



Joe Thomas French

November 20, 1948 - April 14, 2008

Joe Thomas French, 59, died Wednesday, April 9, 2008, in Bryan Texas. He was born in Huntsville, Texas, on November 20, 1948, to Sally Cline and William "Buck" French. Joe was raised in Huntsville and graduated from Huntsville High School in 1968, and attended Sam Houston State College. He began his service to the community in 1970, with the Huntsville Volunteer Fire Department as a firefighter. He began his law enforcement career in 1973, with the Huntsville Police Department. In 1977, he was hired as the full time Fire Marshall for the City of Huntsville's Fire Department. He became Fire Chief of the department in 1978, and retired as chief in 1996. After retiring he moved to Lexington, Texas, where retirement was short. He joined the Lexington Volunteer Fire Department and the Lexington Police Department in 1996, and achieved the rank of Sergeant in the police department. He retired from Lexington PD in 2002, and joined the Lee County Sheriff's Department as a patrol deputy. He retired again for the third time in 2006, and joined the Lexington PD again as a reserve officer until his passing. He was an active member of the State Fireman's and Fire Marshall's Association where he served as President of the East Texas chapter of the State Fireman's and Fire Marshall's Association in 1985. He was also an active member of the Texas State Sheriff's Association. During his career he achieved numerous certifications including the following: Commissioned Firefighter in 1977, Intermediate Arson Investigator 1981, Fire Service Instructor II in 1982, Firefighter Inspector in 1990, Master Peace Officer license in 1995, Firearms

Instructor license in 2001. Anybody that knew him would know that he had a big heart and gave every bit of it to the communities where he lived. His love was for hot rods, guns, friends and family. He is survived by his wife Rebecca of Lexington; son Raimond Thomas French of Lexington, daughter Joan Marie French of Lexington, son John Thomas French & wife Kari of Huntsville, daughter Heidi Dees & husband Jeff of Tulsa, OK.; Grandchildren include Jacob Thomas French and Jeffrey Thomas French of Huntsville, Hillary Dees of Tulsa, OK. Sisters that are survived by him are Peggy Talley & husband Jack of Sequin, Joyce Park of Houston, Marie "Sittie" Cramer of Hilltop Lakes, Diane French of Houston. Other family members survived by him are, Mother –In-Law, Reba Mae Otte, Brother-In-Laws, Timothy Otte & wife Ann and Jerry Otte & wife Pam, all of Lexington. He is also survived by numerous nieces, nephews, cousins, aunts and uncles. He was preceded in death by both parents and brothers Carmen French and Robert Park. Visitation will be held Sunday, April 13, 2008, at Phillips and Luckey Funeral Chapel in Lexington from 3:00 to 9:00 PM. Family will be present from 5:00 to 7:00 PM. Services will be held Monday, April 14, 2008, at 10:00 AM at the Lexington United Methodist Church in Lexington and a second service will be held at 3:00 PM at the Huntsville United Methodist Church in Huntsville and internment will be held at Oakwood Cemetery, Mayes Addition in Huntsville. In lieu of flowers the family is asking memorial contributions may be made to the Lexington United Methodist Church or the Huntsville Volunteer Fire Department. Those wishing to leave memorial condolences for the family may do so at www.shmfh.com

Tribute Wall



“ *Joe Thomas French*

November 15, 2022 at 08:33 PM



“ *To the French family I extend my heartfelt sympathy.I went to school with Joe for awhile and remember him for his love of basketball.He was always nice to everyone.*

Faye Nettles Fiegel - May 07, 2008 at 11:06 AM



“ *We are sorry to hear of your loss.*

Bob, Mellicent, Bobby II, Heather, Heath & Justin Wiley - April 30, 2008 at 08:25 PM

FB

“ Mrs. French and family, My family has known Joe for many years. We graduated together and he and my brothers were close friends, especially Robert and Lynn. Joe and my brother Robert were fellow firefighters in Huntsville many years ago. I can honestly say Joe was highly thought of by my family and before my mother moved to Houston in 1995 to live with me, she would always state if she had any questions or problems she'd "call Joe French" because he knew the answer. I can think of many instances he assisted our family with problems we'd encounter long before he matured to the wonderful person he was. After I married and moved away, whenever visiting my brother Robert I would always have to track him to the fire station and there would be Joe and my brother cleaning equipment, washing the trucks or simply hanging out. Joe was always a person whose love and caring for others made him larger than life. He was an individual others felt privileged to meet and know because he was as some would say, "the real deal" I could relate many stories from the "old days of the Walker County Emergency Corp" in Huntsville where I was used as the prop on how to strap and transport a victim in the old ambulance. Joe and my brothers would harrass me endlessly but they were serious about getting it right. Please know you and your family have been blessed by his presence in your life. I know we all were. We will keep you and yours in our prayers and never forget, he will always be with you in your heart.

Frances Bradberry Bush - April 20, 2008 at 11:13 AM

RF

“ I met Joe back when he was the fire chief in Huntsville. I went to school at Sam Houston and I don't really remember why I met him, but I don't meet too many people that are bigger than me, so I didn't forget it. When I went to work at the Sheriff's office in Giddings I heard about Joe working in Lexington, and then finally got to meet him again. He didn't remember me, but I sure never forgot him. Being the only deputy living in Lexington, I got to go on a lot of calls with him, and I could sure tell you some stories, but I'll leave that for another time. Probably what I remember most about Joe is sitting at the P.D. office and talking, or "tea" at Tootsies. Joe was always willing to help out or give advice. I probably still owe him a few dinners if I added it all up. I would buy one day and he might buy the next two, but I know he never thought twice about it. One time the clutch went out on my truck and I was going to have a hard time finding the money to replace it. I didn't tell Joe about money being tight, but I think he knew. He called me the next day out of the blue and told me he had the very part I needed to fix my truck. He said he had it just lying around in his barn and he didn't have a use for it so he wanted me to have it. I don't know if that was the case, but when I thought back on it later, it wouldn't have surprised me if he just went out and bought it for me. I learned alot from Joe, more than I can ever list here. Mainly, I hope that when people look back on my life they think of me the same way I think of Joe.

Ron Feemster - April 19, 2008 at 08:35 PM

JH

“ Mrs French--I met "Big Joe" my first day in the Harris Cty Sheriff's Academy back in 1973. I was with Mty Gty SO and he was with Walker. We became instant friends, and I'd meet him on the freeway at The Woodlands exit, he'd have his red lights on and would lead us to the academy every morning and evening "running 33 traffic". I was the only woman in the class and weighed all of 100 lbs, so you can imagine what I looked like standing beside Big Joe. Of course they paired us together as my Sat. night drunk that I had to pull out of a car to arrest. During break he gave me his word "he'd help me, and would fall forward or fall down to help me cuff and arrest him. Did he keep his promise? Of course NOT, so I had to "use only what force was necessary to subdue my prisoner" leaving only one choice to kick him in the groin and RING HIS BELLS. He did go down, and I cuffed him and how the whole class did laugh and for years they all said "Big Joe would probably never have children due to Helmer Ringing his Belle's. So glad to hear thru the years he did have children. After 10yrs in Narcotics I went on to become a polygraph examiner and ran several polygraph test for Walker Cty. Sheriff Darrell White called to tell me of his passing last Sun. and I was so sad to hear of his passing. Of course we'd all lost touch with each thru the years, but I did work so close with all those guys from Walker Cty and they always made me feel just like "one of the guys". I was in Giddings last weekend visiting my husband's family when I rec'd the phone call from Sheriff White telling me of his passing. I'm so sorry for you and your family's loss, because Big Joe was everyones friend and had the heart the size of Texas. He was so admired, respected, and loved by so many. I lost contact with him after he left Walker Cty and was so shocked to learn he'd been with Lee Cty SO and all of my husband's family knew him so well. Just Sat. I was talking to Jim Clampett a retired deputy from Lee Cty SO and was telling him about me and Big Joe and how hard those guys were on me during the academy, but I had to be tough to keep up with them. I did so love Ted Pierce, Joe Nesbitt, Sheriff White, and of course Big Joe. I use to call Big Joe "My Big Teddy Bear" because he had the heart the size of Texas and was loved by so many, and did so love his work. Please know that you

and your family have been in my thoughts and prayers through this difficult time. I lost my husband of 46yrs just 7yrs ago, so I do know what your going through. We were both very lucky and Blessed to have had such wonderful loving husbands. Big Joe was so loved by so many, and did serve every county he ever worked for. He did so love his work. He will forever be in our hearts, and as we all know "God only takes the Best". I do believe they are having way too much fun up in Heaven, and I can't wait to join all our loved ones. Please except my sincere thoughts and prayers for you and your family through this difficult time. All the guys in Walker Cty just called me "Mama Helmer", and treated me like "one of the guys".

Judy Helmer

Judy Helmer - April 19, 2008 at 01:28 PM

SF

“*Mrs. French, I'm sorry to hear that Joe passed away. My thoughts and prayers are with you and your family.*

Shayne Futujma - April 17, 2008 at 01:54 PM

DB

“*Rebecca and children, our thoughts and prayers are with you at this time.*

David, Samuel, and Joanne Tally Bergsten - April 16, 2008 at 06:42 PM

SC

“ *To the French Family,
I can remember a day when I was very young and used to stay for a week or two with my grandparents here in Huntsville. My grandfather would parade me around town and ask what next? Of course, I would stand up and say, take me to see Chief Joe at the fire station! Joe would take me all around the trucks, inside and out. I guess you could say that those summers were what made me the person I am today. For those simple little tours, I am grateful. It has made me a better fireman and given me a family in the fire service today. My family and I share something everytime that pager goes off! Compassion...and the deep desire to help someone in need! There are many people that have given me this ambition and Joe French was one of them. For this debt I can never repay enough....only to serve as best as he did. Thank you Joe for giving me a dream that I live everyday side by side with your son, John. Love to the French family and may God watch over you and bless you in this trying time.*

Stephen Countz - April 14, 2008 at 10:25 PM

TT

“ *Rebecca and family, I am greatly saddened to hear of Joe's passing. You have my profound sympathy and prayers. I remember many times that Joe provided this "city boy" heartfelt guidance in how to "get it right". He was a fine leader, a good friend and a great person. I know he will be missed by all. May his example and memory serve one and all. God bless you all.*

Tommy Tomlinson - April 14, 2008 at 09:18 PM

SH

“ Rebecca, Joan Marie. Ramiond and my "kids" Heidi and John:

My thought and prayer are with you all. What a wonderful memorial to Joe today. My love to you all.

Shana

Shana - April 14, 2008 at 09:04 PM

BS

“ Rebecca,
I was so very sorry to hear of Joe's passing. He was a great friend to all that knew him, and even more importantly, he was a great friend to those in the communities he served. Always quick with a smile and ready to help, my life was much richer because I knew Joe French.

Bobby Smith

Bob Smith - April 14, 2008 at 03:58 PM

JB

“ To the entire French & extended family,
We are so very sorry for your loss of such a great man & wonderful human being. I guess I met Joe back in the early 70's (my dad was a Huntsville Fire Chief in the early 60's) and firemen bonded them as they still do today. My dad would take us out to the old Huntsville Raceway to watch the stock car races and Joe was one of the crowd favorites. (I think he was probably my first childhood "crush") because he always had the ability to listen and make others feel important. Through the years, Huntsvillians could not help but notice the way Joe was ALWAYS helping others out as both a mentor and a friend. I know his family is so proud of his many years of silent service and we are proud of having known Joe. God Bless You...
Jamie & Don Brinegar

Jamie Ellisor Brinegar - April 14, 2008 at 12:48 PM

MN

“ John, Kerri and family, you are in my thoughts and prayers. I am sorry for your loss and the pain your are now feeling. John your father did alot for this community, I never actually met him but I have heard of him and his reputation. I know he was glad to have you as a son. He will be missed by all, although he is gone from our lives on Earth, we now have an extra guardian angel watching over us.

Missy Nichols - April 14, 2008 at 12:20 PM

PR

“ Mrs. French and Family our thoughts and prayers are with you all. May god bless you always.
"After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." And so we will be with the Lord forever. 1 Thessalonians 4:17

Phil, Gloria and Veronica Richardson - April 14, 2008 at 09:31 AM

AW

“ I never had the honor to meet Joe, but as I recently join HFD, I began to learn about the great man. I had the honor to pray for Joe and his family at drill the night before his passing. Since his passing the talk about all the great accomplishments came from numerous fire fighters. I will continue to pray for you John & Kari, as well as the rest of the family, fellow fire fighters and friends.

Adam Winningham - April 14, 2008 at 12:43 AM

EL

“ We wanted you to know that all of you are in our thoughts and prayers during this very difficult time. May God give you comfort and peace as you are supported by your faith, family, and friends.
Love, Erle and Kathleen Lindsey

Erle and Kathleen Lindsey - April 13, 2008 at 10:41 PM

DE

“ I have the fondest memories of Joe. He was large in body, voice and spirit and most of all he loved Huntsville. He was a dedicated man to the community and the community's love for him is demonstrated by outpouring of respect and celebration of his life. He was a great friend.

Dana and Doug Eckles - April 13, 2008 at 10:15 PM

BB

“ I have many fond memories of my experience as a Huntsville volunteer firefighter when Joe was Chief. Anyone who met Joe, or was around him any length of time, never forgot him. Besides big in stature. His opinions were big, his laugh was big, and just his presence had a big impact. And it was big hearted people like Joe, that made the HFD the best department in East TX. My heartfelt condolences to the family.

Byron Bush - April 13, 2008 at 08:55 PM

MD

“ My thoughts and prayers are with Rebecca, his children and his grandchildren. He was a wonderfully strong presence. My father always kept in touch and had current info about Joe and his family. I truly wish I had known him better. Margaret

Margaret French Dennison - April 13, 2008 at 07:44 PM

GR

“ I, like Mary Beth Kaltwasser, went to school with Joe many years ago. He was a fun-loving and caring guy who was loved by all. My thoughts and prayers are with his wife and family.

Geneva Higginbotham Ray - April 13, 2008 at 04:19 PM

DE

“ Mrs. French, our heartfelt thoughts are with you and your family at this time. Although we never met you husband, it's overly evident from the written history of his life and memorial comments that he was a truly exceptional person. We offer any help we can to assist you and your family in enduring your great loss. The Earnst family.

Don and Beverly Earnst - April 13, 2008 at 03:27 PM

MC

“ My brother and I grew with up Joe many years ago in Huntsville. He was a great person even back then when we were kids. My thoughts and prayers are with you- Mary Beth Kaltwasser Cook

Mary Beth Kaltwasser Cook - April 13, 2008 at 02:49 PM

JW

“ I met Joe when I became a volunteer in a county department. His knowledge of the fire department and all of its workings amazed me. He inspired me to do my best at being a firefighter. Thank you Joe! To the family, may God cover you with His righteous hand, may His love overwhelm you and comfort you during this time of loss. Joe fought the fight, ran the race and kept the faith. As he joins the eternal fire department may he hear "well done thou good and faithful servant."
God bless you all.

Joe Whitehead - April 13, 2008 at 08:56 AM

NJ

“ Joe French served long and hard hours for the good and well being of other people. He will be missed. Norma Dell and Jerry D. Jones of Lovelady, formerly of Huntsville.

Norma Dell & Jerry D Jones - April 12, 2008 at 09:39 AM

DU

“ *Our thoughts and prayers are with your family.*

Danny & Pam Upchurch - April 11, 2008 at 06:30 PM

MJ

“ *Mrs. French,
We wanted to send our condolences to you the children and family.
Our prayers and thoughts are with you.
May God be your comfort at this time of great loss.*

The Jones Family

Mike and Linda Jones - April 11, 2008 at 01:40 PM

DB

“ *In 1976, as a 19 yr old single girl new to Huntsville, I became the Huntsville Police Dept/Fire Dept Dispatcher. Joe treated me like a little sister and even allowed me to a copy of his photo ID, listing his height/weight, as "protection". My first day alone on the job was the day Mr. Toney was injured. Somehow God allowed me to keep my cool and work with the fireman to dispatch help. I prayed for their safety each fire afterwards and made many friends, Joe being the first that day.
In my opinion; the world, and all the public he helped protect, has lost a truly brave man.*

Dena Eickenhorst Byrd - April 11, 2008 at 12:34 PM

KD

“ *Praying that you can feel the presence of the Lord and the peace He offers. May you find comfort is knowing how many people Joe helped protect during his lifetime. Thank you, family, for the sacrifices you gave so we had the services Joe provided for us all.*

Kathy Dube - April 11, 2008 at 09:54 AM

RH

“ Rebecca and Family, we just wanted you to know that you all our in our thoughts and prayers. We know that at a time like this,there are no words to ease the pain. Please remember that we are here for you all now and always. Sincerely, Rick and Joyce Hodge

Rick and Joyce Hodge - April 11, 2008 at 09:17 AM

JH

“ Rebecca, John, Joan, Raymond and rest of family,
I can't begin to find the right words to comfort you all. I do know that our hearts are heavy with grief at the loss of Joe. He has meant so much to our family as do the rest of you. I'll never forget the chance Joe gave me to be a female firefighter. He was very supportive of me and I will always tressure that. He was godfather to John's oldest daughter Megan. Joe is a wonderful man with a big heart and he will be greatly missed. If we can do anything to help you in this time please let us know.

Love Always,

John and Rochelle Hobbs

John and Rochelle Hobbs - April 10, 2008 at 08:23 PM

RH

“ Joe will be greatly missed. He meant a lot to our family. May GOD bless you all.

Sincerely,

John and Rochelle Hobbs

Rochelle and John Hobbs - April 10, 2008 at 08:15 PM