

It was a late night call for a fire in a commercial strip center. One of our engines and a ladder company were on the automatic aid initial box assignment and, based on the dispatch information, we knew we were going to a working fire in a familiar area. The L shaped strip center contained multiple occupancies including a restaurant, professional offices, stores and a bank. The fire originated in the antique store in the middle of the approximately 30,000-square-foot structure and had good control of that occupancy. The store fronts were glass set in heavy aluminum frames. The entry doors were glass with heavy aluminum door jams representing a very easy, but very expensive, opportunity to break windows and doors to gain entry to each of the occupancies.

As we were arriving, the incident command officer called for a second alarm. Our two units were given multiple assignments. The ladder company was assigned to roof ventilation and the engine company was ordered to open up all occupancies in the building and, with the assistance of another engine company, search for extension.

Only days before, our companies had completed forcible entry training on the lock method of our door assembly training system. The engine company officer broke his company into two teams and had each retrieve a K-Tool Kit from our apparatus. Within eight minutes, the crews had opened the remaining 15 occupancies without breaking one window.

Because the crew reported to the Incident Commander so quickly, the Incident Commander assumed they had broken out doors and windows. He was thinking of all the unwarranted damage caused by our team. When he

discovered, in actuality, that there was no collateral damage, other than the locks, he was amazed the team had completed the task so quickly. He began quizzing the firefighters on their tactics.

A very proud group of firefighters were happy to demonstrate their prowess by pulling and picking the lock on the door of the store where the fire originated. A lock can be replaced for \$80 but a door assembly can cost in excess of \$750; collateral damage was minimized through the use of the training.

The lesson learned at the even was twofold. First, firefighters were amazed their forcible entry training transferred to real life situations. Secondly, the other departments' were amazed to hear that our team quickly reported completed tasks, including the bank, back to the Incident Commander and therefore realized the value in continuous training to improve response.

Street Story Contributor:

Randall F. Parr

EFO, Fire Chief

Tomball Fire Department

Tomball, TX