

No clowning around



Members of Magnolia Volunteer Fire Department's LAFS Troop pose before a performance at Magnolia Parkway Elementary School on Oct. 23. Members pictured from left are Leigh Anderson, Mark Akers, John Fuller and Jodi Adams.



By [AUDREY M. MARKS](#)

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For years members of the Magnolia Volunteer Fire Department have been visiting local elementary schools to talk about fire safety and prevention.

MVFD Chaplain Mark Aker remembers visiting a class more than four years ago.

When he popped in the video he heard the kids moaning and complaining.

“We’d play the same video year after year,” Aker said. “They could sing along to all the songs.”

But in the last three years members of the department better known as the “Magnolia LAFS Troop” have been dressing up in vibrant costumes, donning clown makeup and writing new programs each year for students to learn about fire safety.

Now Aker is better known for his role as Cowboy Bill in the presentation to Magnolia elementary schools.

While the troop makes presentations at each elementary school in the Magnolia district, they stopped by Magnolia Parkway Elementary Oct. 23 to share their message during a school assembly to help students know the difference between fire as a tool and a toy, in addition to how to avoid burns.

MVFD's Public Education Officer Jodi Adams said this is the first year the troop has been able to put on a puppet show for students.

"We received a \$500 at the clown conference that goes toward materials for building props and buying puppets," Adams said.

While the National Fire Protection Association helps set guidelines for the presentation's content, Adams said the members of the troop create their own dialogue and scripts.

"It's a fun and creative thing," Adams said. "For those of us interested in the performing arts this is an outlet."

This year the campaign focuses on staying safe around fires and preventing painful burns. The troop dispels myths about using Crisco or butter to treat burns but using water to cool burnt skin.

According to the NFPA roughly 3,000 people die as a result of home fires and burns and more than 200,000 people are seen in emergency rooms for burn injuries nationwide.

Another important component of the troop's presentation is the ABC's of safety, which stands for Always Be Calm.

Adams said the ABC acronym sticks with kids, because it's something they already know from school.

Adams plays several characters throughout the presentation. She is both Aerial, her clown persona and she is pulling the strings for the puppet Safety Sally.

MVFD Captain John Fuller wears striped socks, red nose and a wig to play his character Hydro who brings laughs with a bucket that magically keeps refilling, a gag that keeps the kids guessing and laughing simultaneously.

Fuller said participating in the troop is very gratifying, as kids remember their message year after year and students enjoy themselves.

Duty Crew Member Leigh Anderson is the woman behind the show, who helps mix the sound and work the microphones for the performance. She said this is her first year participating in the school assemblies.

The educational outreach and LAFS Troop is funded solely through donation from the public.

To help the troop out, donations can be sent to the Magnolia Volunteer Fire Department, P.O. Box 1210, Magnolia, Texas 77353.

Donations intended for the troop must to be marked MVFD LAFS Troop or public education on the memo line to designate the funds for the program.