

NHS AP statistics students compare volunteerism to county resources in Dyer Mill Fire

Leece
Uilkie



NHS STATS
CLASS PROJECT

One of the last projects I did at Navasota High School – the last project, in fact – was a project-based, service learning experience that took our efforts and knowledge of statistics outside the traditional classroom atmosphere. We analyzed statistical data comparing the effectiveness of volunteer versus county effort in assisting the victims to the Dyer Mill Fire.

As you know, citizens of Grimes County and the surrounding areas were cursed with a swarm of raging wildfires during the summer of 2011. A number of victims were left without homes and it was up to the county and other volunteers to provide aid.

Our Navasota High School AP Statistics class, under the instruction of Josh Wilkerson, applied what we learned in class to complete a community service project.

The goal was to measure whether or not local officials were as effective at meeting the needs of wildfire victims in comparison to volunteer organizations while utilizing statistical inference and equations to draw conclusions.

The objective is not to make one side appear superior to the

other, but rather highlight the positive things both sides accomplished and explore whether the county can learn from the response of volunteer groups (or vice versa).

Essentially, the results gathered will give others an idea of how efficiently the output exerted by the community is utilized in an emergency situation

The class elected project managers among our peers. These include: Colton Harris, Julie Reyes, Jacob Malek, Kelsey Kehlenbeck, Trevor Savensky and myself. Assisting with the project were Texas A&M professors Dr. Jamis Perrett and Dr. Laura Stough. Dr. Perrett specializes in experimental design. Dr. Stough specializes in disaster relief.

Maps were obtained displaying the evacuated fire zone. To collect a population to test, Dianna Westmoreland, Secretary with the Friends of Grimes County, provided us with a list of victims. Presented with a fairly small population, we decided to conduct a complete census.

We used multiple techniques and variables when creating the survey to insure the data produced would be appropriate for comparing effectiveness. A Spanish survey and English survey were both available to prevent any complications caused by language barriers.

Throughout the survey, questions were arranged and worded differently to supply both quantitative and qualitative results.



Examiner photo by Scott McDonald

The Navasota High School AP Statistics Class did a project-based learning assignment comparing the effectiveness of county resources to volunteers in the Dyer Mill Fire. Here, they make a presentation of their findings to the NISD Board of Trustees. Pictured standing are project officers (from left) Colton Harris, Leece Uilkie, Jacob Malek, Trevor Savensky and Kelsey Kehlenbeck. Seated is the AP Statistics instructor Josh Wilkerson.

The survey was also created in a way that it could be completed within 5-10 minutes through either the internet, telephone or in person.

The responses from the surveys were run through statistical tests we learned throughout the school year. The quantitative results demonstrated there was no association between the types of aid provided and who provided it. In other words, there was a fairly equal distribution of physical help (in the

form of food, clothing, toiletries, etc.) provided by both volunteers and the county - no one group stood out over the other in terms of amount of aid given.

A qualitative analysis was run using the verbal feedback victims provided in the survey on the after-effects victims experienced. We found the No. 1 after-effect is the emotional impact - not physical or monetary.

Also for qualitative analysis,

a statistical test was run on the average rating given by victims on the quality of aid provided by volunteers and the county. These results showed that there is enough statistical evidence to conclude that volunteers provided higher quality aid than the county. This does not conclude the county did poorly in distributing aid, just that based on the results, the volunteer effort proved better.

The data we obtained from our surveys concludes that we

have sufficient evidence the volunteer services provided more effective aid to fire victims than county resources. Though, throughout the process of surveying victims, they expressed a great appreciation for everything both groups, volunteer and county, accomplished for them.

Project managers presented these results to the Navasota ISD School Board and Navasota City Council through a formal presentation. Since the results showed the amount of aid (quantitative) was the same and the effectiveness of the aid (qualitative) is where the county fell short, perhaps in the county's disaster preparation they could allocate resources not to securing more items for victims, but in better preparing the people who interact with victims. The county could enhance small improvements in the quality of aid. However, the output exerted from the county and volunteer efforts was praised by the victims in both quantitative and qualitative areas.

This learning process preceded any other method presented to me in my high school career. The satisfaction in tackling a project with numerous deadlines and expectations was rewarding in every sense. The AP Statistics class would like to thank the community, the school board, the city council, *The Examiner* and the victims for participating and allowing us to successfully complete this survey.

Printed July 6, 2011

Looking back

Printed July 6, 2011

Deputies first on the scene in massive, smoke-filled area

BY ROSEMARY SMITH
Examiner editor

Law enforcement officers who drove into the heat of the battle on the first night of the Dyer Mill Fire might describe it as driving through hell wearing a blindfold.

Walls of flames shot over their patrol cars. Smoke got so thick they could hardly see beyond the hoods of their cars. Ammunition popped all around them and the heat from the fire became so unbearable they could barely keep their windows down as they strained to see roadways.

On duty the afternoon of June 19, Grimes County Sheriff's Office Cpl. Wes Male, and deputies Bill Bright, Travis Hughey and Steven Siracusa and other deputies, as well as law enforcement officers from Navasota Police Department and Department of Public Safety troopers, assisted local firemen in alerting residents of the need for evacuation during the recent wildfire.

But that wasn't their only job.

One of the most dangerous calls was to rescue victims that were trapped inside their house, as the fire surrounded the Millstone subdivision area.

Cpl. Male said, "We started driving down there and there was so much smoke, you couldn't even see the road. And then as you're getting up to the road, through the smoke, it was just like a wall of flames shot over the whole street. It was jumping the road and the whole road was covered."

Male added that the sounds were indescribable.

Deputy Siracusa said, "There were butane tanks blowing and ammunition was popping off."

Male said the thick smoke caused more chaos as people evacuating flooded the roadways that were already occupied by fire trucks and patrol

vehicles.

"And we were trying to predict, by the way the wind was blowing, which way the fire was going and tell them which way to exit. As the fire was growing and spreading, we were staying north of it so that we could start getting to those people and directing them out," said Male.

Once a command post was set up, Male said it had to be relocated several times because of the wildfire's unpredictable movement.

"It was on both sides of us and moving, so then we moved it again and came here," said Cpl. Male, referring to the High Point Elementary location of the command post.

While firemen continued to work on containment of the fire, which was at less than 10 percent the first 4 days until the rainfall and additional manpower assisted with 75 percent containment on June 22, law enforcement officers continued to help with evacuations, road blocks, and searching for hot spots and flare-ups.

"And that's what we continued to do around the clock," said Cpl. Male.

Law enforcement also assisted with updating evacuees on the status of their homes.

"There were about 50 or 60 people (at Plantersville Town Hall) and they were all from the Pinebrook area, and they kept calling and asking questions, so I went out there and spoke to them, and updated them on their homes, and told them they were fine. They were so relieved. They said their hearts would just stop every time a fire truck would come by and go down County Road 202."

One of the evacuees told Male he watched the fire consume over 200 acres in less than 10 minutes.

The deputies also helped firemen from elsewhere navigate around the unfamiliar

roads, while simultaneously patrolling the area to prevent looting.

"To my knowledge, we haven't had one call for looting, burglary or criminal mischief. And we probably owe that to the influx of units patrolling those areas," Male said.

DPS troopers and other law enforcement officers, including Navasota Police Department, from as far away as Washington County, Montgomery County, Baytown and the Houston area also assisted with patrol duty.

Sheriff Don Sowell added, "We appreciate the help of all the people - to keep an eye out for us and add extra eyes - to keep things under control, monitor and help prevent looting."

As the wildfire spread, Male said the officers didn't have time to worry about their own safety as they ensured the safety of residents.

"We didn't really think about that - that the fire was roaring and blaring right next to you - until after the fact. At the time, it was so hot that you had to keep rolling the windows down so you could see and hear. But it got so hot, I kept rolling my windows back up 'cause you could just feel the heat coming in," said Cpl. Male. "It was definitely a sight to see Mother Nature and her fury. We're glad to see the end so we can finally get some rest."

Male said he didn't receive any sleep until the fourth day, and was thankful to get just 3 hours of sleep.

"I'm proud of my deputies and law enforcement. And everybody that volunteered with the food and ran errands for the firefighters was just overwhelming," said Sheriff Sowell.

The Sheriff's Office also assisted victims with forms for assistance that were made available on their Website at www.grimescountyso.org.

Small family plays big role in helping out firefighters

15-year-old stays up through the night assisting emergency coordinator

BY SCOTT MCDONALD
Examiner publisher

Anthony Small stayed up way past his bedtime on June 19. His family received a call that Father's Day afternoon in the Plantersville from Chris Keil, a family friend who's a volunteer firefighter when he's not at his regular job at Texas Pipeworks.

"He called and asked if we had any coolers we could bring up there," said Shelly Small.

The Small family loaded up 20 coolers with water, ice and sports energy drinks. They took the coolers up to High Point Elementary - the command post for the Dyer Mill Fire that began earlier that day from an ember from a charcoal pit. But they didn't just drop off the coolers and leave.

"We stayed up there passing out drinks and sandwiches to the firefighters," Shelly said.

The family - including Shelly, her husband David, his brother Patrick and her son Anthony - did whatever chores or duties were asked of them. As they were doing them, Grimes County Emergency Management Coordinator Michael Pishner grabbed Anthony, a 6-foot-tall, lanky 15-year-old and asked him, "Can you write stuff down for me?"

Anthony said, "Sure." Anthony, who'll be a sophomore this fall at Navasota High School, got a crash-course lesson in emergency management all while thinking and writing on his feet.

"I wrote down everything he said, which was everything they needed," Anthony said. "I had to write down when they needed more water tankers, when different fire departments arrived on scene and I had to write it in military time.

Anthony said he had never written so much, or so fast, in his life.

"I was scared because of the situation," Anthony said. "I had to write really, really fast and it kept me on my feet. It was intense."

Pishner, who praised several assistants and volunteers at last week's commissioners court meeting, said Anthony was very helpful throughout the night. Anthony even rode with Pishner into the fire zone on the night the blaze started - and when it was at its worst.

"I saw wide, bright flames on the ground and up in the air," Anthony said. It was real smoky."

Pishner kept asking Small if he was thirsty or needed food, but adrenaline pushed the Rattler football player through the night of one of the worst residential fires in the history of Texas - one that destroyed 30 homes and evacuated more than 1,800 people.

When they returned back to High Point sometime after midnight, Anthony then had to transcribe his notes to computer for the beginning of recorded history on that awful night.

Someone came into the Bryan Fire Department's mobile command unit around 3:00 that morning to relieve Anthony. Anthony helped refuel trucks and water coolers, then dozed off to sleep.

The family - which distributed refreshments at the main command center and the next day at the old feed mill store at CRs 304 and 306 - gathered themselves and went home. Anthony didn't get to sleep until about 5 a.m. He said he had a dream about putting out a fire. He slept his Monday morning workout with his Rattler teammates, but didn't miss another Boot Camp workout that week.

Anthony Small only worked one night of the Dyer Mill Fire, but his contributions didn't go unnoticed by county officials.

Magnolia man gave time to Dyer Mill firefighters

Alec Vetrone remembers fighting a fire in Rockport when he was a volunteer for the Port Aransas Fire Department.

"It was an incident where structures were in danger and multiple agencies were on the scene," said Vetrone, a 22-year-old who now lives with his parent in Magnolia. "After being there 6-7 hours, out of nowhere would be a rehab truck that showed up with drinks and snacks and that was the one moment to look forward to out there."

Once news of the Dyer Mill Fire on Father's Day spread to outlying news sources, Vetrone decided he would drive to Grimes County and provide rehab support. He drove until he found the fire line, then someone directed him to High Point Elementary School - he place of the command post - if he wanted to volunteer.

On this particular Tuesday (June 21), he showed up and the Grimes County Emergency Management Coordinator, Michael Pishner, asked if Vetrone was there to help. It didn't take long for Vetrone to become the scribe for Pishner for the next few days.

Vetrone, who's a door guy at the Big Texas Dance Hall and Saloon in Spring, became Pishner's direct assistant the next three days. He jotted down everything happening during the situation, helped report in the incident command post, helped put together press releases and attended all press conferences.

"It's a passion of mine," Vetrone said of fighting fires and helping those who work in that service. Vetrone rode the fire zone area that Thursday and even met a couple of families who'd lost everything.

"It was definitely one of the most devastating incidents I've ever been involved with."

Find us on Facebook!



Go to our website
www.navasotaexaminer.com
and click on the icon

See what everyone's
been talking about!



Call us TODAY 825-6484

or visit us 24/7 at

www.navasotaexaminer.com