade Center changed life forever, as we know it. Millions across the country watched in horror as the terrorist attacks and explosions unfolded live on television as 2,973 people lost their lives.

Awash in emotion but steadfast, rescuers, firefighters, emergency medical personnel, police, nurses and other helpers risked their lives to save other lives. Like all of us, 9/11 had a profound emotional impact on Chief Borchardt.

“I don’t know if you had a chance to be stunned, but I remember as we watched the second plane hit the Twin Towers my reaction at the time was what was going to happen next,” Chief Borchardt said. “Then there were news reports of the third plane and watching the rescue attempts, we all wanted to be there to help.”

Ironically, the Frisco Fire Department personnel had already been undergoing anti-terrorist training.

“The U.S. Fire Administration and the

U.S. Department of Justice, through grant money, had offered training sessions for our firefighters, training them to react to domestic terrorism and it was based on chemical and biological attacks," Chief Borchartd said. "The company that operated the training told us the only difference in what you deal with on a daily basis and what you might encounter in a chemical and biological threat is that the terrorists usually set off a device and then a secondary device. That is where the danger lies because they draw the police and firefighters to the initial device and then the secondary device is where the danger is."

Chief Borchartd adds, "We were all sitting at the table, watching the television when the second airplane crashed into the World Trade Center and I know we all thought about what we had learned from the terrorism manual."

That same day Chief Borchartd remembers being in his office and looking down at the cover of the training manual that was on his desk and experiencing an eerie feeling about what he saw.

"I looked down at the cover of the

training manual and on that cover showed the sky line of New York City and the World Trade Center and it had a target shot encircled on it," Chief Borchartd said. "They have since changed the cover."

Ten members of the Frisco Fire Department traveled to Washington, D.C. and attended the memorial service.

Chief Borchartd adds, "We all wanted to immediately go to New York City and lend our support and help, but that's not what you do. You wait to be called upon because you don't want to interrupt what rescue plan they may have in place. They knew that every firefighter across the country was ready to go."

Ten members of the Frisco Fire Department did travel to Washington,

D.C. and attended the memorial service in early October 2002 that honored the 446 fallen firefighters, including 347 firefighters who died in the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

Frisco firefighters Deputy Chief Paul Siebert, Lt. Gene Pilkington, Captain Shawn Brightman, Lt. Steve Cruz, Lt. David Ferguson, Trent Schulze, Nathan Naylor, Brian Jetton, Travis Level and Chip Wertheimer were among thousands of firefighters that lined the streets of our nation's capitol before the memorial service to form a "Sea of Blue."

The firemen then traveled to New York City to visit "Ground Zero" and several NYFD fire stations. At NYFD Engine 6, where all of the firefighters died during the 9/11 attack, the Frisco firefighters visited with Firefighter Bill Green, whose parents live in Frisco.

"We all wanted to be there, but those of us who stayed behind knew we were well represented," Chief Borchartd said. "That will stay with me, like everyone, for the rest of my life."

Mrs. Borchartd adds, "I know Mack struggled with 9/11 and it was hard for



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him to watch the coverage on television and I know he was so proud that some of his firefighters were able to go to New York and attend the memorial services.”

Chief Borchardt believes 9/11 added a new dimension to the role of the firefighter. “I think you see a fireman or firewoman as not only someone who fights fire but also in more of a rescue role along with emergency medical and accident prevention,” Chief Borchardt said.

The firefighter’s changing role was once again solidified when in 2005 Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, wiping out communities as the hurricane waters flooded the city, leaving people stranded, injured and some losing their lives. The search for loved ones missing from the hurricane’s devastation began immediately. The Frisco Fire Department answered the call for help from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Homeland Security by deploying six Frisco firefighters.

“The call came and it said for the firefighters to leave their protective gear



Chief Borchardt speaking to a group
photo provided by Mack Borchardt

at home and report to Atlanta so we knew they weren’t going to be fighting fires but become a part of the rescue effort,” Chief Borchardt said. “Our guys ended up on the riverfront assisting the navy ship Iwo Jima and they were in charge of delegating the resources the ship had brought in to New Orleans.”

Chief Borchardt adds, “They were put in the eye of the storm of the recovery. Our guys were wearing grey t-shirts and they said the folks in the coast guard told everyone that if they needed something to find the guys in the grey t-shirts and I was very proud of that.”

Chief Borchardt said the fireman had quite an experience being a part of the rescue operation.

“Our guys would hear these bells ring from the Iwo Jima, then a helicopter would land and an announcement would be made. One day the bells rang and the voice from the loud speaker said, ‘United States of America,’ and our firemen asked some coast guard folks what that meant and they said it lets everyone know who has arrived and what they are in charge of. That meant President Bush was on board,” Chief Borchardt said.

When hurricane Rita struck the Texas gulf coast, Frisco firefighters once again met the challenge. “We had as many as thirty folks rotate in and out of the recovery efforts in the Houston area and along the gulf coast after hurricane Rita hit,” Chief Borchardt said. “We had two



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ambulances that operated down there for a couple of weeks and one ambulance ended up staying for thirty days. We continued to rotate crews in and out. We even had some of the firefighters that were in New Orleans volunteer for Rita.”

READY AND WILLING

Whether it is sending firefighters to assist in the rescue operation of Katrina, assisting the community during emergencies such as bad weather and flooding or keeping abreast of the condition of his two firefighters injured fighting a house fire last October, Chief Borchardt stays totally focused on his job as chief.

“Someone once pointed out to me that firefighters know what they are going into and they react to that expectation and are accepting. I see the determination in the faces of our young firefighters and I truly believe we have the greatest group of firefighters in the country,” Chief Borchardt said. “Not being the one going into a fire now, I am concerned for their safety but I know they have great skills and motivation. They are involved in a lot of changes that are going on in our community and there is a lot more going on that firefighters are called upon to be involved in with the community’s safety.”

Mrs. Borchardt said the Chief’s center of his life, besides his family, is the fire department and firefighters. “The explosive growth has played a changing role for the firefighter and when you have firefighters go to New York and then to Katrina you realize that the innocence is gone. At one time, Frisco was a small town and pretty protected, but that is not the case anymore with tragedies like 9/11 and the hurricanes. It changes everybody and I know it has changed Mack and his outlook on life.”

Ryan Wolford works as the assistant to Chief Borchardt and as the Emergency Medical Services Coordinator.

“Commitment is the appropriate word. He is the Fire Chief seven days a week, 24/7 and it doesn’t stop, every day he eats, sleeps and breathes his job,” Mr. Wolford said. “I work with him on whatever the project at hand is and with our growth we have a lot of capital projects with new stations, vehicles and budgetary planning, we are involved in all of those areas.”

Deputy Chief Glover adds, “The Chief wants everybody to be safe in Frisco and if you come to Frisco, he wants you to be safe and have a good time.

VISIONARY

Chief Borchardt was a part of the team of city leaders that served on the 2002 bond committee wherein Frisco voters later approved a bond proposal that included \$20 million in bond monies to cover cost and equipment for the new Central Fire Station and the Frisco Fire Safety Town, a concept Chief Borchardt worked hard to have become a reality.

As you walk through the city-sponsored Frisco Fire Safety Town, the message for kids is safety through its little streets, small houses and businesses, where the creative environment has been designed to teach children. It is built to a five-eighths scale and the miniature townscape features 17 buildings, tollbooth, a section of railroad tracks with working crossing arms and miniature crossing signals. Electric cars are available for the children to drive and each building and car has a sponsor. Bettie Grimes serves as the Frisco Fire Safety Town educational coordinator.

“A lot of people don’t know, but the Chief has been working on Safety Town for at least 15 years and it is very important to him,” Deputy Chief Glover said. “He could have easily just done what they did in another city but he wanted it to have the Frisco feel to it without being cocky. That means bigger and better so we can get the best bang for the buck.”

Currently Frisco Safety Town, the first of its kind in the United States, focuses on children from kindergarten through fifth grade, but the Frisco Independent School District and other organizations hope to expand the town’s mission to provide a

hands-on place for not only children but for young people of all ages to come and learn about being safe.

“Fire safety has been the goal of everyone who has been a part of this project and promoting safety education,” Chief Borchardt said. “I have truly believed in this project from the beginning and I thank the city and residents of Frisco for supporting it.”



*The Borchardt family (top); Showing his girls the ropes (bottom)
photos provided by Mack Borchardt*

Dedication for Frisco Fire Safety Town and the Frisco Central Fire Station, located at Main Street and Gary Burns Drive, was held in early February. The 43,000-square-foot station facility houses a fire engine, two ambulances, a fire truck with a 105-foot extended ladder along with a Special Operations Truck dedicated to heavy rescue operations and their latest addition, the Light, Air and Rehab truck.

COMMITTED

More than 108 firefighters are employed with the fire department and the volunteer fire department remains strong with 40 volunteers. Frisco now has five fire stations throughout the city and serves as a CareFlite rescue helicopter base. The fleet maintenance services center is located in the former central fire station next door to the new facility.

When two of the fire stations were under construction and the firemen needed a place to stay, Chief Borchardt picked up the phone.

“I called the school district and asked them if our firefighting unit could use a school for a while and they moved in during the summer,” Chief Borchardt said. The firefighters stayed at Frisco’s Wilma Fisher Elementary and at Sam and Ann Roach Middle School while the new fire stations were completed. Plans are underway for a sixth station to be built and city officials hope to break ground within the next two months. Along with the new facilities brings the demand for more firefighters.

“We are in the process of looking to hire more career firefighters,” Chief Borchardt said. “Today many of our volunteer firefighters come in and man the Central Fire Station. Many of our new hires come from our volunteers who must go through the same requirements as our potential firefighters including the background check, polygraph and physical examination and test.”

THE INSPIRATION BEHIND THE MAN

Chief Borchardt’s roots are deeply embedded in the past, present and future of Frisco. His mother, Ruth McCormick Borchardt, a 101-year-old native Frisco resident and living legend, graduated from Frisco High school in 1924. For her dedication as a former teacher, the Ruth Borchardt Elementary School was named in her honor in 2001 and the



Ruth Borchardt photo provided by Mack Borchardt
city recently named Borchardt Street in recognition of all she has done for the Frisco community.

“Mack is very close to his mother,” said Mrs. Borchardt. “She is a trend setter and a remarkable woman at 101. She still plays dominos twice a week, goes to church and Sunday school and she has a hamburger named after her at Scotty P’s restaurant.”

Chief Borchardt said he always thought of his mother as someone who was a wonderful mother who cared for her family. “My father was ill when I was very young and she took charge of everything. She was a teacher with a college degree and she taught at the local college in Dallas. She was ahead of her time,” Chief Borchardt said. “I never realized it until Allison and her mother remarked about how my mother was a ‘modern day woman.’ I had always just thought of her as a great mom, but I see now that she was back then what the norm is today. She was always out there taking care of what needed to be done.”

Mrs. Borchardt said her husband is a genuine person who always gives to the community but she knows his main priority is family.

“We are older parents so if Mack and I go anywhere, the girls go with us and we are together as a family,” Mrs. Borchardt said. “Both of our girls figure skate and they qualified during the Texas Winter Games held in Frisco so they are going to the national state games in Colorado to compete and we are so excited.”

Chief Borchardt adds, “Allison is the

chief at home. When I am at the office of course everyone calls me chief and then one night one of my Deputy Chief’s, Lee Glover, called my house and asked for the chief and Allison said there wasn’t a chief at the house, only Mack. When I got on the phone Lee was laughing and he said, ‘Hey Mack.’”

PERSON OF THE YEAR

Chief Borchardt has already left his mark on the Frisco community – a mark that will be seen for generations to come. But he is far from putting his final imprints down.

“One of the most amazing facts to me is that, in my almost twenty years with Frisco, I have yet to receive a complaint from a citizen regarding the quality of service from our fire department,” Mr. Purefoy said. “Such commitment to quality citizen service begins at the top with Chief Borchardt. In addition to being the consummate professional, Chief Borchardt clearly loves this community and its citizens.”

DeAnn Daley Holcomb is a freelance writer living in Plano.



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