

Fire Medic Killed

by Drunk Driver

Ingrid Sowle, 52, a fire medic with the Port Washington Volunteer Fire Department, was killed in the line of duty in the early hours of Monday, February 19. She was fatally struck down by a hit-and-run drunk driver on Roslyn West Shore Road near Bar Beach as she was walking back to her car after responding to a call at another accident. She was walking northbound to her parked car in the right southbound lane when she was struck at 1:27 a.m. The ambulance that had just left the scene returned within one minute. She was then rushed to North Shore Hospital Trauma Center, where she was pronounced dead by a staff doctor at 2:14 a.m.

The driver of the car that struck her was apprehended as short time later at a Shell service station on Mineola Blvd. Police Officer Charles Kruithoff of the Port Washington Police Department was on his way home from his shift at the police station when he was flagged down at the scene. A witness at the scene told Officer Kruithoff that Ms. Sowle had been struck down and that the driver did not stop. Officer Kruithoff and another man went south in pursuit of the driver. Officer Kruithoff then stopped a Nassau County police officer and asked if he had seen a station wagon. The officer said one had just passed by. Officer Kruithoff continued along Mineola Blvd. and then spotted the vehicle at a gas station. The driver, Michael Giovannoto, 38, of Seaford was arrested on the spot and charged with DWI, leaving the scene of a



Ingrid Sowle 1937-1990

**Port Washington
Volunteer Fire Department**

fatality and driving with a suspended license.

According to witnesses, Giovannoto, before striking Ms. Sowle, was travelling at about 60 m.p.h. and did not slow down at the scene which was lit by flares, flashing lights and police lights. He hit Ms. Sowle head on. She was thrown 25 feet into another parked vehicle. Assistant Chief Geoffrey Cole and Dave Fenton, fire medics and colleagues of Ms. Sowle were first on the scene of the accident. She was

"Ingrid had a heart of gold.

She joined the fire medics

because she wanted to give

more to others. She was

always there for everyone.

She was sincere, kind and loving."

—Linda Popeleski

in "multi-system trauma with critical injuries to several areas," he said. The exact cause of death is unknown at this time.

Mrs. Sowle joined the Fire Medics a year ago February 6. Linda Popeleski, a close friend and fire medic, was with Ms. Sowle at the time of the accident. She said, "Ingrid had a heart of gold. She joined the fire medics because she wanted to give more to others. She was always making desserts for the Company. She was

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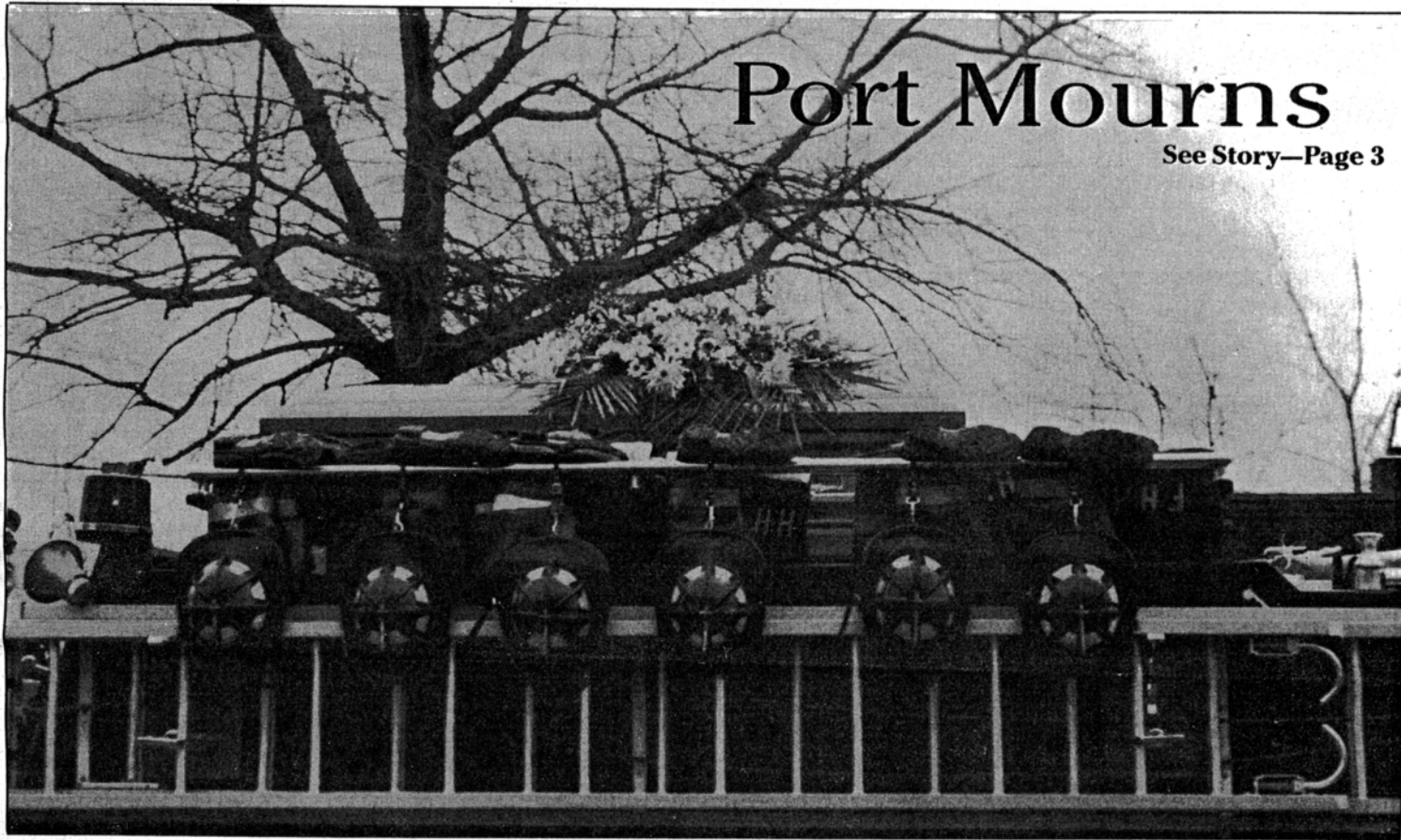
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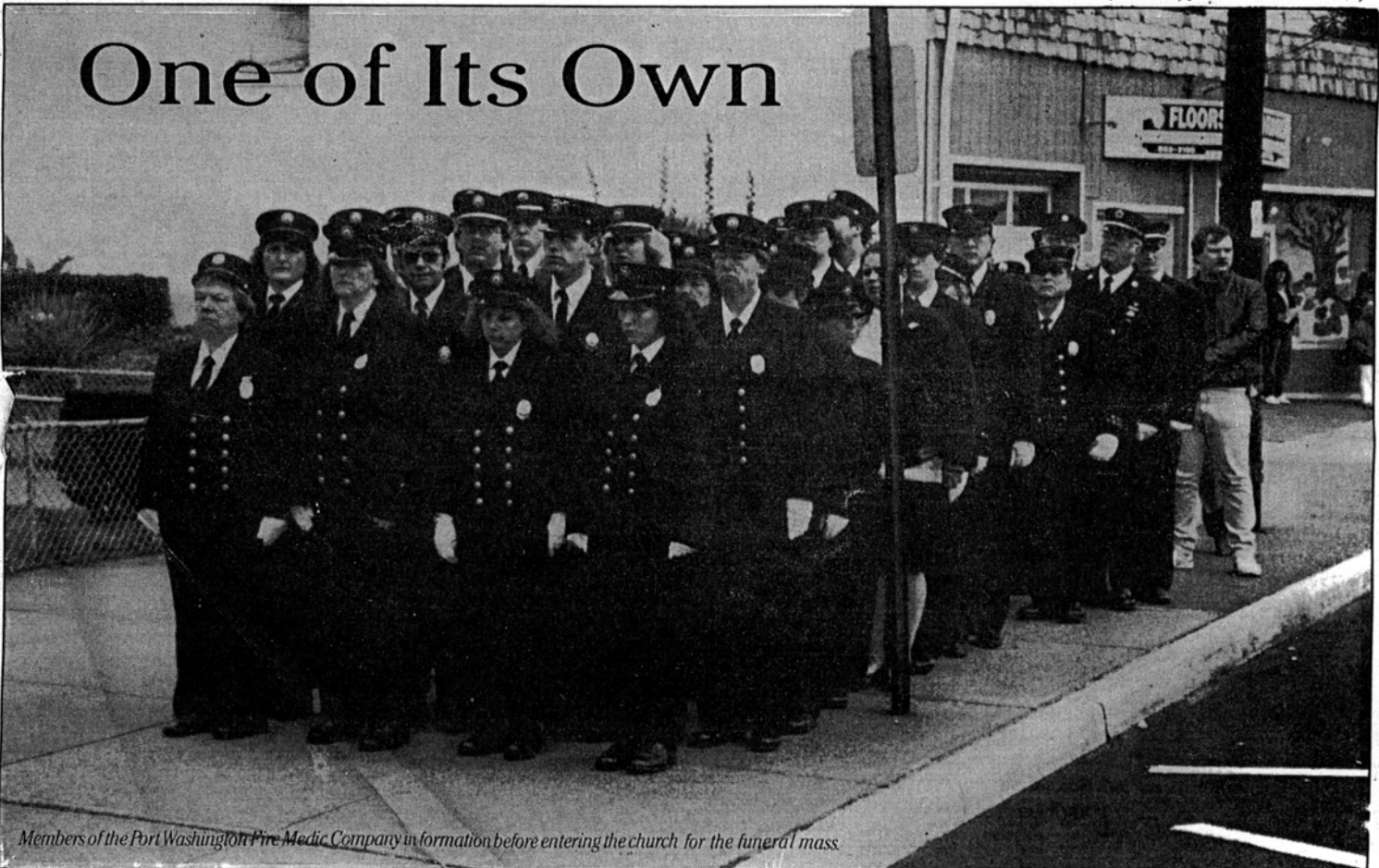
Port Mourns

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(Photos by Humberto Bastias)

One of Its Own



Members of the Port Washington Fire-Medic Company in formation before entering the church for the funeral mass.

A Tearful Farewell For a Fire Medic

By Andrea Martone

On a blank, cold Friday on Feb. 23, Ingrid Sowle was laid to rest.

A Port Washington resident and Fire Medic, Mrs. Sowle was struck and killed by a hit and run driver, while in the line of duty attending another accident victim on West Shore Road during the early hours on Monday, Feb. 19. The man was later apprehended and charged with driving while intoxicated.

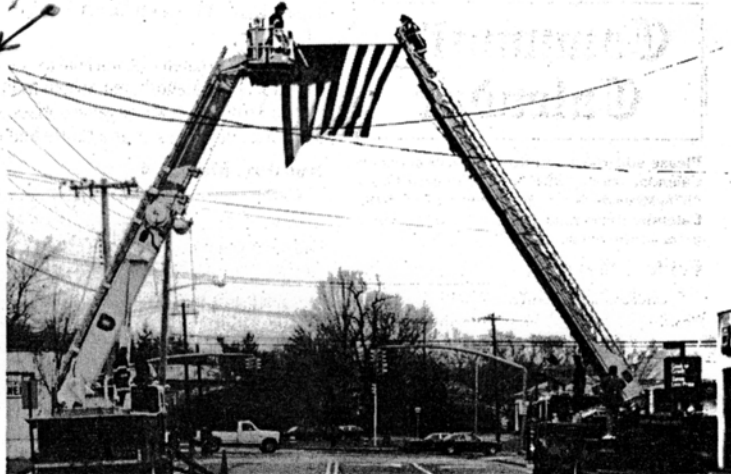
Ingrid Sowle was 52 years of age and a devoted member of the Fire Department who "used to come out to all calls to offer her assistance, even if she wasn't on her work shift," recalls one fellow Medic who wept openly at Friday's funeral. Others who worked with her for the past year recalls a woman who "mothered," loved to cook for the department and breed poodles as both a hobby and a profession. If Ingrid touched the hearts of those she worked with, she certainly affected those who adopted her "babies" (poodles) as one couple from Amityville who had met Ingrid only once, came to pay their respects at her funeral after reading about the tragic accident in *Newsday*. "We only knew her through the adoption, but she always called to see how the puppy was doing and showed a genuine interest in her work. We felt compelled to come today for her."

Friday's funeral procession consisted of every department firetruck and ambulance, as well as firetrucks and firefighters from all throughout Long Island, that wound its way down Main Street to Shore Road, onto Manorhaven Blvd. where it passed under the traditional fire ladder "arch" graced with the American Flag, en route to a Christian Burial Mass that was said at Our Lady of Fatima Church. Interment followed at Nassau Knowles Cemetery.

Over 1500 firefighters, friends and family members paid their respects at the wake the

evening before at Flower Hill Hose Company on Haven Avenue where the Fire Department's Chaplain, Thomas Tobin, eulogized Ingrid in an emotion-filled sermon that touched the hearts of all in attendance. Referring to a speech made in the second World War by Franklin D. Roosevelt who stated "these are the times that try men's souls," the Chaplain went on to say that "this statement could appropriately be applied to us tonight. We are a family, who has lost a beloved member to a tragic and senseless act. And how should we react? When we get past the initial feelings of horror, anger and frustration, I think the answer to the question is in the spirit of the lady whom we remember tonight. I would suggest to you that if Ingrid's life and death is to have any meaning, we should channel our emotions into imitating the love she showed for God's people. . . and I think all of us should thank Almighty God for sending Ingrid Sowle to touch our lives in such a positive manner." The Eulogy ended with a poem that Ingrid's family found in her personal effects and requested be a part of the service. "The author is unknown and may possibly be Ingrid herself," the Chaplain said, "but I think it clearly indicates her acceptance of God's will:

*I walk along a moonlit shore
And hear a voice I've heard before
Calling "come with me."
This cry that breaks the wind-filled night
And fills a saddened heart with fright,
Calls "come with me."
With outstretched arms of water's crest
And drawn as mother's child to breast
Pray come with me.
Come with me, be light of heart
For from this land, I do depart;
And flow with me as waters flow
To shores of land I've yet to know
Pray come with me, come with me.*



The traditional arch formed by Fire truck aerial ladders where the funeral procession passed under en route to the Christian Burial Mass.

(Photos by Humberto Bastias)



A Fire Medic Shield made of blue and yellow chrysanthemums was placed on the casket.

A Place Within the Heart

By Andrea Martone and Christina Cronin Southard

Recollections of a Devoted Comrade

High stress makes for fast friends. Maximum performance level is both demanded and expected for all Fire Medics and terrifying meetings with life and death are a regular part of the job. However, from these unsettling working conditions spring bonds of friendship that are as strong as the ones made on the front lines of battle. They all know they've seen it all and outsiders can never understand it.

Philip Spinnato loved to work the evening shifts as a Fire Medic with Ingrid Sowle because it meant a special meal for him prepared with love. As an ex-captain with the Fire Medics for the past eight years, Philip recalls a special, thoughtful woman who "brought in special foods and made wonderful desserts, and would show up at every call, even if she wasn't on duty." Lois Weston who is also with the Fire Medics for eight years said of Ingrid, "she always wanted to do nice things for people. She probably put in twice as much time here as anyone else. I know it meant a lot to her to be a Fire Medic." Laurie Borelli, a five-year member, adds, "I was present on the scene when Ingrid was hit. It was horror and disbelief. Suddenly,

as a trained Fire Medic, you try to put your emotions aside and do what you've been trained to do. . . save a life. Unfortunately, with Ingrid, there was nothing that we could do."

Many of the Fire Medics agreed that West Shore Rd. is by far one of the most dangerous roads in all of Port Washington. Tammy Bergun, a Fire Medic whose husband is captain of the Fire Medics, said, "When you hear (of an accident on) Roslyn West Shore Rd. on the radio, you dread it."

There are 65 Fire Medics, 40 of whom are women. The Fire Medics handle 1500 calls per year, three times more than the fire department, and are all trained as EMT's (Emergency Medical Technicians) or AMT's (Advanced Medical Technicians).

Although her work as a Fire Medic was brief, having joined the company in February of 1989, Ingrid Sowle has left a lasting impression on the members of her department that will undoubtedly remain in their hearts. As Jane Weiss, a Fire Medic colleague, who worked closely with Sowle acknowledges, "We've lost someone very special to our company and she'll be sorely missed."

The Suspect

By Christine Crown Southard

Michael Giovannotto, 38, of 2376 Willoughby Road, Seaford, was the alleged driver of the 1978 Oldsmobile station wagon that hit and killed Ingrid Sowle on Roslyn West Shore Road in the early hours of Monday, February 19.

He was located by a Port Washington police officer later that evening, immediately arrested and charged with leaving the scene of a fatal accident, driving with a suspended license and driving while intoxicated. He was being held in lieu of \$10,000 bail in Nassau County jail. According to Ed Grilli, spokesman for Nassau County District Attorney's office, Giovannotto is awaiting trial and remains in jail. He has been unable to make bail. He pleaded not guilty to all counts at his arraignment.

According to the Federal Defender's Unit of the Legal Aid Society in Westbury, Giovannotto is no longer their client. He is now being represented by Mineola attorney Anthony Grandinette. Mr. Grandinette said, "There are no

new charges forthcoming despite the death. No vehicular homicide charges have been brought against my client. We are in Part 9 of the felony screening status and conference stage with the District Attorney." He continued that "our posture is that there was a culmination of factors leading to this action, especially the inadequate lighting where the specific accident took place. This accident could have been avoided."

"The defendant was not aware he hit someone. He thought he had hit a (traffic) cone. He was not fleeing the scene. He feels terribly and is seeing a therapist," he said. Mr. Grandinette stated that at Giovannotto's next court appearance on Wednesday, February 28, he will ask for bail reduction.

Giovannotto has a previous record on driving while impaired in 1985. He pleaded guilty, his license was suspended and he was fined \$350. His license was revoked in 1987 for failure to answer summonses. He did not have a valid driver's license when he was arrested Monday.