

In Sympathy

The staff at *The Port Washington News* wishes to extend our sympathy to the family of Robert Dayton, as well as all the volunteer firemen who fought Saturday's blaze and share the grief. Our thoughts and prayers are with them.

Port Washington NEWS

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Main Street Blaze Ends In Tragedy



SMOKE POURS out of the building at 165 Main Street, known as "The Cat Lady Antiques" at 7:30 in the morning when the fire first began.



FIREMAN SCOTT WOOD gasps for air on the fire escape of a second floor apartment where he and Lieutenant Robert Dayton were searching for occupants.

By Andrea Martone

Tragedy struck our town during the early Saturday morning hours on November 26 when a fire raged in the rear of the "Cat Lady," an antique store on Main Street, claiming the life of a fireman who was searching for occupants in the apartments above. Robert Dayton, 28 years old and lifetime resident of Port Washington, had been a lieutenant with the Flower Hill Hose Company on Haven Avenue for the past ten years. He was also a New York City fireman, and was known by his colleagues as "a true gentleman, family man and dedicated firefighter." That dedication would have led to his appointment as Captain of his company on January 2, had the fire not cut short his life.

At 7:29 a.m., three trucks from the Port Washington fire companies responded to the alarm at 165 Main St. A second and third alarm brought a total of 143 volunteers to the scene, combatting a blaze that was in control within a half an hour. That section of Main Street was closed to traffic until 3 p.m. when firemen were certain there was no further danger, and the building was secured. The origin of the fire was at the rear of the building where fireman found flammable solutions used in antiquing. The cause of the fire is still undetermined, pending further investigation by the Nassau County Fire Marshal's office, Arson Squad and 6th Squad detectives, according to Fire Marshal Joe Fico, who was at the scene from the beginning. When asked why this fire was so challenging, Mr. Fico replied, "For extinguishment, the fact that the air conditioning system in the ceiling fell smack in the middle of the store, coupled with the fact that the store was so congested with furniture, made it a difficult approach. Lines had to be stretched around the building to the rear for primary extinguishment. The area where Lieutenant Dayton fell was directly over the hottest point in the fire, making it extremely difficult in rescue efforts."

Leading a rescue search of four men throughout the smoky second floor apartments, Lieutenant Dayton had broken off with one of his colleagues, 23-year-old Scott Wood, to search one of the four apartments for residents who might not have been evacuated. It was in one of those apartments that his alarm went off, warning of low oxygen supply. According to the fire marshal, Lieutenant Dayton fell unconscious before a window could be found, and a bookshelf fell on top of him. Scott Wood was able to grope for a window, cutting his wrists while smashing the glass. He summoned the help of three other firemen who came to their rescue. They performed and maintained life-saving techniques on Lieutenant Dayton throughout the ordeal until they reached St. Francis hospital. After life-saving techniques proved unsuccessful, Lieutenant Dayton was pronounced dead at St. Francis at 10:22 a.m.

In all, 16 men were treated for smoke inhalation and various other injuries. The mood at the firehouses has been solemn, with a Nassau County trauma unit helping the volunteers to cope with their loss. Purple bunting hangs off the windows at the Flower Hill Hose Company in memory of their brave comrade.

Robert Dayton leaves behind a wife, Pamela, and eleven-month old daughter, Kaitlin. His parents reside in town. The family has requested that in lieu of flowers, contributions be made to the Fireman's Burn Center at Bellevue Hospital.

Port Mourns a Hometown Hero

By Mike Barry

Robert Dayton's death is the type of tragedy that makes it apparent that, despite many changes in recent years, Port Washington is still a small town.

As word of Mr. Dayton's passing spread through Port on Saturday, many recalled having gone to school with him or knowing his wife and other members of the Dayton family. Merchants and concerned citizens flooded the phone lines of Flower Hill Hose Company Number One to see if there was anything they could do to help. And a Robert H. Dayton Memorial Fund was quickly established by the Port Washington Fire Department's five companies.

"The 350 members of this department are making a commitment to Pam and her family for the rest of their lives," said Geoffrey Cole, Captain of the Flower Hill Hose Company and a close friend of Mr. Dayton. One of the first

things some department members are going to do, he said, is to help finish the remodeling job that Mr. Dayton, an accomplished carpenter, had begun on his North Bayles Avenue home. "He moved there because he wanted to be near the firehouse," Mr. Cole said. The firehouse is located at 12 Haven Avenue, near the Port Washington railroad station.

The picture that emerges of Mr. Dayton, following talks with his fellow firefighters, is that of a person who successfully combined his love of firefighting with community service.

His commitment to Port Washington didn't stop when he became a professional firefighter in New York City three years ago. Mr. Dayton was always among the Top 10 in his company when it came to attendance at fires, Captain Cole said, even though he was a full-time firefighter at Engine 287 in

Elmhurst, Queens, and worked numerous jobs as a carpenter. His wife, the former Pamela Chirel, is a former St. Francis Hospital nurse and a podiatry student scheduled to graduate in May, 1989. Their daughter, Kaitlin, is 11 months old. Mrs. Dayton's father, Hiram Chirel, is a podiatrist with offices on Main Street in Port Washington.

Mr. Dayton, who was born on January 7, 1960 in Hollis, Queens, joined the Flower Hill Hose Company as a volunteer in 1978, the same year that he graduated from Paul D. Schreiber High School. He and his wife had attended a 10th anniversary reunion of his high school class on the night before he died.

Mr. Dayton held the title of First Lieutenant and was going to become Captain of the Flower Hill Hose Company in January. During his ten years of service to the community's volunteer fire department, he was active in the Road Runners' drill team and served

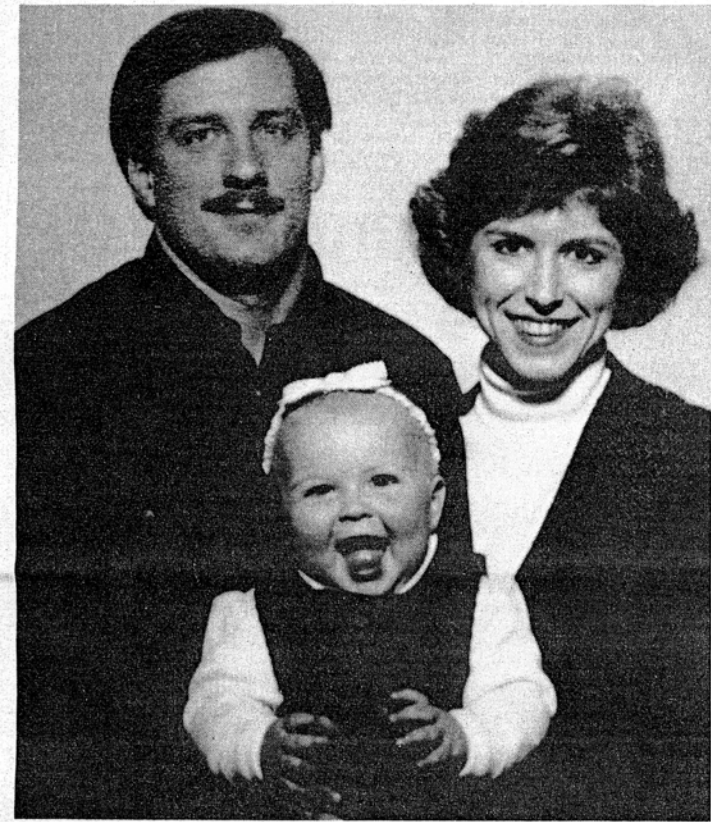
as a department training officer, which coordinates training for new recruits.

"He was always willing to share his experience with the younger members," said Charles Lang, Port Washington's Fire Chief. "They really looked up to him."

In addition to his wife and daughter, Mr. Dayton is survived by his father, Robert H. Dayton, Sr.; his mother, Mercedes; a sister, Denise Suzuki of Houston, Texas; and a brother, James, who is a senior at Brown University. He is also survived by his maternal grandmother, Wanda Wilhouski of Manhasset.

The funeral procession that took Robert H. Dayton, Jr. to his final resting place on Tuesday wound through Haven Avenue, Main Street, North Bayles Avenue, Delaware Avenue and Port Washington Boulevard before proceeding on to Nassau Knolls Cemetery.

PORT NEWS 12/1/88



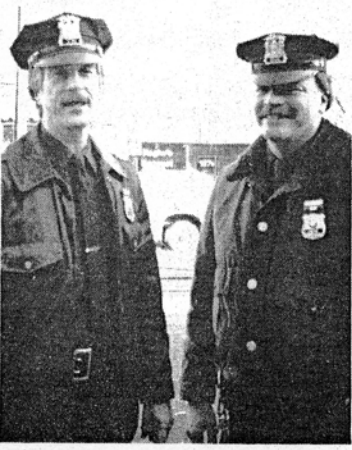
FIREMAN SCOTT WOOD being taken to St. Francis Hospital where he was treated for cuts and smoke inhalation. Photo by Allen Fishkind



THE AFTERMATH. Photo by Allen Fishkind, Joan Smith Florist



PORT FIREMAN RAYMOND RYAN is treated by paramedics for smoke inhalation and



PORT POLICEMEN Dennis Johnson and Ken Nilsen were the first on the fire scene and evacuated occupants in the apartments

Dayton Memorial Fund Formed

Robert H. Dayton Memorial Fund

The Port Washington Fire Department has announced the formation of the Robert H. Dayton Memorial Fund.

Mr. Dayton, a New York City firefighter for the last three years and a volunteer fireman with the Flower Hill Hose Company for the past 10 years, died on Saturday, November 26, while fighting a blaze at a Main Street antique store. He resided on North Bayles Avenue with his wife, Pamela, and their 11-month-old daughter, Kaitlin.

Checks, made payable to the Robert H. Dayton Memorial Fund, may be sent to 423 Port Washington Boulevard, Port Washington, NY 11060