

# The EMS experience

Saluting those with 20 years or more in EMS

## Ron Dille, EMT Austin County EMS and Fort Bend County EMS

**What was your first day on the job?** My first 24-hour shift as a crew member was January 1, 1982, with Fort Bend County EMS, and my first day as a full-time employee was March 1, 1982. I had ridden out as a third crew member on these same ambulances as a volunteer with the Orchard Volunteer Fire Department for approximately two years before that.

**Which services have you worked for over the years?**

I consider myself extremely lucky to have found just two EMS agencies and one volunteer fire department during my career. I was a volunteer firefighter with the Orchard Volunteer Fire Department for several years from the late 70s into the middle 80s and then again in the early 90s. I worked for Fort Bend EMS and, in 1994, I went to work at Austin County EMS, where I soon stepped into the role of EMS director. Along the way, I did some contract work with a private provider in Houston who

staffed some of the thrill shows at the Astrodome.

**Why did you get into EMS?**

I got into EMS by accident. I was actually building a feed store in the small town of Orchard (303 people) where I had just moved. I did not know many folks around

where I was first on scene and could do nothing, I decided it was time to learn. Luckily Fort Bend County EMS agreed to put on an EMT class, for free, at our fire station, and I expanded the idea of helping my neighbors to the idea of helping anyone who asked for help.



*Dille*

so I joined the fire department and fell in love with the idea of neighbors helping neighbors. I trained as a firefighter and assisted EMS at wreck scenes, farming accidents and in people's homes. I quickly realized I knew absolutely zero about anything medical except what my mother had taught me or from my stint in the Boy Scouts. After a couple of fatality accidents



I began learning as much as I could and began riding "third party" on the county ambulance as much as they would allow, which was several times a week. I have often thought the reason I was hired full-time was so they would not have to see me as much. My passion just grew stronger with each passing day and it remains like that today.

---

**How has the field changed since you've been in it?**

Technologically and educationally we have advanced incredibly over the past 25 years, but I do not know if we have actually improved our patient care as much. I feel as a profession, we have lost the passion and compassion that once made us stand apart. While the heart and soul of EMS remains, I am afraid there are a growing number of medics who have replaced patient advocacy with patient complacency. I am even more afraid the patient care drive is sometimes replaced by the business drive.

The equipment and diagnostic tools available today are absolutely incredible and certainly give us an edge we never had before, but only when used in conjunction with the actual compassionate, one-on-one, hands-on pre-hospital medicine. The best equipment in the world is extremely limited if we do not listen to what the patient is telling us.

Has EMS improved overall since I first became an EMT? Absolutely, and the technical side will continue to improve. But let's make sure the compassionate art of holding someone's hand, or cleaning them up after an accident to help them maintain their dignity, or putting their dog out, or putting away their items in the refrigerator, will never die. Remember, they are inviting us into their lives. Let's not take that invitation lightly.

**Was there a particular**

**moment or call that stands out?**

I have been involved in many potential tragedies that have turned into joyous occasions and even more situations where I could not change the grief a family was experiencing. Unfortunately, as I drive through our community I remember most of them, even 25 years later, as I recognize locations and citizens involved.

I must say though the particular moment that stands out was the look in my young daughter's eyes as I was leaving my house on a stretcher and wondering if I would ever see those eyes again. On July 3, 1998, I was picked up by Austin County EMS and transported to a local hospital after suffering a significant heart attack. I was stabilized at the local hospital and transferred by air to Houston where I had an emergency heart catheterization. All I can say is thank God for the EMS system we have all built together here in Texas. Everything worked perfect for me; my wife would not listen to me and called for an ambulance anyway; the EMS volunteers in my community were at my side in a matter of minutes providing basic care; and a paramedic arrived just a few minutes behind them, loaded me into the ambulance and initiated advanced care while transporting me to the hospital. Our community hospital ER transferred me quickly by air ambulance to Houston. I was later told I was not a very good patient. The best part of all of this

is that not only did I look into my daughter's eyes again, but since then I have seen those same beautiful eyes in her son as I held him in my arms.

Another part of this story that I am very proud of is that I was extremely concerned after my heart attack about what would happen in Austin County without me there. Who would run the county and make sure the calls were run and the reports were completed and the supplies were ordered and the employees were paid and, and, and... Guess what? Everyone stepped up and did not only their own job; but also part of mine. Everything got done, including final preparation of the budget. It proves that in an EMS organization, when everyone works together, the organization can run itself.

**What was your favorite part of your career in EMS?** I don't really have a favorite part of EMS because every day is better than the day before. I truly learn something every day, be it from the seasoned veterans, untested rookies, firefighters, police officers, patients, nurses, doctors or even my bosses. I enjoy teaching very much whether it be EMS education or public education. My passion still burns strong for EMS. The profession has a bright future – if we don't forget the past. Please take someone under your wing and be a mentor as those did for us so many years ago. ●