

Firefighter Killed In Blaze at Home

By Susan Forrest

STAFF WRITER

New York City firefighter Anthony Siconolfi was so dedicated to fighting fires that he spent most of his time off as a volunteer firefighter in the Port Washington area, where he lived.

On Tuesday, Siconolfi, who had been painting the inside of his home in Manorhaven, decided to paint the area around the stairway. Before he started the job, he removed the smoke detector.

Yesterday morning, Siconolfi, 41, was found dead from apparent smoke inhalation after a fire broke out in the basement of his single-family Pequot Avenue home, where he lived alone. Investigators said the fire had been smoldering for several hours.

"Talk about a tragic irony of Murphy's Law," said Nassau County Assistant Chief Fire Marshall Tom Tilley. The cause of the fire remained undetermined last night, but Tilley said it was not suspicious.

The blaze was reported at about 5:40 a.m. by neighbor John Dalton, who said he was awakened by "muffled booms" and then saw flames bursting out the side door of Siconolfi's two-story home. As firefighters rushed to the scene, they knew they were headed to Siconolfi's home, but they had to put their emotions on hold and "do our jobs as professionals, the same way we would for any fire," said Geoffrey Cole, assistant fire chief of Flower Hill Hose Company No. 1, where Siconolfi had been a volunteer for 22 years.

It took more than 75 firefighters from the Port Washington Fire Department — which has four companies, including Flower Hill — about half an hour to extinguish the blaze, which caused extensive interior damage. Tilley said Siconolfi's body was found in the second-floor bathroom; the search for him was hampered because the stairway leading to the second floor was destroyed.

Supervising fire marshal investigator Stephen Wenk said a smoke detector in the ceiling above the stairway had been removed just prior to the fire so Siconolfi could paint the area. The screws from the smoke detector were still in place.

Grieving firefighters, who remained for several hours at the scene boarding up their friend's home, described him as a passionate firefighter who was always helping others. Several were seen consoling Siconolfi's brother, Ronald, 38, of Port Washington, and later his widowed mother, Jacqueline, and sister Diane Guagler, 31, who drove in from their home in Macungie, Pa. "Firefighting was his job, his outside interest. His life," said Ronald Siconolfi. "I was so proud of him."

A 1970 graduate of Paul D. Schreiber High School in Port Washington and Nassau Community College, Siconolfi, known as Tony, had been a New York City firefighter for 12 years, and was assigned to Engine Company 217 in Brooklyn. In 1986, he was honored for saving five people, including three children, from a burning tenement in Bedford Stuyvesant, said his commanding officer, New York City Fire Lt. John Peruso. "We lost a wonderful friend, a lovely brother firefighter," Peruso said.

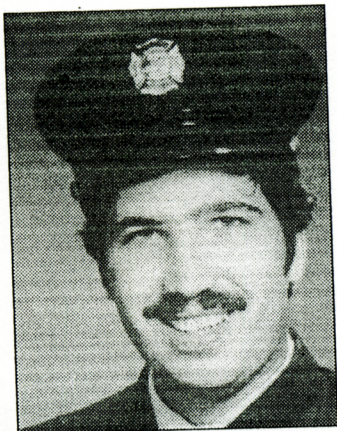
Briefly married in the 1970s without children, Siconolfi was still mourning the death of his

live-in girlfriend, who died in July from a diabetes-related illness.

The flag was at half-staff yesterday outside the Flower Hill Hose Company No. 1, and purple and black bunting were draped over the building. A sign read, "In memory of Anthony Siconolfi. Departed member."

Siconolfi was the second member of Flower Hill Hose Company No. 1 to die in a fire in four years. In November, 1988, New York City firefighter Bob Dayton was killed in the line of duty. "As you can understand, we don't like the month of November very much," Cole said.

Visiting for Siconolfi is today from 7 to 9 p.m. and tomorrow from 2 to 4 and 7 to 9 p.m. at the Knowles Funeral Home in Port Washington. A funeral mass will be said Saturday at 9:30 a.m. at St. Peter of Alcantara Church in Port Washington, followed by burial at Nassau Knolls Cemetery.



Anthony Siconolfi