



Parish of Ascension

OFFICE OF THE PARISH PRESIDENT

KENNY MATASSA
Parish President

Planning Team for School Active Shooter Response Exercise Recognized at Parish Council Meeting

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GONZALES – Ascension Parish President Kenny Matassa presented certificates of recognition at the April 21 parish council meeting to members of the planning team from multiple agencies that coordinated a training exercise involving an active school shooter scenario.

The team was lauded for a coordinated effort that involved more than three years of continuous planning, and culminated last November when a multi-agency task force, as part of the training, responded to Pecan Grove Primary School for an active school shooter exercise.

“The greatest resource we have is our children,” said President Matassa. “We have a committed obligation to protect them, and the hard work and dedication shown by these agencies lets all parents know their child’s protection is the number one goal.”

Gonzales Police Chief Sherman Jackson said the training began after members of his office, along with the parish’s Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness did a threat assessment of all Ascension Parish Schools in the Gonzales area. Chief Jackson said walk-throughs were conducted to look for deficiencies in school security protocols.

Gonzales Detective Sergeant Steve Nethken has been teaching active shooter response since 2007 to patrol officers with the Gonzales Police Department.

“At that time when I first started teaching it to the patrol officers here, it was readily identifiable to me,” Nethken said. “And once I talked to Chief Jackson, we both agreed there were deficiencies in our active shooter response procedures. The chief said he wanted those areas addressed so we would have one procedure in place that we could practice and train to.”

Chief Jackson said the Gonzales police department, school board personnel, and parish homeland security personnel all sat down to develop policies for an active shooter scenario.

“My staff was supportive in the planning effort, and through grants and logistics,” said Rick Webre, director of the parish’s Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness. “It took true insight from the leaders of all the agencies involved. The school board leadership was integral in supporting this and it truly was a coordinated effort.”

“Basically the school board had their policy in place and I felt we had to build around their policy,” Chief Jackson said. Jackson said eventually EMS, the fire departments, Acadian Ambulance for mass casualty, the parish Coroner’s Office, the parish mental health department, St. Elizabeth Hospital, and the Region 1 hospitals for the final exercise, were all involved.

“Out of those monthly meetings, we came to a compromise,” Nethken said. “Each entity learned what they could provide and what the expectations were going to be out of them from law enforcement.”

Chief Jackson said his department met with the Sheriff’s Office to discuss the blueprint for this type of training exercise. He said this training was for the logistics of the city, but the sheriff’s office developed more tactical solutions with the blueprint because of the greater number of site locations within the parish as a whole.

The hospitals’ systems were vital in coordinating casualty information and Nethken said software used by police, fire, and medical agencies makes coordination and sharing of information between the agencies more seamless.

With the first part to the training addressing life safety measures, Chief Jackson said training eventually focused on the expedient reunification of the child with the parent, as well as expediting the identification of the child that has been transported so that the parent can be notified as well.



PHOTO CUTLINE – From left to right, first row: Ascension Parish President Kenny Matassa; Gonzales Police Chief Sherman Jackson; Ami Johnson, Ascension Parish Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness; Denise Graves, Ascension Parish School Board (accepting for Dr. Patrice Pujol); Angie Peraza, Ascension Parish School Board; Charla Johnson, St. Elizabeth Hospital (accepting for Alden Gautreau); Jennifer Sing, St. Elizabeth Hospital; Chad Lynch, Ascension Parish School Board; Chief Mickey Hopkins, Gonzales Fire Department EMS; District Fire Chief Preston Landry, Gonzales Fire Department; Corporal Randy Clouatre Jr., Gonzales Police Department; Detective Sergeant Steven Nethken, Gonzales Police Department. Back row, left to right: Parish Councilman Oliver Joseph, Parish Councilman Bill Dawson, Parish Councilman Travis Turner, Parish Councilman Daniel “Doc” Satterlee, Parish Councilman Dempsey Lambert, Parish Council Chairman Randy Clouatre Sr., Parish Councilman Todd Lambert, Parish Councilman Aaron Lawler, Parish Councilwoman Teri Casso, Parish Councilman John Cagnolatti, Parish Councilman Benny Johnson.