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FIREMAN



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LANCASTER COUNTY
South Central Region
FOAM TASK FORCE
responds to
YORK COUNTY
INDUSTRIAL INCIDENT
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Follow Up

COMMUNITY COMES TOGETHER TO HELP FIRE CHIEF RECOVER FROM FIRE



Chief William Obrecht, Sr. third from left receives Fire Fighter of Year Proclamation from Mike Rizzotti, Dist. Manager of Faraday-Alarm Company, second from left, as Jennifer Kaminsk representing Girsch Fire Alarm Co., right and left, Dr. L. Roy Newman, Committee Chairman and Board Director, Elkins Park VFD, look on approvingly.

In December we reported on the misfortune of Elkins Park, PA Fire Chief William Obrecht Sr., who lost his home to a devastating fire, and how the community was planning a fundraiser to help him overcome his loss.

The fundraiser was organized by Fire Company members and chaired by Board Director, Dr. L. Roy Newman and was held at the Congregation Rodeph Shalom Hall. The fundraiser was an overwhelming success with more than 300 in attendance. Attendees were members and friends from the Elkins Park VFD and community fire fighters

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Norm Geissler's wife Betty, center, is joined by Dr. L. Roy Newman and his wife Stevie. Norm rescued three of the Newman's children from a fire over 40 years ago.



Myerstown fire fighters attend Chief Obrecht event



The food and fellowship was great

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who also responded to the initial fire call. Glenside, McKinley, Jenkintown, Ogontz, Weldon, Lamott, Rockledge, Cheltenham, Abington, Wyndmoor, North Penn Good Will and also Cheltenham Police, Cheltenham EMS, and Roslyn Safety Officers.

Also attending was a delegation of fire fighters from Myerstown VFC in Lebanon County and many others.

Extra-Ordinary Contributors, Abington Bank, Faraday/Siemans Fire Alarm Company, and Fire Companies- King of Prussia, Lamott, Lynfield, Pioneer (Jenkintown), and of course the generous directors of the fire company including Board President Judge Michael Richman, Active President John Hearn; Board of Director Vice President George O'Connell, Esq.; Board of Director Dawn Vahey, Esq. Dick Sundheim, Frank Lawlor, Charles Obrecht, Tom Robinson, Kevin Feiner, Fred Weiler, and of course Dr. L. Roy Newman.

Other guests included elected officials Tom Ellis, Harvey Portner, Dist. Manager of Faraday-Mike Rizzotti, who presented a framed Proclamation to Fire Chief William Obrecht Sr., naming him "Faraday's Fire Fighter of The Year."

But... beyond that it provided those who were guests from other areas a unique opportunity to get a glimpse into the heart and soul of the history of this close knit community and fire company.

As we first reported...

On Saturday, Nov., 26, 2006, a fire devastated the home of Fire Chief William Obrecht Sr., located at 8231 Cadwalader Ave., Elkins Park. Although there were no injuries, the fire was a total loss.

For over 40 years, Bill Obrecht Sr., has volunteered as a Firefighter, many as Fire Chief, for the Elkins Park Vol. Fire Co. of Cheltenham Township in suburban Philadelphia, PA.

On Saturday, November 26, 2005, Elkins Park Fire Company Chief William Obrecht Sr. was assisting his brother and life member of the Elkins Park Fire Company Robert Obrecht complete a home repair on his home in near by Abington Township.

At 1:56pm, a fire department was dispatched to 8227 Cadwalader Avenue in Elkins Park, Cheltenham Township. Bill Obrecht Sr. immediately recognized the address as his neighbors and responded as he has done for the last 43+ years as an Elkins Park Volunteer Firefighter. While enroute, the address reported was changed to 8231

Cadwalader Avenue, Fire Chief Bill Obrecht Sr.'s home. The first arriving units were met by heavy smoke and fire conditions, and a subsequent floor collapse. Exterior operations were initiated as heavy fire extended through the walls and into the attic. Despite the valiant efforts by all emergency responders, the home was a total loss..

But let's go back forty years...

A young Doctor named L. Roy Newman living in Elkins Park with his wife Stevie and their four children unfortunately fell victim to a similar situation as did Chief William Obrecht.

Seems while the Doctor and his wife were away one evening the babysitter is believed to have carelessly discarded a cigarette and during the night a fire developed trapping four children in the upstairs bedrooms.

The Elkins Park Volunteer Fire Department responded and included in those responders were Fire Fighters Norman Geissler, Joseph J. Muldoon and you guessed it William Obrecht, a rookie of 8 months on the fire department who was assigned to run the generator to provide lighting on the fire ground.

Many of our readers knew the late Norm Geissler who was active in the Firemen's Association State of PA and was a Past President and board member at time of his death. Norm was credited with finding the children and rescuing and leading three of the four children to the doorway of the home where he collapsed and had to himself be rescued. Norm reportedly reminisced that it was the hardest decision of his life to start down the stairs with three of the children knowing the baby was still in another bedroom and unable to get out on its own. Fire fighter Joe Muldon placed a ladder at a bedroom window and miraculously entered the building and saved the baby.

The official report in the Carnegie files tells it this way:

Norman L. Geissler saved Sharon, Laurie, and Paul Newman from suffocation, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, April 21, 1963. During the night, fire broke out in the kitchen of a three-story dwelling in which the Newman children were asleep in bedrooms on the second floor. The maid, the only other person in the dwelling, telephoned a volunteer fire company but was driven out by dense smoke when she attempted to reach the second floor. Three men made their way to a landing on

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the stairs before they also were forced out by the smoke. Fire fighter Norm Geissler, 40, machinist, arrived and learned that four children were on the second floor. Despite a warning not to do so, Geissler entered the dwelling and crawled to the stairway, which was opposite the door of the burning kitchen. He ascended to the second floor and found Sharon, 7, Laurie, 2, and Paul, 4, in the hall. Geissler gathered all three into his arms and, coughing from smoke he had inhaled, carried them downstairs. Crouching beneath flames, which had spread onto the hall ceiling, he took the children from the dwelling and then collapsed from smoke inhalation.

Joseph J. Muldoon, 27, office clerk, arrived and learned one year old Daniel Newman still was on the second floor, and ascended a ladder to a front bedroom window. He climbed inside and dropped to his knees below the smoke. Guided by Daniel's cries, Muldoon crawled into the hall, where the smoke was denser. Heat increased as he made his way along the hall to the door of Daniel's room within three feet of flames at the top of stairs leading to the kitchen. Muldoon crawled into the room and located Daniel. Forced to inhale smoke, which caused him to cough, he carried Daniel into the hall and felt his way along the wall. He moved into a bathroom but groped his way back into the hall and then to the front

bedroom. Beginning to feel faint, Muldoon thrust his upper body through the window opening and lifted Daniel outside. A man climbed the ladder and took Daniel from him. Badly dazed from the smoke, Muldoon descended to the ground. He, and Norman L. Geissler, and the four children were given oxygen, and they recovered.

Norm Geissler and Joe Muldoon were credited with rescuing and saving the 4 children and later received the prestigious Carnegie Award. Reportedly this was one of the few times a Carnegie Award was made where a loss of life was not a part of the scenario. Ironically, the award presenter, Pennsylvania Adjutant General Major Gen. Tom R. White, Jr., representing the Pennsylvania Governor flew to Philadelphia to present the award and died in a plane crash returning home.

The children's father Dr. L. Roy Newman told me at the fundraiser that all the children survived and the baby is now 44 years old.

But that's not the end of the story . . .

In appreciation for what the Elkins Park Volunteer Fire Company and its members did in saving the lives of his four children, Dr. L. Roy Newman offered his lifelong support to the fire company. He gathered several of his friends who were doctors, lawyers and businessmen to join him in supporting their community volunteer fire company. The Elkins Park VFC reorganized and created a board of community businesses and professional people to the board. The professionals would run the business of the department and fire fighters would do what they do best, train and serve the community unburdened with fundraising and other administrative duties.

That board continues today and were the hosts of the fundraiser for Chief William Obrecht, Sr. But there is more . . .

Some of the guests present were from Lebanon County, PA, Myerstown VFD who recently purchased a ladder truck from the Elkins Park, VFD. They confirmed the business structure of the Elkins Park VFD explaining as they shopped for a ladder truck and visited the Elkins Park VFD to inspect and learn about the ladder they met with fire fighters and reviewed all the operational and equipment features of the unit but when it was time to make the deal "The Board" appeared on the horizon to discuss the finances and other legal processes. Truly the Elkins Park Volunteer Fire Company members express by their actions that "United We Stand!"



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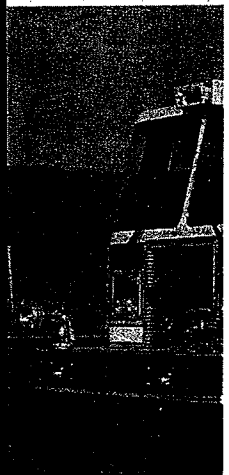
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