

# Port Washington NEWS

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## PWFD Battles "Sunrise Fire" Disaster

By Les Kent, PWVFD

"In all my years with the fire department I've never seen anything as awesome as the height of those flames!"

"We went in fresh and clean, and came out totally blackened from helmet to boots..."

"It was wonderful to see so many people from so many places, working together, devoted to each other, to fight a common threat to people and places many of us had never ever seen before"

These were some of the comments heard from those valiant members of the Port Washington Volunteer Fire Department who raced to the scene of the "Sunrise Fire," as it is now known, as it devastated over 5,000 acres of the Westhampton area of Suffolk county before being brought under control last week.

Unlike the Avianca crash scene of a few years ago with its resultant confusion and blocked traffic problems, the coordinated efforts at the Yaphank staging area and the overall directions coming from the command center on the Wading River Road bridge over Sunrise Highway resulted in a remarkably effective concerted attack on this dangerous wildfire. Thousands of volunteer firefighters, hundreds of emergency and fire vehicles and ambulances were dispatched from this central command post.

Over 175 fire departments were in-

involved in the triumph over what could have become a major disaster. All fire departments in Nassau County, and every fire department in Suffolk County, sent equipment and firefighters, every person a volunteer serving his or her community without pay, yet putting their lives on the line to help a distant neighbor in need.

The PWFD's role began coincidentally, while a group from the Flower Hill Hose Co. (F.H.H.) were actually attending a

pump school session on West Shore Road on Thursday evening, August 24. At the class were Capt. Andy Bellini, Lt. Walter Martinek, Lt. Glen Pedersen, Roy Pedersen, John Scala, Mike Pickering, Billy Elettto, Suzanne Smith, Glen Verity, Mike Zofchak, Jordan Satinsky and Dennis Cscan.

At 8:30 p.m. they received emergency orders to proceed to the fire scene im-

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*"You heard fire,  
you could see it and  
then you heard the  
army helicopter  
dropping water.  
It was like a war."*



PWFD at Sunrise Blaze on Friday, August 25. Kevin O'Halpin, Charlie Henderson, Rich Melichar, John Walters III, Donald Alexander, Bill Crooker, Anthony Guzzello, John Powers

*Paring Down:*

# THE *Port Washington* SENTINEL

"Keeper of the Light"

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## Port Firefighters Tackle East End Forest Fires

BY ANDREA MARTONE

The tee shirts read, "Long Island Volunteers: Neighbors Helping Neighbors." In their hearts, however, is even a more poignant message, "In the light of day, we all believe we can. It's when we're in the dark that we need a helping hand."

And that dark day came on August 24th when the worst forest fire in New York State history in nearly 90 years erupted in Westhampton and help was needed from fire companies east and west in Long Island. Port Washington quickly moved into gear, veterans of crises. They remembered the Avianca crash in Brookville where their help was needed. They also recalled the Nor'easter of '92 that devastated Bayville, calling for mutual aid. They recently responded to a devastating Manhasset fire that left one dead, and a year ago responded to a massive fire at a Lincoln Mercury car dealership. But all prior calls paled compared to the wildfires of Westhampton which destroyed over 5,000 acres, and required 2,000 firefighters to combat the three-day fire that has become known as "The Sunrise Fire."

Port firefighters were called to duty on August 24th and headed to the Suffolk County Fire Academy where they were briefed. According to Port firefighter Tony Guzzello, 10 fire units



Port Washington volunteer firefighters returned from Long Island's East End after fighting the worst blaze in 90 years in New York State history. Pictured above: Michael Pickering (Flower Hill Hose), Bob and Donald Reese (Protection Engine Co.), Roy and Lt. Glen Pedersen (Flower Hill Hose), Billy Eletto (Flower Hill Hose), George Girardin (Protection Engine Co.), Captain Vincent Costa (Protection Engine Co.), Bill Crooker (Atlantic Hook & Ladder), Charles Henderson (Flower Hill Hose), Glen Verity (Flower Hill Hose), Suzanne Smith (Flower Hill Hose), Lt. John Walters III (Protection Engine Co.), Lt. Walter Martinek (Flower Hill Hose), Jordan Satinsky (Flower Hill Hose), Denis Cycan (Flower Hill Hose), Anthony Guzzello (Protection Engine Co.). Not pictured: Mike Zofchak, Tom Cycan, Capt. Andy Bellini, John Powers, Kevin O'Halpin, Rich Melachak, Tom McDonough, Donald Alexander, Jimmy Jablonsky, Don Wilson, Jack Eaton, John Scalla and Ed Dietz.

were called from New York City, and others from Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Fairfield, Connecticut even sent a unit across by ferry via Port Jefferson to join their comrades in battle. "You'd be amazed at how many women responded to the effort," says Guzzello, who has been a member of Protection Engine No.1 for years. Guzzello went on to explain that the Port Washington firefighters - nearly 40 in all - were divided into two shifts that began fighting the blaze non-stop for 18 hours from 8:00 p. m - 2:30 pm, and then again from 2:00 p.m. - 1:00 a.m. Saturday morning. "We were sure tired, but never hungry," says one member of the group. Food and beverages were plentiful for the volunteers. On their way out of town, Port firefighters collected \$350 from their members to purchase Gator Aid, OJ and chips from Trunz on Port Blvd. The Sands Point Golf course donated food to the men. Once at the site of the blaze, local stores such as the 7-11 allowed firefighters to drink and eat free of charge. While food was important for the volunteers to keep up their strength, water power took priority. Residential swimming pools were used as sources of water to extinguish the blazes, cesspool companies, contracting trucks and King Kullen trucks were filled with H<sub>2</sub>O to

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