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NEWS

New Jersey

Flanders Firefighters Honor Chief Who Died In the Line Of Duty One Year Ago

By DOUG FENICHEL Correspondent

1st Responder Newspaper

Story Number 060112112

Disclaimer: This article is a direct street report from our correspondent and has not been edited by the 1st Responder newsroom.

FLANDERS, N.J. - A year to the day after Flanders Fire Company Assistant Chief Tom Shields died after responding to a call for a sick child, firefighters from his company and several others unveiled a plaque honoring his memory.

About 100 people, including Shields' family and firefighters from Flanders, Budd Lake, Woodland Park, Chester and Netcong, gathered in front of the Flanders Firehouse. After speeches, Lt. Pat Piserchio pulled purple-and-black bunting off a large plaque with a color photo of Shields that was mounted on the wall outside of the apparatus bays.

"Tom's watching over us," Bruce Gallagher, former captain of the EMS Division and now a firehouse chaplain, told the crowd. "He's our guardian angel. You can see from all the people who are here tonight the testament that was Tom. Everybody here was touched by Tom."

The group also heard from Mayor Robert Greenbaum and Piserchio. Mary Danielsen, president of Documented Legacy, presented a legacy book to Shields' family filled with interviews of firefighters, talking about Shields and his impact on their lives.

"How does a fire family heal when you're used to running out to the needs of others?" asked Ms. Danielsen during her presentation. "The thought came that we should preserve what was so special about Tom."

After the ceremony, Fire Chief Greg Widzemok said members of the fire company still missed Shields, but he was pleased that the company was moving on.

"It's great to see everyone here smiling, laughing and celebrating Tom's life," he said. "It's very different than this firehouse was exactly one year ago, when we were crying and holding on to each other, coping with his loss. This is the way Tom likes to see us."

"It's been a rough year and I just want to thank everyone for their support," said Nicole Shields,



By DOUG FENICHEL

Crowds gather for the unveiling at the firehouse. Sitting at the front of the crowd are Assistant Chief's parents.



By DOUG FENICHEL

Chaplain Bruce Gallagher talks to the crowd from the front of the firehouse



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Tom's wife and a lieutenant in the EMS Division. "Tom and I have regarded everyone in the firehouse as family, and that's how they've treated me."

Shields died May 31, 2011 from a heart attack hours after responding to a call for a child who became sick in 100-degree weather. The father of two children, Shields was 42. His was the first line-of-duty death for the Flanders Fire Company #1 and Rescue Squad.

The Flanders Fire Company and Rescue Squad No. 1 provides fire protection and emergency medical services to residents and businesses in Flanders and, through mutual aid, surrounding towns. It is made up of about 50 members, all of whom receive training in fire suppression, rescue, hazardous materials response, homeland security issues and emergency medical services. The fire company operates two fire engines, one tower truck, one heavy rescue, a brush-and-foam truck, two ambulances, a multiple-casualty unit and a mass decontamination unit.

In addition, the fire company offers public education services including lectures, demonstrations, training and a trailer that safely simulates a smoke-filled home. For information about membership, donations or public education, call (973) 584-7805 or click on <http://www.flanders-fire-rescue.org>.



By DOUG FENICHEL

**Mary Danielsen from Documented Legacy gives the legacy book to Brandon Shields, the assistant chief's son.**



By DOUG FENICHEL

**Fire Chief Greg Widzemok, left, and Lt. Pat Piserchio take the bunting off the plaque.**

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