

Answering The Call:  
The History Of The  
Port Washington Volunteer Fire Department

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Robert Johnston  
Flower Hill Hose Company No. 1

conducted in association with the  
Port Washington Public Library Local History Center

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pertaining to the subject being discussed

Q: ... with Robert Johnston. My name is Sally Olds. Today is October 6, 2004. Mr. Johnston is speaking from his home in Berne, New York. Can you please say your name?

Robert Johnston: Yes, my name is Bob Johnston.

Q: And which fire company are you a member of?

RJ: Flower Hill Hose Company.

Q: Okay. ... [INTERRUPTION] ... How old were you when you joined the Port Washington Fire Department?

RJ: Oh, about thirty, I guess.

Q: And had anything specific happened in your childhood that made you want to fight fires?

RJ: No, not really. I first became aware of fire fighting. My uncle was a Lieutenant for the New York City Fire Department, and when I went in the Navy, part of the training, I was sent to firefighting school, so I became aware of firefighting. And during the course of time in the service, we got involved with several fires, and I had that in the back of my mind. And I really didn't bother with it after that, until I got married and lived in Port Washington, and my brother-in-law was a member and most of my friends were members of the fire companies, and it gave me the idea, you know. They're all helping. People

helped me in my life, and I figured it was a good idea. So I joined the Fire Department and have never been sorry.

Q: Great. What was your brother-in-law's name?

RJ: George Croll.

RJ: He was a member of Flower Hill.

Q: He was--yes, Flower--so that's why you joined Flower Hill. When you first joined, who was Flower Hill's Captain?

RJ: Oh, let me see (laughs). I'm not sure.

Q: Okay. Do you remember who the Chief of the Department was?

RJ: Yeah, the Chief would be, I think, Eddie Piccardo.

Q: And what do you remember about your first days in the Department?

RJ: (Laughs) Well, we were sort of busy at that time, and I realized it takes time away from your family, from everything else. But it was good. You got a feeling, a good feeling. You know, you were doing something, you were helping people. And that was an important part, as far as I'm concerned. You always felt that, being in the Fire Department, I had a chance to give something back. And that, to me, was important.

Q: How--well, how did you build your confidence, that you could accomplish what you

wanted to do?

RJ: Well, I had had previous training in the Navy, so I knew I could do that. And it felt right. And the Navy, gave us a good firefighting school. Then, when I joined the Fire Department, we had ample training facilities in Bethpage to give us confidence in what we're doing. Gave you confidence to walk into a building that was on fire, was heavily smoking. You knew when you got through there that you could do that.

Q: How would you compare the training that you got in the Navy with the training that you got in Port Washington?

RJ: Well, it was altogether different. We were interested in fighting fires on ships and planes. Of course, in the Fire Department in Port Washington, it was basically structure fires--house fires. But I think the training in both instances was very good. It was different, but it was very good. Of course, the Navy training was more intense. It was a shorter period of time, but it was more intense. You know, everything was a time factor during the war. But the training in Port Washington was afforded, as I say, at the--training center at Bethpage was very good. Very hands-on. Very knowledgeable people were preparing you for this, and I think that's one of the reasons we had so few injuries in fighting fires. I think that was a big help.

Q: Was there anything that surprised you about the training?

RJ: No, not really. I was surprised at how efficient they were. I didn't, being a volunteer group, I didn't think they would be as efficient. But they certainly were. And I think being volunteers made a difference in your attitude. You know, you know you didn't

have to really do anything per se, versus being in the service where you were told to do something, you did it. But volunteering, you're doing it because you wanted to do it. And I think we had a good sense of responsibility, which is part of what you learned at the Academy--at the Fire Institute. So, I think all in all, we had good background and training. We're not, in these volunteer outfits, subjected to as many fires as the city firemen. I realize that. They probably have ten times what we have. But, we had a good group. We had a very well-trained group, and I think the people in Port could sleep well at night knowing we'd be there in nothing flat. We had a good response record, and I think that made us all proud, and, you know, that encourages you anyway.

Q: What do you mean a good response record?

RJ: When the whistle blows, it didn't take us any time to get there. You had to go some to make the first truck out of the firehouse--any of the firehouses. The first truck was--that whistle wasn't finished blowing when the truck was on the ramp, ready to roll. And that's good response time.

Q: What was your specific job assignment in Flower Hill?

RJ: Well, we were--we were a hose company. We were responsible for getting the hose off the truck, hooked up, and water to the scene. We were the hose people.

Q: And did you have a specific skill, you know, that you were assigned to do one particular thing ...

RJ: No.

Q: ... at a fire?

RJ: No. We all knew each other's jobs pretty well. Pardon me. I just knocked a picture of my wife's down.

Q: Oh, no! (Laughs)

RJ: Yeah, well ...

Q: Well, you say you knew each other's jobs. Well, then, so did you have different jobs to do?

RJ: No. It's--you know, you're pulling hose. You're taking the hose into the fire. You're working the nozzle. That's basically what you have to do. They had other companies, had other specific duties. You know, the ladder men were in. They laddered the building. They cut the holes in the roof to ventilate the fire. We all had--the different companies had different responses. One company had the response for heavy rescue. And protecting the property. You know, it's one thing that the house is on fire; you're going to go in and put the fire out. You have to have somebody to go in there and protect the rest of the belongings of the people. The furniture. There were guys in there. We'd get in with the hoses. They were right behind us with canvases to cover as much furniture as they could, to protect it from smoke and water. So we all had different jobs.

Q: And which company would do that? To protect the ...

RJ: Atlantic.

Q: ... furniture.

RJ: Atlantic. Atlantic Hook and Ladder. Protection Engine Company, they--we all had the engines. But that was their prime job. Get the water flowing. We had to get the hoses hooked up; they had to get the water flowing. And we all worked together. It made no difference. If I wasn't needed on a hose line, I'd go up a ladder with an ax. You know, you could switch jobs like that. You went where you were needed, is what it boils down to.

Q: But, so had you been trained to do those things also?

RJ: Oh, sure.

Q: To go up the ladder? To do all the different jobs?

RJ: Oh, yes. They would give you a pretty thorough training, both in classroom and in actual situations. We had the buildings at Bethpage that were set on fire, and you had the opportunity to go through your whole routine there. You know, learn how to put the equipment on. It's all--it's pretty thorough in scope.

Q: Going back to your Navy service, when and where did you serve?

RJ: In the Pacific.

Q: What years?

RJ: We went out in '44 until the end of the war.

Q: And did your military experiences affect your firefighting experiences in any other ways, besides the actual firefighting training?

RJ: Well, of course, the service instilled a sense of direction, obedience, responsibility. I don't think anywhere you can learn that other than in something like the service. And that is instilled upon you right from day one, and actually it stands you in good stead really forever. It teaches you decision-making. (Laughs) You get caught in some situations (laughs), I'm going to tell you. You want to be able to decide right then and there what you have to do and to do it. But ...

Q: Do you remember a specific instance where (laughs) you were put to the test with that?

RJ: (Laughs) Oh, yeah. There's any number of them. We were [inaudible?] and rescue, as I said. But part of the time was at the air base, and we ran the equipment. When a plane crashed, we went out in the fire trucks and took care of stuff. There's always a situation there. You know, you're dealing--a plane crash in a single-seater plane, when that hits, there's nothing much left. We learned quickly about quick response. A man's life is at stake there, and instantly. Because that thing--you can be walking up to that plane, and all of a sudden, it will just blow. So, everything depends on your quick thinking, your decisive moves, and to do the right thing. So, I think the service played a very important part in most of our older firefighters anyway, because most of us were in the service. And I think that stood us in good stead, and I like to think we've imparted some of that to the younger fellows that have never been subjected to anything but their mother and father saying "do this" and "do that," or a school teacher saying, "You have to do this."



We gave them, I think, the benefit of our experiences, at least that part was a good part to pass on, and I think we did. And I think we formed a closeness in the Fire Department that we had in the service. You know, there was nothing closer than fellows in the service, I don't think. And we developed that in the Port Washington Fire Department. We're a very close group.

Q: How did this closeness show up?

RJ: Well, in everything we did. We worked together. We were together. It was *our* fire. It wasn't, you know, Atlantic's problem or Protection's problem or Flower Hill's, but it was *our* problem. And we went right at it, and we hit the fire right away, as a unified group, and I think it was well done. I was very proud of the time that I served in that Department.

Q: So, would you say then that there was not any rivalry among the companies?

RJ: Oh, sure. There's always. But it was *friendly* rivalry. It was *friendly* rivalry. It was never, you know, never a jealousy type thing. It wasn't a "Let's get them" type thing. It was always just friendly.

Q: How did it show up?

RJ: Oh, in different events that we had. Or even at the fire. There has to be some degree of humor injected in any of these things. Something will happen to somebody. You know, something silly. And we would respond to it. I think (laughs)--I did ...

Q: Can you remember some of the funny things?

RJ: No, I didn't--I just think (laughs), well, everybody had the experiences. Somebody misses a rung on a ladder. Somebody drops a piece of equipment. I remember I was going up on the second floor. The had a fire on the second floor. The house was pretty well involved, and I was on this little half roof, and I was ready to go in. We thought somebody was in the building. And I was ready to go in that second floor window, and it was open. And they must have gotten in the front door, and they pushed the fire right under--I could hear it coming. It was like a freight train coming. It hit that window. I was about to get in the window. It blew me right over. Thank goodness, I ended up spread-eagle on the roof, so I didn't fly right off the roof. But, to me, when you look back at it, it was funny as heck. Of course, at the moment, it's not funny, but we all thought it was funny. There I am, laying flat on the roof, spread-eagle. You know, it's something that happened, but you have to turn whatever you can into a little bit of levity. You know, it's a serious enough business that you have to be able to put a little humor into it.

Q: So did the other firefighters tease you about that?

RJ: Oh, sure. You know, that's what happens. Things like that happen.

Q: What did they say?

RJ: Well, no, you know (laughs) "You can't depend on him for anything; he'll be laying down on the job," you know. At the time it was funny. You look back at it and say "That was kind of stupid." But you learn. I'll tell you, you learn. We were at the fire at the Plandome Country Club We're up on the ladder going up to the second floor. It was heavily engaged, heavily inflamed. And I went to open the window up there. And one of

the older firefighters said, "Don't touch that." I said, "Why?" He said, "Let me show you." And he reached to open it up, opened the window from the top. And the hot gas from the fire shot out that upper window, burned the paint right off the roof of the porch right above us. That was one valuable lesson that I learned. I wasn't thinking. I was just going to open the window. And that would have been the last time I opened a window. But old Teddy Minich--he was one of Flower Hill's ex-Presidents, he's the one that stopped me. And he told me, you know, how to watch that. And it was a good lesson. I never forgot that.

So, you know, we all learned from each other. And everybody was willing to teach one another. And we had some very good teachers. In addition to the school, we had many New York City firefighters and officers, and they were always giving you the benefit of their experience, which, as I said before, is much more vast than what we ever had. But it was a constant learning, constant passing around of information. And then, there's always the bull sessions later, you know, after a fire you'd sit around and talk. What you thought should have been done, or what you thought was handled pretty well. And you learned from that, too. So I think it was a constant learning experience.

Q: So, in those bull sessions, what kinds of things came up? Like, you know, where you were having second thoughts about what had been done?

RJ: Oh, well, you know, everybody always has the Monday morning quarterback idea. "Well, maybe I would have gone about attacking the fire a different way, and maybe I would have put some more men on this. I saw the way they went in, I would have carried more axes and pike poles in there to get at the ceilings, to pull the ceilings down, say, after the fire was above the ceiling." Things like that. And then the other guy that made the decision originally said, "Well, I didn't look at it that way. I thought the best way to

get in there was this way." So, you know, it's just bull sessions.

Q: Were you ever haunted by mistakes made at fires?

RJ: No, you can't. You can't look back, because you did what you thought you should do, and you did it, and you can't go back and say, well--I never could look back and say, "Well, maybe we should have done this," or "Maybe we should have done that," or "I feel bad that we didn't do that." I don't--I don't--I don't feel that at all. I feel that we all did our best with the information we had and with our--in consistency with our training and all. We did the best we could. Somebody always can look back and say, "Well, you shouldn't have done this." But most of the time, I think we all thought positive what we did. I don't care if we didn't save the building, or there was a loss of life. It was only because it was beyond us. We couldn't save it, or we couldn't save that life. We tried. God knows, we tried. But it sometimes happened. But you can't look back and you can't fault yourself for it. You have to always think you're doing the best for the situation. At least, I think that. And I think most of the guys do.

Q: Do you remember any particular fires that were especially memorable?

RJ: Oh, yeah. Well, you know, a good deal of nasty ones, the worst ones, I think we all would agree was -- there was a fire down on Shore Road, or Shore--not Shore Road, down on Bayside. And we lost three little kids, three little girls. That was tough. That was very tough.

Q: What happened?

RJ: Well, it was a nasty fire. There was a party, evidently, at the house. Evidently some

cigarette or something started a fire downstairs in the living room. And it took off, and by the time an alarm came through, the house was really going. And we were all--funny part is, all the fire companies were at their firehouses that night. So, the minute the first sign of the call, the first call came in, half of us were outside. I remember, we looked up. We could see orange in the sky. We knew it was bad. But when we got there, those three little kids were trapped over the garage, and they didn't have a chance. We worked on them in the yard there, but finally, one of the doctors came over and said, "You can stop now. There's nothing that you can do." And that is heartbreaking. Because most of us--at least I had two daughters, basically at that age. And, you know, that will go through your mind right away, you know, when something like that happens. But I think that's--that was really the thing that stood out in my mind, I guess, of all the fires.

Q: Do you remember what year that was?

RJ: No, not really. I know it was in the papers. It was in the *Port News* written up, but I really don't remember when it was. Hey, I have trouble remembering when my daughter's birthday is. I'm not (laughs)--I never really pay that much attention to the time.

Q: How did you happen to become President of Flower Hill?

RJ: I guess I was (laughs)--maybe I was lucky, or unlucky. No, seriously, it's an election thing like anything else. And it just--it worked out. My brother-in-law had been a President. Several of my good friends were all Presidents. And it just fell through. And administrative work and organization was my bag anyway. And it seemed to do very well. enjoyed it. I think we accomplished a few things, and ...

Q: But, what did you accomplish?

RJ: (Laughs) I lasted throughout the term!

Q: What were your responsibilities as President?

RJ: Just the general running of the organizational part of the fire. We had Captains and Chiefs that ran the Department and the individual company in all respect to firefighting. The President ran all the day-to-day operation. The bookkeeping stuff, the organization, that's what the President and Treasurer did.

Q: And you said that was your expertise. Had you been doing that in your paid work?

RJ: Yes, in business, and it always seemed my lot to fall into something that had to be organized or better organized or something. Even in the service, it just was that way. And it just seemed to fall in naturally. It's been all my business life, it worked that way. So, that was a good--that was a good thing. I enjoyed that. And then, of course, I think one of the best things that I was involved in was getting that Fire Medic company started.

Q: I want to hear about that. How did you happen to organize and form that?

RJ: Well, we were told in, I think, in '79 that something had to be done with the ambulance. Either we had to get rid of it, give it to the Police Department, or cut it loose altogether. It was taking too much of our firefighters' time. And it really was. They were running quite a bit. So the Department -- at a Department meeting said, "Come up with

something. We have to make a decision." So a committee was formed, and we studied it. We were all over the Island, checking on outfits that had ambulance groups, to find out what was best here, what worked for these people. And the one thing that we found out, our committee, if we're going to keep that ambulance--which was a shame not to -- we had it since 1926--we had to have women involved. And if you don't think that was a sell (laughs), I'm going to tell you, you'd think we were going to turn the Department over to them altogether and they were going to run everything just like they do at home. And that was the biggest sell we had.

Q: Why? What were the objections to involving women?

RJ: Women. This is an "all boys' club." And they just could not see women involved.

Q: What were they afraid of?

RJ: I don't know. What are--loss of control, loss of male domination or something. Whatever the heck it was, it was quite strong. And we did talk it up, and, as I said, it took us two years to get this thing off the ground. But we finally convinced them. We had a couple of very good women that were willing to stick their necks out and become part of this organization.

Q: Who were the first women?

RJ: Well, Kay Perro was one of them. She's a nurse from St. Francis, and she was involved in training EMTs [Emergency Medical Technicians] up there. And the basic core of the ambulance are the EMTs, and that's special training. And you can't pick anybody off the street

and say, you know, "Spend a couple of days over here and you'll be an expert." It was quite a course that they went through. And Kay helped get us into St. Francis in a class almost exclusively of our people. I think they were taking it up at St. Francis. Two or three people from different departments, and training them. And we went over with, I remember, Dr. [Eugene] Cavelli and Charles Rogers, and Kay. And we told them we had to have a group to start off with. We couldn't start--we had about six of them that were in the Fire Department that were running the ambulance, but we couldn't count on them forever. They were doing double duty, and that was tough.

So, they got us together up at St. Francis, and we got a class of about thirty in, which was unheard of at the time. But that started, and we filled in from there. And we got the Department to go along with it. Of course, we set up a new set of Constitution bylaws for them, and we finally got it approved, I think we went into official operation some time in June of '78 is when we started. Yeah, June 14th, if I remember--we officially started as the fourth company in Port Washington. It was Flower Hill, Protection, Atlantic, and, now, Fire Medic Company Number One. So, now we had four companies in town. And that was twenty-some years ago. So, that grew. Then it grew into a good group with a good response time.

We had a lot of help from a lot of people. We ended up, I would say--I don't know what; I haven't been there in ten years--I would say we had forty to fifty percent of the group was women, which is a far cry from nobody. From *no* women! And I'm going to tell you, if I needed help, I would just as soon have a couple of the ladies come down and help me as some of the guys. They have the--it seems almost a natural tendency to help, to be a little gentle. Maybe it's part of being a woman. I don't know. But that was a good thing. But from that, we became successful right away.

And we had inquiries from all over New York asking us how we did it, how we got it going, how we got it motivated. And it was interesting. Some of them, when we told them the main consideration was getting women involved, they flatly said, "Well, forget that. We're not



going to do that." So there was that prejudice all the while. And--but I think that's well past now. I don't think there's any kind of prejudice now. Now we have line firefighters. We have women that are firefighters, in themselves. So it worked out. And I thought that was a very good thing, and it just was a good thing they put us on that committee. I'll tell you that. Because I couldn't see giving up the ambulance. Not without a good fight. And, as I say, it took us about two years of checking , finger-pointing, putting arms around fellows, meeting guys all over the place. We met in bars and in homes, and up at the firehouses, trying to talk it up, trying to get a positive feedback on this. And finally, as I said, we finally did it.

Q: Well, when you first had the thought, why did you think that you had to get women involved?

RJ: Very simple. We couldn't get enough men. That was the problem. We couldn't get enough men. And if you're not going to get enough men, what's left? The women. So, I mean, to me, it was no strain. I figured they could do the job as well as we could. We're not asking them to go into a burning building. We're asking them to help somebody laying in the street that had a heart attack or was hit by a car or something. And, hey, mothers do that all the time with their kids. They get hurt. Who's the first one there? The mother. And we just knew that it could work out. And, as I said, We talked to Kay Perro who was a nurse up at St. Francis. And we, you know, asked her, "Well, what do you think? How would you feel about it?" She said, "I'll join."

Q: So she was your first member.

RJ: She was one of the first women. And, of course, her background and her ability as a teacher up there, it was invaluable. And it was so good. Because it gives you such a

good feeling. You're helping people that -- I don't care how much money they have, when you are in desperate need and somebody comes and helps you, money can't buy that. And that gives you--I think that gives you a terrific feeling to know you're doing something for somebody nobody else can do, no matter how much money they have, or how little. You're there. You're right there.

And I grant you, it could get messy at times. You know there are terrible accidents, and one doctor I know, told me, he said, "Thank God for you people up there on the ambulance." He said, "You get the people cleaned up and basically stabilized before you even bring them up to us in the hospital." And it does make a difference. Somebody covered with sand and blood, and a piece of something missing, you get them cleaned up to where they look like a human being, that's a big help. And it worked out. As I say, it worked out well. And we gave talks wherever we could, explaining about the workings of the ambulance and the coordination with the Fire Department. We always rolled the ambulance with the Fire Department. When there was any kind of an alarm, an ambulance rolls with them. Well, because it's a hazardous job, we always wanted the ambulance right there, in case one of our own got hurt, we would have the ambulance. So, that, too, worked into a mutual, beneficial thing. We all respected one another and worked out with one another. So it really--it paid off well.

Q: Did you become a fire medic, yourself?

RJ: Yes, I was the first President there.

Q: And you went out on the ambulance calls?

RJ: I helped. And, as I say, it—was always a great thing. Yes, and we took turns. We made

sleeping arrangements up at the headquarters, to where we carried crews overnight. You know, the hardest thing is getting people to the scene in a hurry, because, you know, a heart attack, something like that, that old brain of ours doesn't like to be deprived of oxygen for too long. Or a severe wound of some sort has to be taken care of right away. So, we had the overnight crews, and that helped. Because you get a call at four o'clock in the morning, if you have to wake somebody up, get them up to headquarters, you already lost three or four minutes. So, that worked out very well.

Q: Well, how do you work out the sleeping arrangements?

RJ: Well, when we first started, we had three sort of lounge chairs in the meeting room. And that's where we slept. But shortly thereafter, we put together three bedrooms downstairs. That way, if you had a mixed crew, you know, a lady could sleep in one, a fellow in another, and that worked out. You know, there were then the bedrooms, and we never had any problems like that.

Q: Did--did they sleep in their clothes?

RJ: Well, mostly, or in briefcase clothes. You know, they didn't sleep with jackets on or anything. But they basically had some clothes on, and it helped you to get out in a hurry. I had like a jumpsuit that I used to sleep in up there. And when I was there, I was driving the ambulance, so I got up right away. Got up, found out where the call was and what it was, got the engine started. By that time, everybody else was piling out of their rooms, and we were ready to go. And we had crews stand by at nasty times, like I took a couple of New Year's Eves. We weren't going out New Year's Eve, so I took some of them. And, you know, it's tough around Thanksgiving, Christmas, and any of the holidays. You

know, somebody has to be dedicated to do it, although we did try and keep things--you know, Christians would take Christmas holidays and stuff; Jewish gals and guys would take and keep their holidays and we would step in for them. And, you know, they would step in for us. So it really worked out. I don't think we really learned too much about prejudice from that group. I'll tell you the honest truth. If the whole world acted towards one another, I think, as we did, we'd all be better off.

Q: Had there been a change in the ethnic make-up of the Department?

RJ: Oh, sure. Well, the first change was the women. Then, we got the different religions. Then we got the Black and Puerto Rican or Hispanics in, which is good. The first Hispanic that came in--Carlos--he used to call himself, he says, "I'm the designated `Spic' in the lot." That was his words. He said, "I'm the designated `Spic.'" And very well liked. As I said, we all worked--we all worked together. I got news for you, Sally. If you need a helping hand, you're stupid if you look to see what color that hand is or if he's got a Bible or something in his hand. If you need help, that person's great that's got a hand out to help you. And I think that worked out pretty well. I think we did very well on that score.

Q: And you felt the community accepted help from whoever was there to give it.

RJ: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Most of the time, they weren't even in a position to even know. If somebody had a heart attack and is laying there, he's not even conscious. He doesn't even know who's helping him. But you'd be surprised, many times, they'd call up to thank who was on the crew that day, and that was gratifying in itself, you know, to know that some of the people called back and, say, you know, I was on the call, and -- I

met a girl the other day. It was down in Long Island Friday. Saturday. We had a death in the family. And I met a girl there. I knew the name, but I never met her. I was on the call when her father had a heart attack and died. And I remembered the call, and I told her. And she said, yes, they appreciated it. But, you know, you're not in there for somebody to pat you on the back. But, you get a little satisfaction that--that's all it is. It's just what you feel. And that's what I think was the best thing, as far as I'm concerned. Because if I knew I helped somebody, and they don't know me and I don't know them, but I went out of my way to help them and make sure they were all right, that gives you a good feeling. I don't think you can--I don't think you can beat a feeling like that. And I don't think we have as much of that today as we did twenty or thirty years ago.

Q: Why do you think that is?

RJ: I don't know. You know what I think basically? I think we're too busy. We have too many other things occupying our minds. We find that people have to have two jobs to survive. They haven't got time. They haven't got time for anything or anybody but their own little world. And I'm not--hey, I grew up at a time when money wasn't that--had much in use. We all made do. But we had time. We didn't have so many outside activities. If we had a party at the firehouse, it was well attended. Because there wasn't much else going on that you could go to. Now, there's too much--too much to occupy your mind. Too many things to do. Too much work to do. I think that's part of it. Because we certainly, I think, had a little different spirit about it. You know, I think we thought more of our neighbors and all. Now I'm not saying we don't like them. Not that. But we had time for them. We had time for anybody that needed it, you know. And that's an important thing. I don't think that's as much in evidence today as we'd like to see it.

Q: Okay, excuse me. I have to turn the tape over. ... [END OF SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ... All right, so now it's working. So, can we go back (laughs)--when the men resisted having women in the Department, what did they say and how did you deal with that?

RJ: The first thing is they just said, "We're not going to have them. We don't want them. They're not going to run our fire department." And that was the general tone. They didn't have any specific argument against any woman. It was women in general. And, as I said, we went all over. Dennis Dermody and I, we were really the team that went out and visited all these other places and got their ideas.

We went to non-fire department ambulance companies, and they had men and women. And we found out what the problems they were encountering. And when we did, we found out they're not having really any serious problems--men versus women. They were having trouble getting money, collecting money. That's where the major problems were. It wasn't men-versus-women problems. So we went after it on that end. That they would be an asset, and if we didn't have them we couldn't do it. It was that simple. We were having regular firemen that were trained filling in, running the ambulance and doing their regular firefighting duties--going to school, and it was just wearing them out. And that wasn't fair to them.

And we said, "We have to do something different. We want to keep the ambulance. It's associated with the Fire Department. It has a good name with the Fire Department. We don't want to disband it. We don't want to turn it over to the Police Department," because they, in turn, would end up with the same kind of problems. And we just didn't want to let it go and let some private group take it over. "And, in order to do that, you guys have to make some concessions. You have to realize what we're trying to do." And eventually, as I said, when it came to the final meeting, nobody objected. Nobody got up and said, "Well, I still don't want them." And that was a big thing that we

could sell them all on that. And, as I say, I would say that took up most of our time. Going around and selling the idea to the other firemen.

Q: And going ...

RJ: It was all the companies. It wasn't any one company. They were all the same. It was a general feeling. And we went outside of Port Washington to other fire departments that were having trouble and wanted to form a company like ours. And they all said the same thing, that women are the problem. And, you know, you look back now, there were no problems. And half of them wasted all that time fighting something that wasn't there. They were fighting an idea, and it wasn't the right idea. So, it finally came to pass, and I think they did a good job.

Q: And once the women did join the Fire Medic Company, were there any problems with the men?

RJ: No. No, and, you know, I was very active at the time and I would be aware of everything. Of course, being older than all of these kids, if there was any kind of a problem, they would get me aside and talk to me and, you know, "I'm having a problem with this," "I'm having a problem with that." And none of them had a problem of being rejected, being set aside, being segregated. None of them had a problem working with the other fire medics--with the males. I had a few where a couple of the males would come to me: "I can't work with that guy. I just can't get along with him." I had several of them. But not men versus women. And most of the crews--I would say ninety percent of them--were mixed. There were very few that were all male or all female. But, no, they all came together. They all came together very well.

Q: And when there was a problem like that--if somebody said, you know, "I'm isolated; nobody will work with me"--how did you deal with that?

RJ: I would take them on *my* crew. I had this one fellow, nobody wanted to work with him. He was young, inexperienced. And, you know, there are some guys, they can be twenty years old and they're just going on sixteen. And this fellow was like that. And he was a nice enough guy. And nobody--they flat-out refused to go with him. So, I put him on my crew. And, you know, we treated him with respect. We didn't kid him all the time if he made a mistake. He's going to make mistakes. You're really new at this. We just explained to him, "Well, no, you don't do this; you do that instead" And it worked out. And, matter of fact, that kid--I think it was his father had a heart attack one day, and the crew--I don't know who was on the crew--but they came up and they saved him, and that made a difference with the boy, too. He really came along fine. And all it took is just somebody to say, "Well, look. You're not a bad guy. Why don't you come and work with me. We'll see what kind of problems there are."

All you had to do is be a little compromiser here and there, you know. I would say one of the things about being president of any of these organizations was being able to settle problems. Compromise. Get them together. Get them to see that there's two sides to everything. We did have that. And--but most of the time, we got over it. And it made for a better group all the way around. And eventually, when this kid got off my squad, I brought him over to the fellow that wouldn't stand, to begin with, and he took him back in the squad. So I knew that worked out all right. But it all was for the benefit of the community. The community wouldn't be interested in us fighting amongst ourselves. They're interested in getting the right team to their problem right away. That's what they're interested in. And I think we did a good job on that. We--we did--I know



we got some substantial donations in the Fire Medics before we were part of the contract group. You know, we contract for service, just like the Fire Department does. We contract with the Town of North Hempstead. And we got a couple of very substantial donations.

Q: What kind of donations?

RJ: Oh, big ones. We got one for twenty-five thousand dollars. It was fifteen. And I personally knew the fellow. And he said, "Bob, I don't detect that real enthusiasm I thought I would get." He said, "You know, that's a lot of money." And I said, "I know it." He said, "You guys looked rag-tag. Everybody's in nice uniforms, and you guys are there in whatever you have." And I said, "That's because we don't have it. We haven't--" "Well," he said, "That fifteen is for uniforms. Everybody should have a uniform." So I thanked him, and he said, "All right. What would you do different? I know you're not overly enthusiastic about this." I said, "It's fine. It's a wonderful gesture. But we need equipment on the ambulance that, to me, is more important than how we look walking down Main Street. Everybody in town knows us. We don't have to put a fancy uniform on." "Well," he said, "what do you want?" I said, "Well, we need a defibrillator on the ambulance." He said, "How much is this stuff going to cost." I said, "It's going to cost at least ten grand." He said, "You write me a letter. Tell me what you need." And he said, "I'll get you the money." And he did. He gave us twenty-five thousand dollars.

Q: Was this a private person?

RJ: Yes. Well, it was through his company.

Q: Yeah.

RJ: But it was--it was private.

Q: Could you give me his name?

RJ: No, I couldn't do that.

Q: Did he give it anonymously?

RJ: Well, yes. He gave it to Dennis and I. And we accepted that, and we couldn't do anything for him. I think we took him to dinner. That was about it. But he was a good person. He was a good community-minded citizen. And I thought it was fabulous. And, as I said to him, "You know, I never meant to give you the impression that I didn't appreciate the offer of fifteen thousand dollars. I knew that's what it would take to equip everybody. But we needed ambulance equipment so much more." He said, "I appreciate that." He said, "That's why you got it." And I really thought that was a great thing. I was so proud of being in town with people like that. Made you feel good. It made me feel good just to be a member. That's important. I'll tell you that. And it still does to this day. I think it's one of the finest groups of people that I could run across.

Q: Well, what are you proudest of in your firefighting career?

RJ: Oh--well, I'm very proud of the fact that we got that ambulance going. That, to me, was-- I thought that was one of the biggest things. I know I'm just proud of the fact that whenever that whistle blew, if I was in town--no matter what I was doing or who was at my house--Thanksgiving dinner, we all rolled out. I had three firemen were having Thanksgiving dinner with us (laughs). That alarm went off, and we all left. There was

the turkey and all the fixings. We left. Two hours later, we came back. It was stuff like that that you can't beat. That's what I was proudest of--the guys and the girls. They made me very proud.

You know, it was like being in the service. Those guys, they were like brothers. They were closer than brothers. And this was the same sort of a thing. These fellows would do anything for you, to help, because they are of that nature. They're willing to help. They'll help anybody, and especially one of us, they would be more than willing to do anything. And it was really--really very nice. I know we had a group of them, we got together, we went up hunting in Vermont--twenty of us at a time would go into Vermont and go hunting for a week or two. All friendly people. I know when my mother died, we were all at the firehouse at a dinner party. Martha Knowles and her troupe of people--you know, the embalmers and all those. Call came down to the firehouse that my mother died. The whole crew packed up and went up to take care of it. And it was, you know, it wasn't, well, that somebody on duty, someone would take care of it. It was personal.

Q: How did all of this impact your family?

RJ: Well (laughs), that it does. I will agree. And it takes time. And, of course, once you're in and you're an officer of any kind in the Department or the company, then you get called on to go out of town. That's because I was on an advisory committee for the Nassau County regarding fire ambulances. And I found that I was spending a lot of time out of town, in the evening, and my one daughter said to me, "You know, Dad, we don't get to see you too much anymore." And I said to my wife, "I've been lax, haven't I?" And she said, "Yeah, I think so." —So that was it. I cut all the extra committee stuff off and just tended to my specific duties in town. It does take time. Like anything else, if you're on a committee and that you believe in, you're going to have to work at it. These

aren't rubber-stamp things. You've got to be there. You have to give input. You can't just sit back and agree with everybody; then, they don't need you. And if you're going to have to be there, it's going to take time. So, that's one area where it--as far as missing dinners and everything, hey, my wife had a Salton tray that whatever I missed went on that tray and it stayed warm. (Laughs) Might be a couple hours later, but it was there. But other than that comment from my daughter, I really didn't--I never got any flack from my wife on it. She was--well, her brother was in with me. So, you know (laughs), what was she going to say? But, no, I appreciated the support from the family.

Q: How many children do you have?

RJ: I have two daughters. They--they both work in Manhattan.

Q: Would you want them to be firefighters or fire medics?

RJ: Oh, it'd be all right if they were out of town. They can't do it and work in Manhattan. They're in Manhattan. They catch the six o'clock train in the morning, and they don't get back till seven-thirty, eight o'clock at night. You can't be a part of anything with time like that. They're women. They've got their getting ready to do to go to work, you know--their clothes, their, I guess, their nails, their hair, and whatever the heck else is involved working in Manhattan. So, I would think, up here--up in Berne--I would think, sure, that's fine. Because I think anybody that can help anybody should help them.

Q: How did you happen to move away from Port Washington?

RJ: Well, basically, I spent quite a few years up in the country on a farm up here--my grandmother's. And I always liked it. And when my wife died and, oh, I remarried, and

this girl was a clamdigger from Port Washington going--I looked in the cemetery up there. They--it seems they were here forever. And we came up to visit friends. And we saw a house up here--at least I saw it. I saw it in the general store. It had all sorts of color pictures inside and out. I said, "Boy, that looks like something Joan would want." So I said, "Go down in the store and take a look at that." And she came; she looked at it, and she said, "I love it." We hunted up the real estate, and that day, we bought the place up here. "But it's only going to be a get-away. We'll go up on weekends." Well, the weekends stretched to three days, then to four days. And finally I said to her, "Look, I'm going to close my business." She worked for Dr. [Kenneth] Ewing in town. And I said, "You'd just better tell Ewing we're gone." And we came up. And that was twelve years ago. And you couldn't get me back. You could give me my old house back for free. I wouldn't come back.

Q: Now, talking about your business, how did you integrate your work with the Fire Department with running a business. What kind of business was it?

RJ: Construction. Construction. I was a construction consultant. It was no problem for me. If I had to go, I could go. I was the boss. Who's going to tell the boss he can't go? And that wasn't a problem. And it worked out. You know, meetings in the evening were no problem, and when I was in town, if the alarm went off, I was there. That really didn't pose a problem. I know it poses a problem for some people. But, if you work for the school or the post office or some of the local businesses, it's--the alarm goes off, they work it out with the guys that they can go. I mean, because you never know when it's going to be--the alarm is going to be for you. So, they all were very good that way.

Q: What was the most moving rescue you ever made? Or one of them?

RJ: Well, one of them. I know, next-door neighbor, we had a fire next-door. The woman was upstairs. She had a little girl upstairs. And I couldn't get upstairs. I went upstairs, and I thought the house was laid out exactly as mine. I ran to the top of the stairs. I made a turn, and I slammed into a closet and almost knocked myself goofy. I got back down the stairs, and I remember old Montreville Smith, the policeman, he was down there. He said, "What's the matter?" I said, "I can't get in there. There's a child up there." So he went up. In the meantime, I went around back where there was a half a roof, you know, like eight feet high. And he came out the window there and he had the child, and he handed the little kid down. And, you know, that was pretty good. That made you feel good. I know I couldn't have got back the second time. Once you hit that smoke, then you become disoriented. Smoke will knock you for a loop. You don't even know where you are. But that was a good feeling. It's a good thing.

And any time--you know, as I said, sometimes you lose the people. We lost a twenty-year-old girl New Year's Eve. And she hit a pole up by police headquarters. And, of course, we were right across the street, and we were there in nothing. And we got the girl in the ambulance, and she said, "You know, I'm getting so cold." Well, she was losing a lot of blood, and you couldn't see it. She was bleeding internally. So we put the Mast suit on her. That's a pressurized suit. You put that on and blow it up like a football, and it squeezes the lower abdomen, extremities, and keeps the blood up. So, now, we're right down the street from St. Francis, and we called up there and we told them we had a girl going into shock. Young girl. Obviously bleeding heavily and internally, to get somebody up there--you know, one of the surgeons on call. And we got her up there. And one of the guys on the ambulance was taken into the operating room with this girl, with this suit on, because he had to relieve the pressure in it as the surgeon was working around in there. It just so happened the surgeon was there, we were there. Everything was fast. The girl died. It just--it was heartbreaking. And yet, you know, it was a young girl. We were talking to her in the ambulance, and, you know, trying to reassure her that

we're going to be at the hospital in a minute. And it just didn't do any good. And yet we did everything we could, everything by the book. You would say it was a perfect rescue. But they died, you know. That kind of stuff is--that's heartbreaking. But, you know, we tried.

Q: Sure.

RJ: As I say, you look back. Would you do anything different? There was nothing different to do. Would you do anything different? I'd have stopped the car before it hit the pole. But that, and the next hardest thing is talking to the parents.

Q: Did you have to do that?

RJ: I did. They wouldn't--everybody was busy, and I got the phone number and all and spoke to them. And ...

Q: How do you break it to parents?

RJ: Well, it's not easy. You can't beat around the bush too much. I just told them. I said, "There's been a very bad accident." I said, "Your daughter was involved in this." Well, they wanted to know how she was doing. I said, "Well, she's up in the operating room right now. And as soon as we know anything, we'll call you back." And when it was over, I had the surgeon call them, because he was there. He knew, you know. But her insides were all torn up. You know this was before seat belts and anything, and it's not a pleasant thing. That's for damn sure. But, as I said, we knew we tried everything. And it just wasn't to be. And you can't beat yourself up over these. If you do that, you're not worth anything in the ambulance or the firefighting service. You can't let it become personal.

Q: Have you ever had dreams, though, about fires or emergencies?

RJ: Oh, yeah, I've had a couple of--from the service, I've had a couple of flashbacks. I know my wife woke me up a couple of times, and I was sweating bullets! Just comes back so vivid that--unbelievable. But, thank goodness, they fade away, too. You know, that's sixty years ago. That starts, thank goodness, to fade a little. I know I try to remember even some of the names from the crew, and I forget (laughs) Maybe that's one of the good things about old age is you forget some things. So, but, all in all, I think I've had a good life and I think the Fire Department played a big part in it. And the service. They both played a part in my contentment in later life. I will tell you that. I am not sorry about anything. I don't regret anything. And I tell my daughters--I said, "If something happens to me, if it happens to me tomorrow, I've been happy. I have no regrets. And I don't want you girls to have any regrets. I went through, and everything is fine." And now, I feel that way. I really do. And maybe it's just old age catching up. I don't know. But it was all--all-in-all--all I can tell you, Sally, it was a good life.

Q: Did you ever do anything for good luck? Carry anything or ...

RJ: Well, I had a little piece of jade from a--it's like a pendant, I guess. A small piece of jade. My grandmother gave it to me. And the funny part is I carry that all during the War. My daughter has it now. But not that I would say--like I gave my daughter an Irish rubbing stone, a worry stone, you know. You walk around with it in your pocket. If you're worried or depressed or anything, just take and rub that. Takes the worry away (laughs). And she still carries it. But that's all. I had no superstitions or anything that worried me. I--and like everybody else, there were times when we were scared, and that's--you know,



everybody else was. It wasn't just me. It was everybody. I'd have to ...

Q: Well, how did you get over that instinctive human fear of fire?

RJ: Well, I don't think you ever, if you have any brains, you don't get over it. You respect it. And if you're not doubly alert, you can get stung. There's no question about it. I mean, when you get in a fire that's too hot, you can singe your ears. In the Navy, we had a fire on a ship. And we were down--down in the engine room. And we were down there, and somebody accidentally killed the water. Well, the flame--there's all the fuel oil in there--and the flame immediately flew up, burned the hair out of my nose, burned my eyebrows off (laughs). It moved! I'm going to tell you we wasted no time getting out. It was a mistake. Somebody made a mistake. Somebody--we called for more water, and it translated up two decks above, a guy said "Kill the water." And it was a quarter-turn valve. That's one of those things like you--if your arm and your fist is up in the air and they say "Kill it," you straighten your arm, that's the way the valve shuts off. That fast. So, that was a wake-up (laughs).

Q: Were you ever injured in the Fire Department?

RJ: No. Nope, I was ...

Q: Did you suffer from ...

RJ: ... fortunate.

Q: ... did you ever suffer from smoke headaches?

RJ: No. No. I was pretty lucky that way. And then, of course, we got the breathers in, you know, the Scott packs, and that took care of the smoke aspect of it. You know, you've got these oxygen bottles strapped to your back, and that gives you a chance to breathe. I'll admit before we had those, there were times when it got a little hairy in there. You wished you hadn't been (laughs) in there with the smoke. But, the same with flashbacks. They happen, but, you know, experience gives you the ability to think right away and take care of it. And that's, I think, what--that's what all that training was about. You know, being able to--being able to react, I guess, is the biggest thing that I can think of. Being able to react. You know, if you see a problem, be able to instantly react to it. My wife, I had to write her a note if I wanted her to react to something (laughs). It'd take-- you know, some people do it, some people don't. And I think most of us were fortunate in there that we could

Q: Well, what makes a good firefighter?

RJ: Well, dedication, for one thing. Dedication to the idea of being a volunteer firefighter. Or any kind of a firefighter. Paid city firefighter. They're not just in it for the money. There's more to it. I don't care, any time you put your life on the line with a hot fire, it's more than "I'm going to get paid five hundred dollars at the end of the week." It's more than that. It's dedication, and you have to have it. I think you have to have it. You have to have a willingness to do. And, in the case of volunteers, you have to have a willingness to help. That was the biggest motivator for me, I thin, is help. I still go on the Meals On Wheels up here. I deliver Meals On Wheels. I can't ride the fire truck anymore, but I can deliver Meals On Wheels, and that's a good thing.

Q: Do you drive your own car for that?

RJ: Yes. It takes about two hours, and you get to meet some people. Some people have nobody else. It's sad, but they have nobody. Or they have families that don't bother with them. And that's a hard thing. And some of them, just to come there and bring the meal, they're not worried about the meal. You know what it is? "Somebody came in the door, and I can talk to them for a little bit." And they think that's the greatest, that somebody will stop and talk to them. I could probably finish the whole trip in an hour if I didn't have to stop and talk to people. But they look forward to it. You know, when you're like that, you have nobody else to talk to, and you're there day after day, you know, these are elderly people. And they're not running around. And they really have no real interest. Oh, there's television, stuff like that. But it's different. Person-person contact is very important. It is to them. And, you know, it's interesting, because they all have stories to tell. So, it works out very well. Even my wife goes with me on her days off. She goes and makes the rounds with me. And it's--I actually--I bake bread for a couple of them on the route. I make homemade bread.

Q: What kind do you make?

RJ: Well--well, basically, I make raisin bread, because I like raisins. But it's what my grandmother taught me when I was a kid. I've made bread ever since.

Q: Did you ever make it for the Fire Department?

RJ: Oh, sure. I've made it for Rotary get-togethers or something, or, you know, something like a silent auction or something, I'd make some loaves of bread and bring it down, and

they would take it. But it's something you don't get today. Who makes homemade bread? I mean, from scratch. I don't even use a bread machine. And it takes about three hours to fully do it. So, you gotta like to do it.

Q: How important were the social aspects of being in the Fire Department?

RJ: Well, it was part of it. That was--it was a good part. We had our yearly dinner, and we would have a picnic in July or so, and then we'd have the Memorial Day parade and we would have a breakfast at the firehouse. And, you know, we'd cook a breakfast and go to the memorial service, and then after that we would invite the families--the kids and all--and then we'd take them down to the Manorhaven Park. In those days, we used to take them for a ride on the fire truck. I don't know if they're allowed to do that anymore. And, you know, we had basketball and pitching horseshoes and stuff. It was a pleasant, low-key way of doing things. It was family. You know, there were no drunks And it was comfortable. It was very nice.

Q: And did some of the firefighters become your friends?

RJ: Oh, sure. And most of them are still--All three companies are good friends. And I still am in touch with some of them. And, as I say, whenever I go down, I try to stop over and see them. And, you know, go over old times. And well, some of them are good friends. And we have--my step-son is in Atlantics, and he's pretty active down there.

Q: What's his name?

RJ: Vincent Matero—M-A-T-E-R-O. And he's active down there. And he's got two girls, and he knows what it is to spend time with the kids, with the Department, with his job.

You now, I know from him that it's not easy. You know, taxes have gone up so much in town, that you've got to be working all the time. But, in all--in all of my seventy years, it's treated me well.

Q: How would you like to be remembered?

RJ: Well, that I was always there. That I did my job. And you never had to ask me twice. That--that's for sure. I cared for the people. I cared for the town, I cared for the Fire Department and still do. And that's—that's it. I just--I--as far as I'm concerned, I was always there. If you needed me, I was there.

Q: What do you think the value of this oral history project is?

RJ: Well, hopefully, it will give some of the people that aren't aware--whether they belong, whether they're new, young members in the Fire Department or people in town--it gives them a little idea of what went on, what we tried to do for them. And, you know, there's no money involved, no pay involved or anything. And that we did think of the town. We did try and do our part in being a good citizen in town.

Q: Well, do you think the people in town are aware of this? Do you think they appreciate what the Fire Department does?

RJ: Well, I don't think a good deal of them, because most of them are from out of town or in theCity. Well, I could give you one little instance. We went up to a fire in Flower Hill one day, and actually it ended up being nothing, which was fine with us. Like a false alarm. But the fellow come out, and he said, "How much do you guys charge for a fire?"

Do you charge by the room or what?" (Laughs) He was from Manhattan. We tried to explain to him, "You call us; we'll come. There's no charge. You don't have to pay for anything." He couldn't believe it. He thought that was really something. We were hysterical. We thought it was hot stuff. Here this guy wanted to know how much we charge. Did we charge by the room or what (laughs)? I thought that was--that was precious. But I think a lot of people aren't aware. I think people are too busy with themselves and their lives to become aware. And that's one of the sad things. At least up in the country here, you know what's going on. You really do. You know what your neighbors are doing to help you, or, you know, what they're trying to do for you. It's really--it's like it was in Port, I guess, fifty years ago. You know, when everybody--my wife used to ride horseback down Main Street, you know. It's different. It's changed. Have you been in Port long?

Q: Thirty-six years.

RJ: Well, that's long enough. You probably saw some of the change. I remember ...

Q: Sure.

RJ: ... I used to know everybody in town. Being in the Fire Department and especially on the ambulance, we touched almost everybody in town, either directly in a family or through a relative. You know, we gave a hand to everybody. I go down the street now, I would say ninety percent of the people, I don't know. Of course, I've been away for a while. But ...

Q: Is there anything else that you think we should talk about that we haven't covered?

RJ: No, I just think the people through the years have been good to us.

Q: Oh, one thing--one thing I did want to ask. You talked about the importance of humor. Do you remember any like practical jokes that you would play on one another, or some of the funny moments in the Department?

RJ: No, I remember one day we were at a fire. We were picking up--no, it wasn't just so-- wasn't funny to me at the time. And we were packing the hose. That's one of the nastiest jobs, after the fire, to pick that wet, dirty hose up, fold it up, and get it back in your truck. And I was up in the truck bed loading this hose, and one of the young officers hollers at a couple of guys. He said, "Some of you guys get up there and relieve Johnston. We can't have an old man up there packing hose." So, I said to myself, that's a fine note. "Get up there and help that old man!"

Q: How old were you?

RJ: Probably forty (laughs). But I certainly didn't think I was an old man then. But, I got news for you, Sally, I don't think I'm an old man now, either. I can't go by numbers. They don't matter. All I know is I got two daughters that are forty-five and forty-six or - seven, something like that. So, I would think back and think, yeah, I was a young man once. At one time. But ...

Q: Well, you've accomplished a lot ...

RJ: Well ...

Q: ... in your life here, and I want to thank you very much for a great interview.

RJ: Well, I just--as long as the Fire Department comes across in a positive light, because there's too many people too many times trying to knock something that's successful, knock it down. And that really isn't fair, because these people do for other people in town. Sometimes I hear some of these critics, and I feel like saying, "When was the last time you gave, you did something like that?"

Q: What do they--what do they criticize? Critics.

RJ: Anything in general. "There's too much partying." "They spend too much money." We're a non-profit thing. We don't have any spare money. We have some money put aside for a new truck, but that's good business. You have to--these things cost anywhere from two hundred to six hundred thousand dollars.

Q: Yeah, let me just go back to what you were saying about packing the hose. What does that involve? What's the actual work involved?

RJ: We might lay out a mile and a half of hose through the street, hydrant to hydrant, or down to the bay. All of it goes through those dirty streets. They're wet; they're dirty. In the wintertime, they're partially frozen. But, you know, we don't wave a magic wand and they get back in the truck nice and neat. They have to be picked up, drained of water, picked up, put in the truck, brought back to the firehouse, put in hose dryers so they'll be ready for the next time. That's a nasty job. It really is. And same with the ladder guys. They're going to clean their ladders down. You know, once the fire is out and everything is good, every bit of equipment has to be made ready for the next time.



Q: So, how many people will work on this job of packing the hose?

RJ: Oh, anywhere--you could have six or eight fellows on it. You know, there's plenty for everybody to do. So, guys are busy. You have to--the Scott Air Pack has to be taken down and recharged. You've got to take them down to the charging bin where they put the new oxygen in them. There's a lot to clean up. And then, when you get the fire trucks back in the barn, everything is practically put away, then you wash the trucks and clean them so they're clean and ready for the next go-around. So, you know, there's a lot more to it than just spending time at the fire. It's like a housewife that prepares a nice big Thanksgiving dinner. And then everybody goes, and she's stuck with all the dishes and everything. Well, that's the way it is after a fire. We're stuck with the clean-up. Same with the ambulance. Once that ambulance goes out and has been used, everything has to be cleaned, sterilized, and put back, and replenished and put in good shape. You know, we can spend two hours on an ambulance run. The whole ambulance run probably only takes twenty minutes. Or, if you have to transport to another hospital, that can add time. But everything has to come back so the ambulance has to be cleaned out and sterilized. You can't--you can't leave any residue in the ambulance. And any equipment used has to be replenished. So, all this takes time. You know, it's not like a glory job where, boy! we went to the fire, we squirt a lot of water around, we madeholes ... [END OF RECORDING] ...