

Tabling the Emotion

Making Station Dining Tables by Hand Promotes WFR Pride, Unity

by Judy Truesdell

From its beginnings in 1909 as a volunteer department to today's ISO-1-rated agency with 66 members including public safety personnel, Wylie Fire Rescue has maintained its sense of teamwork and family. At each of the three stations, there's a three-dimensional reminder of that camaraderie: the distinctive dining tables designed and built by members of all ranks.

"It all started when we built Station 3 at 210 N. W.A. Allen," said Firefighter Clayton Jones. "While the station was under construction, we were at temporary Station 3 – a single-bay building that we ran one engine and a squad out of."

Jones said it was Asst. Chief Brandon Blythe who came up with the idea to build a custom table to serve as a central gathering point to honor their new station, which was dedicated in 2009. They purchased a bare wood table from a furniture store in Forney, disassembled it, sanded it, stained it, and decorated the top with the Maltese cross and ISO-1 decals, along with the station's opening date and a proud red "3."

The other two stations followed suit over the next few years, and the designs varied. Decals incorporated pride and patriotism: a "never forget" sticker with the number 343 commemorating first responders lost in the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center was used, along with individual firehouse symbols. Coins honoring the department's 100th anniversary, celebrated in 2009, were imbedded on the Station 1 table, and the bulldog mascot was Firefighter Andrew Johnson's design; he wanted to give the station a classic mascot and still represent the department while giving that house individuality.

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This table top was the first of the three handmade by Wylie Fire Rescue teams. It was created while they awaited construction of Station 3. Top photo: Firefighter/Paramedic Matt Tripp looks over the shoulder of Firefighter/Paramedic Billy Bradshaw as they catch up on some record keeping at the Station 3 dining table. Bottom Photo: Firefighter/Paramedic Billy Bradshaw does some work at the Station 3 table, while, from left, Victoria Dockery, a Post 30 Explorer, Firefighter/Paramedic Tim Turquette and Firefighter/Paramedic Matt Tripp discuss the evening's meal.



From left, Firefighters Chad Marshall, Travis Araujo and Josh Monroe square up the table top for their station's dining table.

Firefighters E.J. Owens and Brandon Storm searched online for something unique to use for table legs. They contacted Public Works and secured a pair of out-of-service fire hydrants from the '50s. They removed the bonnets to shorten the height of the table (otherwise they would've had to sit on bar stools). Owens sandblasted the hydrants, then Firefighter Brad Campbell took over. "He took very meticulous efforts to print and paint," Firefighter Billy Bradshaw said. "He spent a lot of time making the hydrants look beautiful, even making sure to get chrome chains for the caps." Owens also stenciled Maltese cross designs on the mahogany bases for Bradshaw to cut out. As many as 30 coats of polyurethane were applied to the tabletops and at least 10 on the bases with sanding in between applications. The final coat was applied and color sanded with 1000-grit sandpaper, and then a finish paste wax was applied and buffed.

Anywhere from 15 to 25 firefighters had a hand in creation and customization of the tables. Jones, who also helped build the tables at Station 1, said, "We wanted something that would be meaningful to the members of the department, but also something that would give a sense of our history to visitors when they come to tour the stations or for kids' birthday parties that we sometimes host. We wanted something we could be proud of."

"We certainly put a lot of pride and ownership into the table at Station 1," Bradshaw said. "We wanted a table not only symbolizing our own department but something that would commemorate our pride in America's armed forces as well. We had fun building them, and it was something we all did together as a team."

Blythe said he's pleased the guys rose to the challenge and embraced the project as they did. "Some of the fire service's values are teamwork, pride and ownership – it's not just a job. Most of our personnel have skills and abilities that they use on their days off in other jobs or as hobbies. Building the tables brought all of these things together."

He said the project created unity. "Each station designed and built their own table. This brought the stations together as a whole. Each station has three shifts; these shifts worked together using firefighters' particular skills and abilities to complete certain parts that took the tables from a concept to a finished product. Today, these tables provide a place for the shifts to come together daily for not only their meals, but also training and shift meetings.

"We are always pleased when members of the community visit the fire stations for parties or tours. When citizens are with us, there are almost always questions about the tables. People are impressed with the tables overall and even more so when they learn they were constructed by our firefighters." •

Photos courtesy Firefighter Cory Claborn and Craig Kelly, City of Wylie Information Officer.



Fire hydrants from the '50s were sanded, repainted and repurposed as legs for Station 1's dining table. Station 1's logo and imbedded commemorative coins make its tabletop unique.

Station 2 incorporated its signature fierce, hot pepper into the art for the top of the dining table the team created. Doors were used as the table tops and legs for Station 2's dining table, with fire axes crossed on the sides and a ladder underneath.

