

# A great chief passes

The Pompton Lakes Volunteer Fire Department said goodbye to former Chief Tom Duffy this past week. Tom was a great chief and an excellent firefighter. He urged us on with a smile and showed the way when it was tough.

He was chief when firematics was coming into the new era. He had to deal with the "we never did that before" attitude some of us old ducks espouse. We worked hard and fought fires together. Lois and Tom were always at firefighters functions which we all enjoyed immensely.

There was an additional sad note at the Richards Funeral Home. We learned that Bucky Brinster had died a couple of days before. As I entered the home, a beautiful young lady grabbed me and hugged me. "Uncle Howie," she said, "it has been years since I saw you last."

It took a couple of seconds for this old brain to function, but I recognized Stacey Brinster. The last time I saw her she was really little and we called her "Poo." The distinguished lady with her was her mother Diane. We had a great conversation about the old times.

The old times are OK but the new times are often better. When I first became a firefighter, we still had the

## Bits and Pieces

By Howard Lee Ball



old 1926 apparatus and used it well. It was outmoded and in a few years we were able to replace it with newer models.

When we drilled on the old American LaFrance quad-ladder truck, we heard stories about what preceded those marvels of firefighting. It seems that the fire chief worked for the borough and used a horse and wagon to collect garbage. The horse that pulled the wagon was also the firehorse. The animal was kept in a stable behind the firehouse (now Riddles.)

On most alarms, the horse came up the drive and hitched up for the run. In those days the alarm consisted of several railroad train metal wheels which were struck with a hammer to alert the firefighters. If an alarm came in on days when the horse was busy pulling the garbage wagon, it would stop in the traces and wait for the chief to unhitch him

and go to get the fire apparatus. That was colorful, but hardly a quick response.

In firefighter terms, I am a ladder man. I was a proud member of Company Number 2 of the PLVFD. The family of firefighters never grows old. A couple of weeks ago, I met Bill Fear of the Bloomingdale Department. We talked about old times and new times and people we recall with joy.

Rich Dean of Butler Fire Department has a website for firefighters. That really brings us into this century. In my role as Chaplain of the Passaic County Fire Academy, I have once again been present at the Fire House. It seems as though I had never left. Many young people I have never known before welcomed me like an old, long-lost uncle. It is a joy.

As I rode in the new Number 2 in the Memorial Day Parade, I could not help but recall that I have ridden in the 1926, the 1954, the 1974 and now this 1999 marvel which has every modern convenience. They tell me it is easy to drive and operate. There are many overrides to protect you from mistakes. It is the state-of-the-art for today.

It really is a far cry from the horse and garbage wagon.