

# Dustin Hamilton, Assistant Fire Marshal, June 10, 2025

## Transcript

Narrator:

You tuned in to another edition of The Break Room. A weekly conversation about how the City of Saint Augustine works from those who do the work every day hosted by the city of Saint Augustine 's Communications Director, Melissa Wissel, The Break Room offers a closer look at the different city departments and provides updates on current and upcoming projects and events and now your host, Melissa Wissel.

Melissa Wissel:

Hello, and thanks for tuning in I'm Melissa Wissel, Communications Director for the City of Saint Augustine. We're back in studio this week with Dustin Hamilton, formerly known as Fire Inspector. Fire Safety Inspector and Firefighter now he is our Assistant Fire Marshal. Dustin welcome back and congratulations! I know you still do some of that other stuff we'll talk about that for a minute but what was the occasion, or you know opportunity here I would say that they promoted you because you deserved it because you're awesome but you probably had to do a little more than just somebody saying Dustin 's awesome.

Dustin Hamilton:

Ohh thank you thanks for having me. Yeah basically just kind of come down to the position evolving into the need for an Assistant Fire Marshal when it started out the idea was you know I'll just do fire inspections and kind of help as needed with things that come up and then it. As being a small department we're trying to do more with less and then I've started going to meetings and sitting amongst groups and going out to the EOC doing activations and all of those all of those things were kind of required somebody that can make decisions for the department there's only 4 of us total in our admin and they just kind of got to the point where they felt like you know it would be good to have be able to let me be in that room with these folks I'm already in that room with these players that you know are making decisions. So it just. Seemed like it was of natural thing for them to go ahead and let me become an Assistant Fire Marshal.

Melissa Wissel:

Well it's an important role to be in when you're in the room and you have somewhat of a responsible position like you said you're the Fire Safety Inspector but there's kind of this "can he make a decision?" and you're like well I you know what the decisions going to be.

You want to be but you haven't been given that authority or that position to be able to have the. The department behind you let's say.

Dustin Hamilton:

Yeah and that's the that's the thing that was kind of happening to you was you know some of the meetings or whatever I would be in the other players in the room were like you know I'm able to make those decisions but it's like they're thought could be what is a Fire Safety Inspector doing making these kind of decisions for their Fire Department.

Melissa Wissel:

Right.

Dustin Hamilton:

You know.

Melissa Wissel:

Needed to have that elevated title which is great.

Dustin Hamilton:

Right yeah and I've been you know I've been there for a while you know I've been. In the admin role now for over 3 years and I've worked for the fire department for going on 15 years now so. It's been. There for a little while so it's definitely not like I was somebody that's been there for a year or 2 and now they're putting into some kind of admin role but.

Melissa Wissel:

Very warranted promotion very. Deserving so congratulations on that.

Dustin Hamilton:

Thank you so much. Yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

And we did we went through the hurricane so let's shift gears to hurricanes you mentioned going to the EOC we recently had our exercise what was it hurricane Waterloo every year we have an exercise talk about that a little bit you were mentioning. They were they started sending you or you had been going during activations and we have representation what does that look like not only just in the EOC but preparations we want to remind our listeners while we're here about all that just let's start. Talking about hurricanes.

Dustin Hamilton:

Yeah so. The initially they started sending me well before I got in the fire service many moons ago I that's what I did I worked for Emergency Management I was an Emergency Management Planner so it was a natural fit for when we do have activations let's send him out there he kind of knows what to do and the reason for the hurricane. Exercise is this a good chance for everybody to kind of dust all of everything off to get ready for the upcoming hurricane season there's just a lot of little nuances that you forget about with working with software web EOC out there asking for. Or resources and things that people might need and also gives you know for us and the fire department and I'm sure for the Police Department as well that's our job we're always thinking into this emergency response recovery mode year-round but it helps with other departments that are just not. Used to necessarily thinking in that way it's like you know what happens if all the lift stations go down in the city due to flooding you know what do you need to ask for what is the timeline look like for you to be able to recover from that you know and so it just helps get all everybody ready for you know. Worst case scenario.

Melissa Wissel:

Right.

Dustin Hamilton:

How am I going to respond to this?

Melissa Wissel:

And some of us I think who have been through I think last year we were doing something we counted 9 named storms since Matthew so some of us are seasoned but we have a lot of.

Dustin Hamilton:

Yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

New residents anything that you could recommend or suggest to any of our listeners what are some of the maybe top 3 top 5 things what should.

Dustin Hamilton:

Yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

People be thinking about now. Because what we like to tell. People is prepare when the sun is shining.

Dustin Hamilton:

Yeah it is to have a plan for where you're going to go I mean you know Saint Augustine's a beautiful city one of the things about it though is like we will flood you know if that that happens during the storms we've seen it multiple times here it's not necessarily a place you want to ride a storm out.

Melissa Wissel:

Right.

Dustin Hamilton:

You know if we're recommending that you evacuate you should probably do so and kind of have plans in place for that think about getting out a little earlier than everybody else in the state of Florida I mean that was the thing that happened last year too. Because people were trying to evacuate but so was everything in the southern part of the state so you're kind of just sitting in a traffic jam gas.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah the entire state of Florida was trying to leave.

Dustin Hamilton:

Yes yeah gas and supplies are becoming a shortage for you so it just it makes that evacuation much more difficult than what it could have been if you had just left a little earlier when you know but that that's probably some of the main things that we we've kind ask for.

Melissa Wissel:

Because we're in a place where we're not like you just said it's not about shelter in place in your house because what we look at like you just mentioned too is that storm surge it's the flooding down wires electric you know electrocution restarting up your generators or when your house power comes back on those surges the other thing I want to remind folks this was something that I learned maybe after Irma evacuation doesn't mean you need to hightail it to Georgia, just get to higher ground maybe west of 95.

Dustin Hamilton:

Oh yeah. No. Yeah. Right yeah just out of low lying areas which unfortunately the city is kind of a low-lying area.

Melissa Wissel:

And we have shelters so people can go to shelters if they don't have a place.

Dustin Hamilton:

Yes. Yeah and yeah we have shelters for special needs folks as well so if you have any kind of medical issues or anything and you're unable to travel to get away we have special needs shelters that have things in place to help take care of those folks as well.

Melissa Wissel:

Sjcemergencymanagement.com I think is SJC for Saint Johns county emergency management.com the city 's website has the resources and links to all of that. We've got some notification apps that you can sign up for Alerts Saint John's I'm going to do a quick station identification if you're just now tuning in you're listening. To The Break Room, I'm Melissa Wissel Communications Director for the City of Saint Augustine with Dustin Hamilton he has our Assistant Fire Marshal. Well giving us some great reminders about hurricane season before we sign off I do want to remind folks to talk a little bit from fire departments perspective but we've also got 4th of July coming and the heat of summer some safety precautions and maybe some reminders about 4th of July.

Speaker

Yeah.

Dustin Hamilton:

Yeah for those that are coming downtown definitely.

Melissa Wissel:

Don't.

Dustin Hamilton:

It's busy. You know downtown gets packed a lot of people want to come here and enjoy the fireworks I mean it is a it's a great place to come and see them but yeah for sure stay hydrated drink plenty of water. And just you know it's one of those days for you're not feeling well being out in the heat walking around all day maybe it's not a good idea for this this year but yeah no that's the thing is we don't want a bunch of folks coming here and having to fall

out because you've maybe been drinking a little too much throughout the day but if you're drinking anything try to.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah. Right. Drink water yeah and we've got some we're adding some enhancements sort of in the I'll call it the aftermath of the last Night's of Lights were implementing some new or additional security bathrooms portlets downtown. Are we I don't know if we're able to do? I don't think we had there was talk of maybe a cooling station or something but I don't think we're able to pull that together but there is going to be a bathroom new bathroom area down by corner of Saint George and Cathedral.

Dustin Hamilton:

Yes. Yes yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

And we're going to have some barricades kind of set up along as well so people can't be darting into the street little more traffic control.

Dustin Hamilton:

Yeah sounds like it'll be a new traffic route for some folks so that'll be something to keep on the lookout for once that goes live and they post that online and throughout all the media outlets so yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

Right how that yes. What else anything else we need to talk about oh tell me a bit quick how did we do a Spark to Flame this year changed it up a little bit?

Dustin Hamilton:

Oh this is great yeah it was great I mean it was it was another great year I mean this was our second year of spark the flame so we're already talking about next year I know I think this week Abby is going to a conference to speak about Spark the Flame to.

Melissa Wissel:

Mm-hmm. Tell us a little tell of our listeners a little bit about it.

Dustin Hamilton:

So Spark the Flame is a girls camp that we've put together that is for girls who have an interest in wanting to get into public safety mainly fire department related and they can sign up for that and it's 2 days long it's 2 separate groups though per day so if you signed up for it you would be coming for one day. And they just kind of get to see a lot of different aspects of what it's like to work in the fire service and we'll teach them EMS life safety skills do some I think they're doing some rope propelling with them they're letting them put fires out there will not fires but.

Melissa Wissel:

There's like a smokehouse or something right.

Dustin Hamilton:

You spray and spray water and stuff yeah they got we have a house that that has some smoke it has a smoke generator in it it's completely safe smoke but and they're performing like search and rescue operations within those within the buildings and yeah it's a lot of fun when. When we started it we were kind of unsure as to like you know they're going to like this is it's going to be successful for us. And it's continued to grow both years and in the next year coming up I'm sure it will be even bigger than it was this year.

Melissa Wissel:

And the ages it's middle school and high school little bit older.

Dustin Hamilton:

Yes yeah it needed to be a little bit older group just because of you know when you start talking about here's how you would stop the bleeding on a you know some kind of large laceration it's like a little bit more mature group for that versus younger kids. As it continues to grow I could see us talking about doing something that's for the younger age brackets but you know it's right now we're still kind of in its infancy stage and were working some kinks out here and there to try to make it better.

Melissa Wissel:

Each year and it's also really like you said it's a if there's young girls that are interested in fire service sort of that hands on experience.

Dustin Hamilton:

Yeah it's a it's a great it's a great opportunity for you to get to see it you know at a at a young age is this something that you might consider you know and it kind of gives you some

aspects as to like this is these are parts of the job that you're going to be you know getting to experience on a pretty regular basis you know and you can find out in a in a fun way and also in a learning environment in a controlled environment as is this something that you know I might want to pursue when I'm done with school.

Melissa Wissel:

Very good last quick thing you're still doing safety inspections still doing short term rentals how are they looking people getting the gist of it things are manageable.

Dustin Hamilton:

Lots of short term. Rentals. Yeah I mean. Yeah we just we've got a lot of them I mean I want to say we're fixing to hit we're around 900 of them that we have registered just within the city so and all of those we have to inspect every year but yeah for the most part I mean they're good you know.

Melissa Wissel:

People are abiding by the rules they're on board they get it good.

Dustin Hamilton:

Yeah. Yeah if they're not they're attempting to if you're not you have neighbors next door that will keep you in place yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

Keep you honest.

Dustin Hamilton:

We will hear about it.

Melissa Wissel:

That's great well congratulations on the promotion we're happy to have you come down and we'll have you come back again stay safe and I will look for you still driving fire trucks or you get your own car now.

Dustin Hamilton:

Yeah. I'm in my own vehicle now it's.

Melissa Wissel:

Does it say safe fire Marshal on it Assistant Fire Marshal.

Dustin Hamilton:

Rare. No mine 's actually a plain vehicle yeah mines unmarked for now.

Melissa Wissel:

OK so we don't you just might be there and we can't see you all right.

Dustin Hamilton:

Yeah I kind of like it. Like that.

Melissa Wissel:

OK well great well thanks for coming in.

Speaker

Alright.

Dustin Hamilton:

Thanks.

Melissa Wissel:

If you missed part of this broadcast and want to go back and listen from the beginning you can find us on your favorite podcasting app check out [CityStAugRadio.com](http://CityStAugRadio.com) for a complete listing of past podcasts and this interview we want to keep you informed about what's happening in and around the city and that you hear it hear from the people doing the work to make it happen every day follow the fire department on Facebook and Instagram at [CityStAug](https://www.facebook.com/CityStAug) and of course the city website [CityStAug.com](http://CityStAug.com) thanks for tuning in until next time.

Narrator:

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