

Nassau Firefighters Support Burn Center Foundation

By Ex-Captain Steve Grogan, Lynbrook Fire Department



In the United States, approximately two million people suffer burns each year. Of these, 300,000 are burned seriously and over 6,000 are fatalities, making burns the nation's third largest cause of accidental death. Burns are also the second leading cause of accidental death to children under the age of five and nearly 24,000 children are treated in hospital emergency rooms each year for scald injuries.

On Long Island, the only place to treat burns in Nassau County is at the Nassau University Medical Center (NUMC) in East Meadow. The only other hospital on Long Island that has a burn center is Stony Brook University Hospital in Suffolk County.

In February 2008, NUMC opened a newly renovated \$6.7 million, 12,000 square-foot Nassau County Firefighters Burn Center. The center is now large enough to accommodate as many as 18 burn patients and it is staffed by 20 nurses. The hospital first began burn treatment with one room and four beds back in 1948. The new center now takes in approximately 200 burn victims and treats nearly 1,000 out-patients each year. The age of the patients has ranged from as young as a 10-day-old infant to someone as old as 101.

The Nassau County Firefighters Burn Center features a Hubbard tank room to clean wounds as well as a horizontal shower room and room mattresses with circulating air that automatically turn immobile patients to prevent further skin damage. Each bed is in a typical intensive care unit bedroom with a glass front so that all are visible from the nurses' station. The center also has a support staff of physical and occupational therapists, rehabilitation specialists, psychologists, psychiatrists, a nutritionist, and a chaplain.

Part of the funding for the 2008 renovation came from donations by the Nassau County Firefighters Burn Center Foundation, a non-profit organization officially founded by firefighters in

Nassau County twenty years ago, and which is dedicated to the advancement of burn care, research, prevention, education, and the proper treatment of burns. As part of the renovations, the foundation provided funds for the purchase of TVs and DVD players for the rooms, and numerous portraits and other scenes that fill the walls of the center. There is also a collection of fire department patches from the Nassau departments and fire companies that support the foundation and which hang just inside the entrance.

On another wall is a plaque from the foundation, presented to the center in June 1998, which acknowledges the great work of the doctors, nurses and staff, who through, "Their exemplary dedication and commitment to their patients establishes a benchmark that all other medical professionals should endeavor to realize."

The foundation raises its contributions in many ways. Raffles, concerts, golf outings, and various other fundraisers and events are hosted by the 71 fire departments and the over 10,000 firefighters in Nassau County. One department regularly donates money raised through the dark horse at every meeting. Another department just recently donated money from selling bumper stickers, while a junior fire department raised money from a softball game.

The first money ever donated to Nassau's Burn Center occurred back in 1979. Prior to that, money raised by Nassau County fire departments were sent to the NYC Burn Center. In 1979, Ex-Chief Francis X. Pendl of the Bethpage Fire Department, and a Deputy Chief Instructor at the Nassau County Fire Service Academy, was burned during a training session at the academy. After his stay at Nassau's Burn Center, Pendl, and Detective Tom Gulla, a member of the Nassau County Police Arson Squad, set up the first Nassau County Police and Fire Hockey game to benefit the Burn Center.

In 1990, Ex-Chief Paul Napoli of the Oceanside Fire Department, and the Administrator of the Nassau County Fire/Police EMS Academy, helped co-found the Nassau County Firefighters

Burn Center Foundation to act as a fundraising arm for Nassau's Burn Center and promote awareness of burn prevention and fire safety to the fire service and the general public.

Ex-Chief Napoli, who is co-chairman of the foundation, knows personally the work and dedication of the people at the Nassau County Firefighters Burn Center and what the center means to the fire service and the residents of Nassau County. His son, also a volunteer, was among a group of ten volunteer firefighters admitted to the center in the summer of 2003 after an explosion at an Oceanside industrial laundry complex. The Ex-Chief would later tell his local newspaper about the Burn Center, "When you saw them come in, just picture black on their face. Later on they looked like the mummy. Now, they don't look like they were ever burned."

All the men recovered.

In November 2009, the Burn Center treated former Westbury firefighter Richard Foreza whose 18-wheeler overturned on the Long Island Expressway. He received third-degree burns over 85 percent of his body. But the former firefighter died four days later. His friends in Westbury later organized a fundraiser at Mulcahy's Pub in Wantagh and donated \$18,000 to the foundation in his memory. That money was used to purchase specialized pieces of equipment. A plaque in Foreza's honor also hangs just inside the doors to the Burn Center.

Over the years the Nassau County fire service has donated over \$1.5 million to the Foundation for Nassau's Burn Center. Besides the many fire departments in Nassau County that regularly support and contribute to the Burn Center, two Battalions, the Fourth and the Sixth Battalion Fire Districts hold annual battalion events to raise funds.

Starting 15 years ago, the Fourth Battalion, which includes the departments of Rockville Center, Lakeview, East Rockaway, Lynbrook, and Malverne, began holding an annual battalion fundrais-

er for the foundation. Starting six years ago the annual event was held at Madison Hall in Rockville Centre. The guest bartenders for the event are always the chiefs and delegates of the battalion while the music for the past three years has been provided free of charge by the band, Switch, whose lead singer is a member of the East Rockaway Fire Department. The Nassau County Firefighters Pipes and Drums Band also donates its time and plays each year.

In 2010 the Fourth Battalion's event was held in the hall of Lynbrook's Tally-Ho Engine 3 firehouse. Nearly \$7,000 was raised. In the past six years, nearly \$50,000 was donated to the foundation for the center from the Fourth Battalion.

Ex-Chief Robert Cribbin of the Lynbrook Fire Department, and Chairman of the Fourth Battalion, and Vice-Chairman of the Nassau County Fire Commission, said, "The departments in this battalion are proud to do their part and join the other departments in Nassau County in their commitment to support the foundation and the Nassau County Firefighters Burn Center, which does such great work."

Ex-Chief Napoli expressed his thanks for the support and efforts of the Fourth Battalion as he accepted 2010's check from them. He also expressed his thanks to all of the Nassau County fire departments who regularly donate to the foundation. "With these donations the foundation can continue to support the first-rate treatment that the Nassau County Firefighters Burn Center provides."

Fire departments and others who care to make a donation can send it to the Nassau County Firefighters Burn Center Foundation, PO Box 246, Levittown, NY 11756.

About the Author: Ex-Captain Steve Grogan is a 42 year member of Tally-Ho Engine 3 of the Lynbrook Fire Department. He has been Lynbrook's PIO and writer for over 25 years. He holds a Master's Degree from CW Post College, is a Vietnam-Era veteran, a former Lynbrook Village Trustee, and a retired federal agent.

Photo on facing page: Fourth Battalion Chairman, Nassau County Fire Commissioner, and Ex-Chief, Robert Cribbin of Lynbrook, presents the check in 2010 from the Fourth Battalion fundraiser to NCFBC Foundation Co-chairman, and Ex-Chief, Paul Napoli of the Oceanside Fire Department. Also present for the presentation are, (L – R): Fundraiser Co-Chair, and Ex-Chief, John Hennig of the Rockville Centre Fire Department; Battalion Secretary, and Ex-Chief, Jack O'Brien of the Malverne Fire Department; Battalion Vice-Chairman, and Ex-Chief, Thomas Smith of the East Rockaway Fire Department; Fundraiser Co-Chair, and Ex-Chief, Charlie Jaeger; Rockville Centre Fire Department; and Battalion Treasurer, and Ex-Chief, Fred Senti, Jr, of the Lakeview Fire Department.

Battalion presentation and fundraising photos by Firefighter Brian Grogan. Hospital and other photos by Ex-Captain Steve Grogan



Volunteers of the Nassau County Firefighters Pipes and Drums play at the Nassau County Firefighters Burn Center Foundation fundraiser at the Tally-Ho firehouse in Lynbrook.



The plaque presented to the Burn Center from the Nassau County Firefighters Burn Center Foundation.



Patches from Nassau County Fire Departments and fire companies that support the Nassau County Firefighters Burn Center, and its foundation, adorn the walls at the entrance to the Burn Center.