

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hainesville VFD and Mineola HS students work together to transform firefighting apparatus

May 23, 2016 — QUITMAN, Texas — Hainesville Volunteer Fire Department received a new truck as part of the Department of Defense Firefighter Property Program, administered by the Texas A&M Forest Service.

The truck, a 1990 M923A five-ton military transport vehicle, had to be converted into a service-ready unit within 180 days of acquisition by the department.

“We removed the troop carrier seating, canopy and spare tire, which made it into a flatbed in preparation for the firefighting unit,” Hainesville VFD Chief Cory Clanton said.

The volunteer fire fighters then fabricated railings for the flatbed.

“We configured the railings so there is only one way onto the truck and that entrance is by the driver. It is a good safety precaution and the driver can see the volunteers at all times,” Clanton said. “It is a safety mechanism not to have volunteers in the back of the truck or walking around it. The pump is about 24 inches off the bed of the truck so it’s similar to a top mount and the controls are in the catwalk.”

All that was left was to paint the truck, and Hainesville VFD firefighter Leo Rubio knew just who to call. Rubio, a Mineola High School alum and former automotive shop student, contacted Mineola Automotive Shop teacher Johnny Callison. Callison went to see the truck and decided to take on the massive project for his students.

Once the truck was delivered to the high school, the students stripped it down as far as they could, separating the bed, cab, doors — the whole front clip. They painted the bed with black non-skid bed liner and the cab a bright fire engine red. The transformation took about two to three weeks to complete, said Callison.

“It’s an honor to be a part of this project,” said Texas A&M Forest Service Regional Fire coordinator Nathan Carroll. “They really put a lot of thought into the truck and it will be a great asset for the community and increase the capabilities of the department.”

Callison was very proud of his students and their accomplishment.

“We are real lucky to help the community,” he said.

Callison had motivated the students by reminding them that the truck they were working on could very well one day save their lives or the life of someone they knew.

Sure enough, within days of Hainesville VFD receiving the truck back from Mineola HS, heavy rains hit the area and the truck was requested by two different mutual aid areas — first by Quitman Fire Department, then by Holly Lakes Volunteer Fire Department.

When Hainesville VFD arrived with the five-ton truck to the home on Little Sandy Creek, they drove through multiple feet of fast flowing water right up to the front door of a home where they were able to rescue a family of four, their pets and a few personal belongings.

“The kids were really proud to learn their truck had rescued people,” Callison said.

“We have a lot of great equipment,” Clanton said, “but nothing compares to this five-ton. And I think that is because of the community involvement with the kids from Mineola High School.”

Chief Clanton and all the members of Hainesville VFD are very proud of their truck, noting that it not only increases their abilities significantly, but it also brings their community together.

The DoD Firefighter Property Program, overseen by the USDA Forest Service, provides excess military equipment to fire departments and emergency service providers. Launched in Texas in 2005, this program has released over 400 retired military trucks to VFDs across the state to help better protect lives and property. Texas A&M Forest Service picks up the vehicle from a military installation, performs necessary repairs and delivers it to the volunteer fire department at no cost to them.

To learn more about this and other fire department assistance programs offered by Texas A&M Forest Service, visit <http://texasfd.com>.



Photo courtesy Tristan Mosher Photography