

Brandon Westbrook enjoys working with the Katy Fire Department, alongside his dad, who is also a firefighter



Katy's Hot Firefighters

Whether They're Battling Blazes or Bringing Calm to Emergency Situations, Katy's Courageous Firefighters Are Always There When You Need Them

*Written by Mary Hogan
Photography by Suzi Issa*

When there's an emergency, Katy firefighters are there to help put things right again, battling blazes and giving peace of mind to the neighbors they serve. They are truly dedicated to helping others in their worst moments, combining compassion and courage. These hot Katy firefighters persevere through the challenges of the job to give back and make a difference in their community.

Sharing Time & Talents

After watching his brother serve as a firefighter in Central Texas, Chief James Dillon of the West I-10 Fire Department decided to volunteer, too. "I would always visit him at the fire station and I spent a lot of time there," he shares. "I came to know the firefighters as my family." When he moved to Katy 17 years ago, he continued his career with the Houston Fire Department as senior captain, while volunteering with the Katy and Willowfork fire departments before joining the West I-10 Fire Department.

Chief Dillon says his family's support is crucial to his success as both a career and volunteer firefighter. "The challenge of being a volunteer firefighter is determining the appropriate amount of time to commit," he says. "I have been successful in balancing time by assessing my available time, talking with my family, and gaining their support."

Despite having to juggle multiple responsibilities, he is glad to be able to serve his Katy friends and neighbors and help keep them safe. "I enjoy interacting with the community on a regular basis," says Chief Dillon. "It's the people who make a community, and the Katy people are very supportive of their firefighters. It means a great deal to be appreciated by the community." His motivation to take an active role in his community comes from the desire to share his time, skills, and abilities with others. "I believe that if we are given a gift, whether it is time, skills, or treasure, we should share it with others," he says, adding, "Firefighting is a very spiritually rewarding position, both as a volunteer and a career."

Helping Fellow Katyites

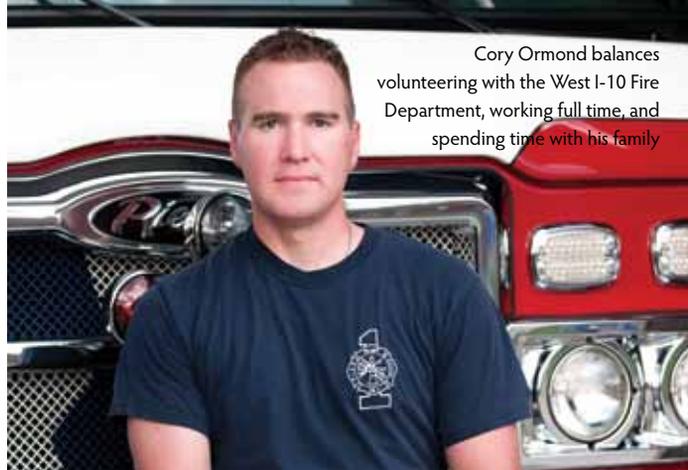
Almost 10 years ago, Cory Ormond was driving past the West I-10 Fire Station one day when, on a whim, he decided to stop by and talk with the firefighters on duty. He has been a volunteer firefighter ever since and considers the job itself the biggest reward of all. He explains, "Where else can you drive a million dollar piece of equipment down the road to a call and then pull equipment off of that vehicle that saves lives?"

Ormond sees his work as a volunteer firefighter as the perfect way to pay it forward and make a difference. "Some people like to slow down and stare at accidents on the side of the road, passing by without thinking twice," says Ormond, adding, "I prefer being the one who is in the middle of the incident helping that person, because one day, I am going to need someone else's assistance, and I can only hope that someone might show up to help."

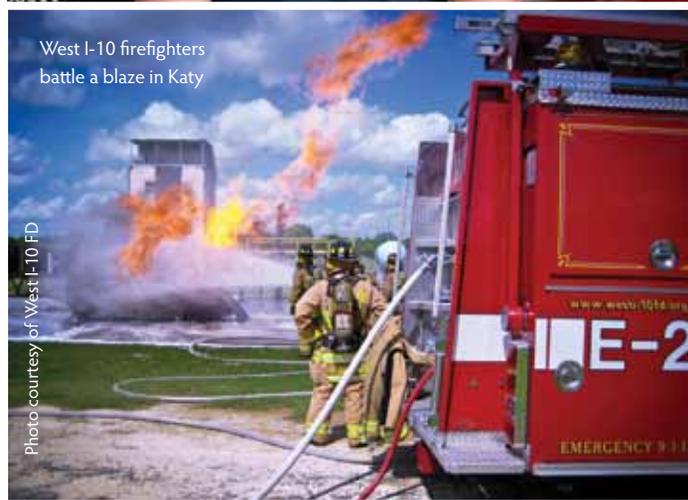
With a full-time job and a Katy family, Ormond leaves his nights, weekends, and holidays open for volunteering. He admits, though, that finding time to work, be with family, and still give back can be a challenge. "Volunteering is a challenge in and of itself, simply because you don't have an established schedule as to when people are going to call 911," he shares. "Finding a happy medium between the two and running shifts makes it somewhat nice for the obvious fact that you have some evenings off for just the family."

A Rewarding Career

When Dana Massey decided to join the Katy Fire Department, she was following in the footsteps of her family. "My father, uncles, and brothers were all in the fire department, so I grew up around fire stations," she shares. She has followed her dreams and made a career out of both firefighting and serving as a paramedic. "The best part of being a firefighter in Katy is that I don't really look at it as a job," says Massey. "I enjoy doing it and I have a great boss who makes every day at work enjoyable. We have great equipment and a good working environment."



Cory Ormond balances volunteering with the West I-10 Fire Department, working full time, and spending time with his family



West I-10 firefighters battle a blaze in Katy

Photo courtesy of West I-10 FD



Dana Massey and Brandon Westbrook of the Katy Fire Department, with Sam the fire dog

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As a mom of a teenager in junior high, she enjoys being able to give back to her family's many friends. "It's good to know that when one of your family or friends is having the worst day of their life, you will be there to help," Massey shares. Juggling her career and raising a family can be challenging at times, but her Katy friends and family have always been there to lend a helping hand. "The most challenging part for me has been the long work hours and schedule," says Massey. "I was a single mother most of my career and being gone 24 hours posed a big problem, but with great friends and family I made it through."

She considers having a love of helping your community a key part of being a successful firefighter. "A firefighter is a great job with a wonderful schedule, but you're not going to get rich doing it," she laughs. "So you have to really enjoy helping people and your community to get gratification from this job." And every time she does get to make a difference in someone's life and sees the gratitude in their eyes, she feels the rewards and blessings of the job.

Dedicated to Giving Back

Like Massey, Brandon Westbrook of the Katy Fire Department was also born into a family of firefighters. He grew up watching his dad, uncles, and cousins volunteer, which naturally sparked an interest in him at a young age to do the same. Along with serving in Katy, he is also a full-time member of the Houston Fire Department. "I most enjoy being able to serve a grateful community that shows its appreciation," he says of working in Katy.

Westbrook adds, "My dad also works for the Katy Fire Department, so on some days, we are making calls together, which is something I've always wanted to do." He is close to his parents and brothers, and while he sometimes misses holidays or birthdays because he is at the station, he still finds the job highly rewarding. "The most

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rewarding parts are being able to help people and being able to see the difference you made in their lives and family's lives," he shares. Becoming a firefighter takes much training and dedication, but Westbrook encourages those passionate about the field to never give up on their dreams. "The road to becoming a full-time firefighter may not be as easy as people may think, but with a little heart and determination, it is one of the most rewarding jobs out there," shares Westbrook.

Motivated to Make a Difference

About two years ago, Ryan Gonzales followed his calling to help others and joined the West I-10 Fire Department with no previous experience or knowledge in the fire service. "I was a changed man and God had placed in me this new passion to help others rather than working so hard to help myself; to lead by example, by my actions, and realize that there are more important things to life than the pursuit of our own happiness," he recalls. "I saw volunteer firefighting as a way to give back to use the talents I was blessed with alongside the training I attained from the fire department not only for my community, but also to help others around the world." Two years later, he continues to learn how to save lives both here at home in Katy, as well as in countries like Haiti, where he journeyed to lend assistance after the earthquake in 2010.

He feels a sense of camaraderie with his fellow firefighters and considers them family. Still, he says it is important to balance being a hero for your community with being a hero for your own family. Gonzales says, "It's challenging to continually balance the two, [juggling] between your family at home and your family in the fire department; between spending the time to help those in need who you have never met and helping your loved ones at home who remind you as to why you volunteer in the first place." In the end, though, everyone is supportive of making family a priority.

DANIEL E. MCCARTY, JR.

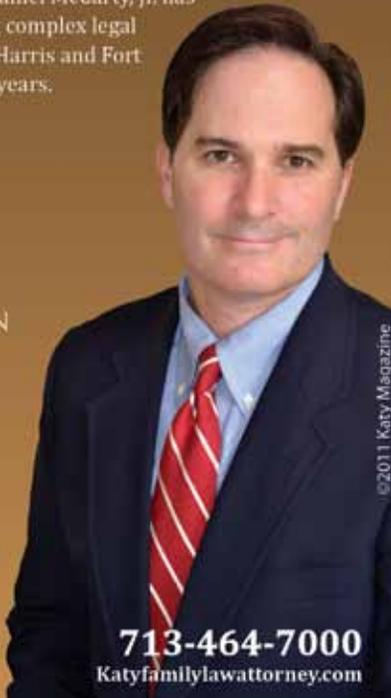
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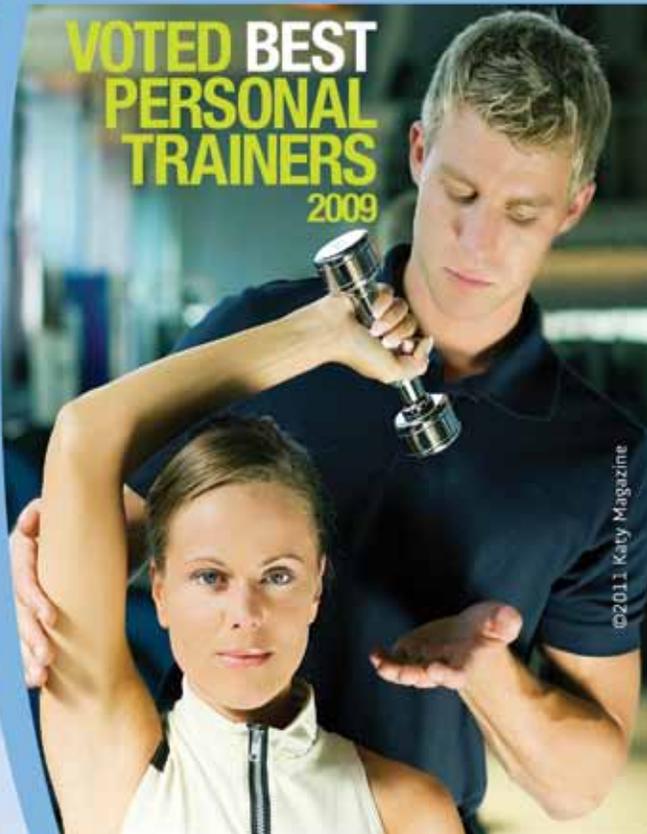
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Ryan Gonzales of the West I-10 Fire Department enjoys the chance to give back



Katy firefighter Dana Massey also serves as a paramedic



Chief James Dillon of the West I-10 Fire Department followed in his brother's footsteps as a firefighter

Interested in Volunteering?

The West-10 Fire Department is a nonprofit organization that relies on volunteers to service parts of Fort Bend and Harris counties. For information about volunteering, visit westi-10fd.org.



Firefighter Ryan Gonzales recently volunteered in Haiti, lending assistance and aid after the 2010 earthquake

Photo Courtesy of the West I-10 Fire Department

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WEST I-10 FIRE DEPARTMENT

Maintaining a full-time job while also focusing on saving lives as a volunteer can be difficult at times, too, but being able to make a difference every day is well worth it. Gonzales explains, "We may get called to work a scene in the early parts of the morning, sometimes for a few hours, left with only enough time to clean up, say goodbye to our families, and head to work. When others are starting their normal work day, we as volunteer firefighters have fought a structure fire, rescued a patient from a motor vehicle incident, or helped Life Flight a patient who's gone into cardiac arrest, all before 7 a.m."

Gonzales relies on his Christian faith for strength and motivation. "No matter how small or big the task, I've learned that any little bit helps and that even though we may think we can't make a difference, we really can do our part in giving back in our own individual ways," he says. "Even if it's something so simple as a smile or a hello to someone who just needs to hear it, that smile could change the course or outcome of their day. Or it could be so big as putting your own life at risk and pushing yourself through the mental and physical challenges that come along with it, just to help those in need." KM

MARY HOGAN is associate editor for Katy Magazine and loves having a job where she gets paid to interview hot firefighters.

This is a small sampling of all the amazing, dedicated firefighters in the Katy area. Due to space constraints, we are not able to showcase all of our hometown heroes!

Meet Katy's Firefighters

James Dillon

Chief and Senior Captain, West I-10 Fire Department

- Married to Anne, with three daughters, Brittni, Rebecca, and Emiley.
- Has lived in the Katy area for 17 years.
- Enjoys Katy's hometown feel and the supportive community.

Ryan Gonzales

West I-10 Fire Department

- Has enjoyed volunteering as a firefighter for about two years.
- Enjoys giving back to others and lending a helping hand to his neighbors in need.
- Journeyed to Haiti to assist in the 2010 earthquake aftermath.

Dana Massey

City of Katy Fire Department

- Has one daughter, Kara and a miniature schnauzer, Maddie.
- Has lived in the Katy area for 11 years.
- Enjoys Katy's small-town feel, where everyone knows everyone and you have everything you need.

Cory Ormond

West I-10 Fire Department

- Married to Allison and has a stepson, Kyle and a daughter on the way, Kaitlyn.
- Grew up in Katy and has lived here ever since.
- Enjoys Katy's diversity, where there is something for everyone and big-city conveniences are only a short drive away.

Brandon Westbrook

City of Katy Fire Department

- His dad, Doug Westbrook is also a Katy firefighter.
- Has two dogs, Gauge and Lucy.
- Enjoys that Katy is a tight-knit community, with friendly and gracious people.

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1 Thessalonians 5:16-18



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