

FIRE FOCUS

By Les Kent PWvFD

We grieve.

Every member of the Port Washington volunteer Fire Department feels a profound sense of loss as a result of last Friday's tragic fire on Bernard Street.

By now most of the details are known to the community as a result of the news media coverage on radio, television and newspapers, including the story in this issue of the *Port Washington News*.

But Monday morning's front page color picture of little Melissa Castillo in *Newsday*, with the headline "No Greater Pain," seems to have said it all.

Loss of life in a fire is the ultimate tragedy of any such incident, regardless of the age of the victim.

This fire took the life of 5-year-old Melissa, her grandmother, and another woman who is still unidentified at this writing. In addition, three other people were injured in the fire.

But somehow when a small child is one of those lost, the disaster becomes most heartrending.

There was an immediate sense of desperation when even the first units of our PWvFD arrived, only minutes after the general alarm had been sounded, and found flames already shooting out of the upstairs windows.

The weather, of course, was dreadful...cold, snowy and windy...all of which were additional obstacles to overcome.

But overcome them, they did. Our volunteer firefighters and fire medics performed all the professionally designed procedures in fighting just such a residential structure fire, quickly and expertly.

Their courage and devotion to duty as volunteers facing a hazardous situation in

the face of all these deterrents deserves special recognition.

But, unfortunately, to no avail. A beautiful child and her grandmother and another victim were lost, by circumstances beyond control.

Many of the firefighters and fire medics have small children of their own, and a catastrophe such as this is especially deeply felt by them. But then, all of us have families and can mourn in sympathy with the families of the victims.

Perhaps it would be of interest to our readers to be aware of the "Fireman's Prayer," known to all of us in every fire department in the country. It follows:

When I am called to duty, God,
whenever flames may rage, give
me strength to save some life,
whatever be its age. Help me
embrace a little child before it is
too late, or save an older person
from the horror of that fate.
Enable me to be alert and hear
the weakest shout, and quickly
and efficiently to put the fire out.
I want to fill my calling, and to
give the best in me, to guard my
every neighbor and protect his
property. And if, according to my
fate, I am to lose my life, please
bless with Your protecting hand
my family, friends and wife.

And so we are the PWvFD grieve for little Melissa, her grandmother, and the other victim...and for their families. May the departed find eternal rest and peach with God, the injured recover quickly, and may their families find the strength and help from all of us in this tragic time.

In our beloved Port Washington, they are not alone.