



July 2022

Meet Fire Chief Jeffrey J. Wittig:
Dedicated Public Servant and
Lifelong Learner



When you meet Oak Hill Fire Chief J.J. Wittig, you'll immediately be drawn to his warmth and openness. He's a dedicated public servant with a commitment to teaching and learning, as well as to keeping the public safe and healthy.

1. Tell us a little about yourself and family.

Chief Wittig was born in Victoria, TX and moved to Austin as a child. He received his early education in South Austin/Oak Hill public schools, including Bowie High School, where he played many percussion instruments in the band. He met his future wife there, as she also played in the band.

He attended University of Texas where he majored in Psychology and played in the UT Band (as did his future wife). It was easy to see how dedicated he was to his education because he graduated in three years. In fact, he graduated, got married and started his job in 1995.

Chief Wittig beams when he talks about his three children, ages 21, 19 and 16. His older son, also an Eagle Scout, followed his father's footsteps and graduated in three years in finance from UT Dallas, where he was on the

Dean's list and graduated Magna Cum Laude.

Their second son also attended Bowie High School and is ASE (Automotive Service Excellence) certified from the Austin Community College program. Chief Wittig calls him their "high performance guy." Working since he was 14, his second son owns FIVE vehicles, which is more than his parents!

His eyes twinkle when he talks about his daughter, who is 16. She is also in the Bowie High School Band, having started out playing the tuba. Now she plays the baritone and performs during concert season. Because of her training in gymnastics and ballet, she marches in the Color Guard in the Fall.

2. You have earned your Eagle Scout Award. Do you remember your project? And, how have those skills helped you professionally?

His Eagle Scout project was to build a brick barbecue pit and picnic tables for Mary Lee School, off Oltorf Street in South Austin. It is a campus where children live when they've been removed from difficult home situations.

He learned about fundraising and designing and creating projects in his path to Eagle Scout. His Scout training prepared him for leadership which he believes was especially important to him as a teenager. He learned how to make a plan, and how to execute it. Then, he learned if it didn't work, he had to adjust his plan and continue. He learned "you don't give up. You keep problem solving."

Those skills help him every day in his work now. He knows the importance of remaining flexible and that no fire, person, or problem is the same.

3. Your major at UT was psychology. How has that prepared you for your work, both as a fire fighter and as Fire Chief?

He learned how to work with people who are different from himself. In his line of work, he keeps an open mind because issues are not black and white. Rather, there are always fuzzy, gray lines. He learned not to make assumptions. It helps him to understand why people do what they do and that we may not know the intentions of others, and that those intentions may change. He also feels strongly that it's important to acknowledge another person's perspective. He tries to remember that perspective is rooted in what he learned about human development. In trying to understand each person's perspective, he knows he doesn't have to agree with them to understand them. And, he knows everyone doesn't have to have the same opinions. Furthermore, he doesn't want people to put up relational barriers and fences.

4. You've also earned several professional certifications. Some are local, others are national and international. Please tell us about them.

Chief Wittig started out as a volunteer, while working full time at University of Texas. Opportunities presented themselves and now, as Fire Chief, he reports to the Board of Commissioners. It's a rigorous process to be qualified to serve as Fire Chief. His resume, background, experience, interviews, and service all helped in supporting his credibility.

Working as Fire Chief is, in many ways, like any other professional

organization. He advanced through his credentials and surpassed the standards.

Some of his impressive credentials include:

- a. Master of Business Administration - He worked on his MBA (a 2-year program at the University of Phoenix) while working full time and raising young children with his wife.
- b. Chief Fire Executive – The CFE was a two-year process at St. Edward's University. He had to conduct original research and write a professional journal article based on his independent studies.
- c. Chief Fire Officer – The CFO process was very different from the CFE process. It was a rigorous process with national standards that map to NFPA (National Fire Protection Association). Firefighters in Texas are not required to reach those standards, but he did. CFO was also based on his resume and experience. He had to demonstrate that he completed twenty detailed and thorough elements, which included community service. His work was reviewed by two unknown peers. He believes the CFO designation represents what a fire chief should strive to achieve.
- d. Executive Fire Officer (EFO) is achieved on the federal level through FEMA and the U.S. Fire Administration. It is a four-year program, including residency in Maryland at the National Fire Academy. He wrote a reference-driven, each of the four years in the program. Each one was very much like a master's thesis.

5. How has your faith affected your ability to deal with stressful situations and with leading others?

Everything is based on faith. All the experience, education, and training are important, but faith is the foundation for everything he does. He believes that faith is always there, even in times when people get into a doubt cycle.

He believes if we can stay focused, everything else falls into place. Having faith does not mean it's easy or comfortable, but he finds comfort that faith is his underlying foundation. It helps to set his mind right to push through whatever stressful situation or problem he encounters.

He believes everyone has their own story, and they aren't all the same. He hopes he has equipped his children with this foundational understanding.

6. Who has influenced you the most in shaping your career?

Many people from different places have influenced Chief Wittig. He remembers lessons from a plant superintendent at UT as well as people in other positions.

He seems to enjoy mentoring others, as well, through his firefighters training at the Texas Commission on Fire Protection and with the men and women he trains to become EMTs.

He says mentoring has changed over his career. The best advice he gives is to learn something new every day. He knows over his 26-year career, fires are much more hazardous and approaching the profession is very different because the processes have changed. He firmly believes that if someone doesn't learn something every day, it's a missed opportunity.

He feels strongly "if you aren't contributing or learning something new every day, it is time to move on."

7. How do you balance your work and your volunteer commitments to the community?

As you can imagine, Chief Wittig stays busy but balances his commitments by maintaining both work and personal calendars. He always remembers that faith takes priority. And he wants to always be present for his children and wife of 27 years.

8. If you could give your 21-year-old self some advice, what would it be?

He'd tell himself to "stay focused on your goal," because that's what has helped keep him on track. He continues, "be tenacious about it, don't let things get in the way. Don't get swayed by outside factors and those are much different influences now."

9. How can the Oak Hill Fire Department help property owners in Barton Creek?

What makes Oak Hill Fire Department stand out is the level of planning they put into practice. They want people to be prepared because most people believe "it won't happen to me". They offer a free Home Safety Inspection which helps people be safer and build relationships. He wants the community to get to know fire fighters outside of an emergency. That way they establish relationships and trust.

Oak Hill Fire Department does two big Public Education events. In the Fall, usually in October during Fire Prevention Week, they host an event for people to see the equipment and to build rapport with the members of the department. He believes it's critical to focus on making the community better and safer, through relationships.

In the Spring, usually before Easter, they have a pancake breakfast. Again, it fosters a sense of community and mutual respect.

10. What three tips are the most important for property owners to do themselves to keep their homes safe from fire?

1. Defensible Space – This is a program through Firewise U.S.A. <https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Wildfire/Firewise-USA> It's important to watch how close flammable materials are to your home (shrubs, trees, brush). Clearing dense objects from around your home helps when you are planning your landscapes.
2. Look at the type of landscaping and mulch you are using. Be aware of flammability. And make sure your irrigation system works.
3. Most importantly, keep your gutters clean. Tree debris, cedar trees, and pollen are vulnerable to one little ember. It is well documented that

embers are an ignition point for many fires. And embers can travel from miles away to spark a fire near you.

11. I heard we are as dry as we were in 2011. What should we do to prepare?

Follow the suggestions above. The fire tips are important.

From an EMS perspective, heat exhaustion and heat stroke are at much higher level in the scorching temperatures of an Austin summer. You can dehydrate quickly. He says hydrate with water, make sure you shade yourself, wear a hat and sleeves.

12. How do you maintain vehicles?

Mechanics who work on fire trucks generally come to the station to do preventive maintenance or repairs. The Quint is the front-line engine and is ready to go all the time. If they have a problem, they do have another engine that is a Ready Reserve Engine, ready to go like front lines. It only takes three minutes to move protective gear from the Quint to the Ready Reserve Engine. They also collaborate with partners if needed.

13. How can the community help the Oak Hill Fire Department?

“People can easily help train more firefighters to be prepared to work in our great state. We have a training foundation and have set up a link on the Amazon Smile program, where a percentage of the purchase is granted to the foundation. It doesn't chance your Amazon pricing, but it provides a way to share back to something you choose to support.” The direct link is <https://smile.amazon.com/ch/20-8425823>. It will provide more details.

14. What is your favorite meal for the firefighters? What is your favorite treat for fans to bring you?

Firefighters work a 48-hour duty cycle. Then, they are off for 96-hours. They have a minimum of four people on duty and are ready to go. They enjoy crock pot meals, full meals from the oven or stove top and even have an outside grill. In fact, they had sprinklers retrofitted so their grills are up to the standards of the fire code.

When asked about what treats (like cookies or pizza) they liked, they said that's great, but their biggest treat is seeing people come into the station. They love for families, including children, to come into the station so they can show off the engines and show them around the station.

If you are interested in scheduling a firehouse visit call 512-288-5534. And, of course, if it's an emergency, call 9-1-1.

**Special thanks to Marianne Rochelle, for her editorial assistance.*

Good Neighbor
Kimberly Allen, Woods III
TCSO Citizens' Academy



I am proud to be a graduate from the Travis County Sheriff's Office 35th Citizens' Academy. There is no doubt that this has provided me valuable insights on the criminal justice process and TCSO operations and services, including those in my focus areas around mental health. The education and dialogue the academy offers is designed to further TCSO's efforts in improving community relations and the quality of life for Travis County residents.

As a selected citizen, I received approximately 18-hours of classroom instruction by corrections officers, law enforcement deputies, civilians, and supervisors who work in each division within the department. I am so glad I pursued the opportunity to help to develop a citizenry with TCSO and hope others may consider doing the same!

A few tips to help to eliminate car break-ins:

- Keep car doors locked
- Do not keep objects visible in car
- Do not keep your keys in/hidden in your car
- Do not keep keys to other peoples' cars in your glove box



Stop the Spread of Oak Wilt

As you are continuing your summer landscape projects, please keep in mind that Live Oak trimming is **STRONGLY DISCOURAGED** from now through October.

Oak Wilt is present in several areas of Barton Creek. It spreads via beetles and through interconnected root systems. Please do your part in saving these precious resources.

Learn more about Oak Wilt and its prevention by visiting:
www.texasoakwilt.org

ASK THE BOARD

How can I keep my home safe during summer vacations?

The Travis County Sheriff's Department has Home Check Request (formerly Closed Patrol). When you go out of town, you can sign up on the sheriff's website: <https://www.tcsheriff.org/services/public-resources/home-check->

request#/ to have officers check their property for safety.

Lt. Frank Lofton said, in his interview in our April newsletter, to let neighbors know to keep an eye out for unusual activity. The form allows requesters to list visitors and/or vehicles authorized to be on their property while they are away. Residents can request this free service anytime, though people usually request it when traveling for a week or more.

Lt. Lofton noted "we have NEVER had a house broken into in the Barton Creek area while on Closed Patrol." He also emphasizes the importance of not posting any pictures from a trip on social media while you are gone, saying it's very risky.

Home Check Request can be found on the website using the path View All Services/Public Resources/Home Check Request or by clicking the link above.

Planning a renovation, pool, or new paint job? Remember to check with Barton Creek North Community Manager, Rebecca Jones, to see if BCN Master Architectural Control Committee approval is needed! BARCREEK@CIRAMAIL.COM



Contact Information

BARTON CREEK NORTH CONTACT INFORMATION

REALMANAGE
REBECCA JONES, COMMUNITY MANAGER
BARCREEK@CIRAMAIL.COM
866-473-2573

Need a copy of your Barton Creek North account statement? Sign up for the Resident Portal at www.RealManage.com

WWW.BARTONCREEKNORTH.COM

Barton Creek North Board of Directors Meetings are typically held the fourth Wednesday of the month at 3:00 p.m. at the Oak Hill Fire Department, 4111 Barton Creek Boulevard. Members are invited and encouraged to attend meetings of the Board. Email notifications are sent one week before the meeting.



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