

# ST. TAMMANY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT # 1

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**Fire Chief - Larry Hess**

**For Immediate Release**

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## **Slidell “Fit As A Firefighter” program shines at regional obesity summit**

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By Carol Wolfram of The Times-Picayune

Print More than six years ago, St. Tammany Fire Protection District 1 Fire Chief Larry Hess and Michelle Partridge, a registered nurse and Director of Women and Children’s Services at Slidell Memorial Hospital, were chatting away as they worked out at Cross Gates Family Fitness in Slidell. They worried aloud about the growing problem of obesity among children in the Slidell community, and what could be done to address the issue.

Even they could not have dreamed that their gym-based brainstorming session would result in the creation of a program, Fit as a Firefighter, that would deliver its “healthy living and lifestyle” philosophy to more than 2,000 Slidell families and, earlier this month, would be honored during the fifth annual Southern Obesity Summit in New Orleans as Louisiana’s “Innovative and Successful Community Initiative” program.

The SOS recognition also came as a surprise to Fit as a Firefighter program Director Taffy Morrison, who initially expected that the program outlining Slidell’s free, weeklong summer fitness and nutrition camp for children ages 8-12 was to be presented during a breakout session at the conference. The emphasis was to educate participants choosing to attend that session about how Fit as a Firefighter was developed through the development of partnerships throughout the community — co-presented by St. Tammany Fire Protection District 1 and Slidell Memorial Hospital with invaluable and ongoing support from the SMH Foundation, Cross Gates Family Fitness, Rotary clubs of Slidell, the SMH Women’s Health Alliance, the Junior Auxiliary of Slidell, and dozens of other businesses and civic organizations throughout the city — all dedicated to fighting childhood obesity.

Rather than a limited breakout session audience, Fit as a Firefighter’s honor as the recipient of the state “Innovative and Successful Community Initiative” award earned the program a platform before the entire summit audience of nearly 500 participants from 16 regional southern states. Fit as a Firefighter was chosen from 31 successful, innovative programs submitted from the 16 regional states to be featured and highlighted in this way.

Now in its sixth year, Fit as a Firefighter offers fitness, safety and motivational activities to help build self-esteem and teach nutrition and life skills to local children struggling with their weight. It also has spawned several programs designed to provide support throughout the year for both,

the children and their families. These include Trim Kids Nutrition & Fitness Family programs, Becoming Healthier family nutrition nights, and low-cost family fitness classes, such as the Body Combat fitness program for the entire family.

Fit as a Firefighter also has been named a recipient of proceeds from the Leadership Northshore Camellia City Charity 5K Race/1-Mile Walk organized by class of 2011 team members Joel Bruno, Phillip Hebert, JoBeth Kavanaugh and Jeanette Sanford. The race will be held Nov. 12, starting and ending at John Slidell Park, 105 Robert Blvd., Slidell. The race will begin at 8 a.m. Registration is open to adults, teens and children. The cost for registration is \$15 for pre-registrants and \$20 the day of the race. Pre-registration is suggested at [www.camelliacitycharityrace.org](http://www.camelliacitycharityrace.org) or by emailing [camelliacitycharityrace@gmail.com](mailto:camelliacitycharityrace@gmail.com). Sponsorships are welcome.

“As funds are available, we would like to see this project expand to parish and citywide initiatives such as the ‘Healthy and Fit Slidell’ program, to empower our community with the resources and means to improve the quality of life and health for everyone,” Morrison noted.

In the meantime, Morrison continues to champion the Fit as a Firefighter program, having seen for herself what local pediatricians have noted on their charts: Children returning to their annual checkups with as much as a 10 to 15 percent body mass index drop after participating the program.

The annual Southern Obesity Summit serves as a vehicle to identify, collect and disseminate evidence-based and emerging practices within the obesity prevention field in the South.

“SOS is about change,” Morrison noted, “it is about taking what participants learn in New Orleans and applying it to your community when you are back home.”

Louisiana is currently tied with Kentucky as the fifth “fattest” state in the South.

For more information about the Fit As a Firefighter program and the SMH Healthy Families programs, call the SMH Parenting Center at 985.649.8529. For additional information on the Camellia City Charity 5K Race/1-Mile Walk, visit [www.camelliacitycharityrace.org](http://www.camelliacitycharityrace.org).

For more information about St. Tammany Fire Protection District #1 visit us at [www.SlidellFire.org](http://www.SlidellFire.org) or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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