



**Robert Eckels  
County Judge**

# **NEWS RELEASE**

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## **DHS SECRETARY RIDGE MEETS WITH HARRIS COUNTY CITIZEN CORPS VOLUNTEER PRIOR TO PORT OF HOUSTON VISIT**

Houston – Department of Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge and other high-level department officials are meeting with volunteers active in local Citizen Corps when they travel across the country. “ Citizens who volunteer in their communities are a critical component of any endeavor to secure the homeland. I want to personally thank those who have taken that message to heart. By helping to keep our hometowns safe, we make our country strong and safe,” said Secretary Ridge.



When Secretary Ridge arrived in Houston, Don Hawkins, a Harris County Citizen Corps volunteer, greeted him. Don's desire to better serve his community prompted him to sign up on the Harris County Citizen Corps website. ([www.harriscountycitizencorps.com](http://www.harriscountycitizencorps.com))

Don is a chaplain and counselor. He uses those skills as a volunteer for Victim Relief Ministries. Don and several of his fellow volunteers have also gone through the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training through the Harris County Citizen Corps. They are now trained to better assist first responders in an emergency situation. Don and his associates also participate in the training of other CERT classes.

Victim Relief Ministries trains volunteers from faith based organizations to work with victims of crime, fire, or a disaster, be it natural or manmade.

Don Hawkins was born and raised in Texas. He has six children. Hawkins is the Texas State Director for Victim Relief and is co-chairman of the Emergency Preparedness Task Force at the Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce.



During the Port of Houston security briefing, Harris County Judge Robert Eckels presented Secretary Ridge with a personalized Harris County Citizen Corps shirt and cap. Judge Eckels is the chairman of the Harris County Citizen Corps and Mark Sloan is the coordinator of Homeland Security and Special Projects for Judge Eckels' office.