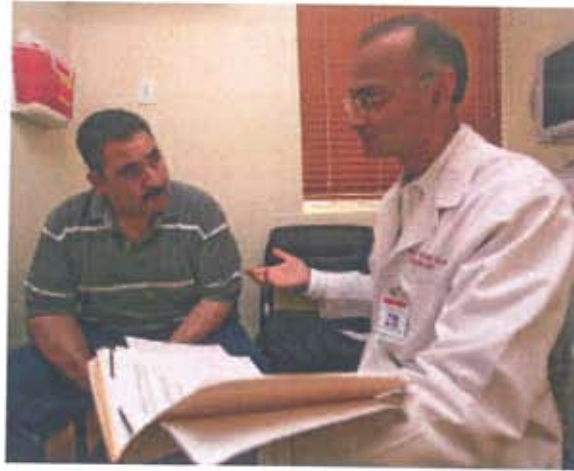




## Fort Bend County News

Cardiologist Kota J. Reddy evaluates the cardiac screening performed on Missouri City Patrol Sgt. Saul Luera, 30, of Missouri City. Reddy is offering free cardiac screenings for Missouri City firefighters and police officers.

SUZANNE REHAK: FOR THE CHRONICLE



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### Local cardiologist gives heartfelt support to public safety officers

Doctor provides free screenings of firefighters, police in Missouri City, Sugar Land

By KAREN HASTINGS  
Chronicle Correspondent

Police and firefighters stream in and out of cardiologist Kota J. Reddy's Sugar Land office these days, but the only emergency is their increased risk of heart attack and stroke.

Alarmed by statistics that list heart disease as a leading cause of death among the nation's firefighters and an increased danger for police officers as well, Reddy has begun offering free cardiac screenings for Sugar Land and Missouri City public safety officers.

Since word of his offer spread late last year, about 150 police and firefighters have taken advantage of the offer. On one recent day during the holiday season, a Missouri City fire truck brought in Lt. Daryl Maretka and three of his men.

"I think it's safe to say we'll get all our guys in here," said Maretka, 30, sporting a Band-Aid on his arm from recent blood work.

"We're told repeatedly that cardiac arrest is our No. 1 killer, but there's been no big proactive program to bring that number down. This is an awesome step in that direction."

As an interventional cardiologist, Reddy said he has long been aware that heart disease is rampant in public safety occupations. Stress, poor diets and work environments that mix sedentary hours with sudden intense physical activity leave these men and women significantly more vulnerable.

He cites studies that show heart disease causes 45 percent of on-duty firefighter deaths, and 22 percent of police officer deaths.

A November conversation about the problem with an assistant police chief from Fort Bend County brought national statistics closer to home. A few days later, a conversation with a patient, Missouri City Councilwoman Cynthia Lenton-Gary, convinced Reddy to put his concerns into civic action.

"I've done well and I want to do something to give back to the community. I want to create something unique; that's my passion," said Reddy, a native of India who has studied and conducted research at Stanford University, Baylor College of Medicine and the Texas Heart Institute. Now a U.S. citizen, Reddy opened his Houston practice in 1997 and added a Fort Bend County office in 2006.

"My point is to create a unique program for the firefighters and cops and show it works in dropping the instance of heart attack and stroke dramatically. My whole concept is preventing and reversing heart disease."

The idea, he said, has caught on "like wildfire."

Missouri City Assistant Fire Chief Mike Youngblood, a 22-year veteran, doesn't like going to the doctor, but was reassured by the results of his recent appointment with Reddy.

"At 56 there's a lot of anxiety about what's going on with the ticker," says Youngblood, who has three firefighter sons. "Just having the opportunity (to get it checked) helps relieve some anxiety. Even if the news is not all good, it's an opportunity to catch things early."

Reddy says the screening has a per-person value of \$1,000 and includes five different noninvasive tests that check cholesterol levels, thickness of neck arteries, the presence of calcium in the arteries, levels of inflammation-causing enzymes in the blood and for a component of "bad cholesterol" that is considered to be a prime indicator of heart-disease risk.

After the testing, Reddy prescribes medication or further tests for those who need them. Others are offered the option of coming back in six months after trying a special diet and lifestyle modifications Reddy has developed to prevent and repair heart disease.

His plan is to offer two-hour follow-up sessions for groups of officers, where they can ask questions about diet, test results and other issues.

Sugar Land Police Chief Steve Griffith praised Reddy's program and said it complements his department's efforts to ensure the force is fit and healthy. The department already is working with consultants to phase in yearly physical fitness requirements for police officers. By October 2009, a physical fitness test will be required each year, he said.

Meanwhile, Reddy challenged colleagues in the medical community to follow his lead.

"We should do something for the firefighters and cops when we know there's a high incidence (of heart disease) because of bad diet and high-stress jobs and intense physical activity," Reddy said. "This should be adopted across the nation"

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