

## Steve Russo is Weston's 2011 Firefighter of the Year

Written by Patricia Gay

Wednesday, 22 June 2011 12:24

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Steve Russo, who has a reputation for going above and beyond the call of duty to help others, has been named the Firefighter of the Year by the Weston Volunteer Fire Department.

"Steve has done a lot for the department this past year and really stood out," said Weston Fire Chief John Pokorny.

The 2011 Firefighter of the Year was chosen by Mr. Pokorny, the assistant chief, and two captains. The honor was bestowed upon Mr. Russo at the WVFD's annual awards night dinner on June 3.

Mr. Russo has volunteered with the department for just a little more than two years. But in that time he has responded to a lot of calls and made a positive impression on other members of the department.

"Steve has done so much for us. He goes on a ton of calls and drills. He also helps us with our paperwork and is a great overall firefighter," Chief Pokorny said.

Mr. Russo said he was shocked when he heard his name called out as Firefighter of the Year. "Since I hadn't been in the department that long, it came as a complete surprise. I'm totally honored. This makes me want to work harder," he said.

Mr. Russo has lived in Weston for 26 years. He is married to Lisa Russo and has three grown

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children, Caitlyn, 25, Matthew, 23, and Connor, 20, all of whom went to Weston public schools.

He is an attorney with a Greenwich law firm and specializes in commercial and residential real estate.

Mr. Russo's family moved to Greenwich when he was 10. He received his undergraduate degree from the University of Connecticut and went to George Washington University law school.

Mr. Russo moved to Weston when he and his wife were starting a family. "We were looking for a good school system with good green space and a small town atmosphere. We found it in Weston," he said.

He served on Weston's Planning and Zoning Commission for nine years, two years as vice chairman, and a short time as chairman. He worked on the 2000 Plan of Conservation and Development.

Mr. Russo was also involved in Norfield Church on their outreach committee and spent many years on the Little League board, coaching Little League baseball and girls' softball. He is also on the board of the Weston Field Club.

### **New activity**

After his kids were grown and no longer involved in sports, Mr. Russo decided he needed a new activity that would help him stay in contact with the town.

"A couple friends convinced me to give the fire department a shot, so I did, and it's been a great experience. I've gotten to know a whole new group of people who volunteer for fire and EMS," he said.

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Working for the fire department has been “incredible,” he said, and he has learned a lot.

“The town of Weston is fortunate to have the number of people it does involved in fire and EMS. It takes a lot of training and a lot of blood and sweat goes into it. It’s a good group of people and you grow to trust them on a significant level,” he said.



It’s also been a humbling experience. “Being active in the department makes me have to stay in shape and work hard,” he said.

Mr. Russo gives credit to volunteers who have young children. “I go out on a lot of calls and they’re right beside me. They give up time going to games and doing other things with their families in order to go on calls. They make sacrifices to help others,” he said.

While there haven’t been any serious fires in the past couple years, Mr. Russo has responded to several motor vehicle accidents as well as an incident in Devil’s Den where rescuers had to pull a man from the woods after he fell from a cliff.

He also responded to the flood the town suffered in March and helped evacuate a resident from Slumbers Corners utilizing a canoe which had washed upstream. “We initially tried to go up the driveway in our truck but the flood waters were so high you couldn’t see the road. Fortunately, the canoe appeared and we were able to rescue the resident,” Mr. Russo said.

Mr. Russo said he puts a lot of time and effort into the department because it is a good way to give back to the community. “I’m playing catch up for all the years I missed not being a firefighter. People really appreciate what we do,” he said.

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As a father, Mr. Russo has always been very involved with his children, which is why he coached both Little League and softball.

“I loved coaching kids, but I did notice that the parents of the boys were often more difficult and more concerned about winning than the girls and the girls’ parents. A lot of pressure was put on the boys to win. But I believe that at that age, the most important thing is to teach the kids how to play the game, to give everyone a chance, and show them how adults should act. I did enjoy coaching immensely,” Mr. Russo said.

### Swedish visit

Mr. Russo told of an interesting experience he had last summer when he and his wife visited relatives in Kungälv, Sweden.

“Since I was a firefighter, one of the relatives arranged for us to take a tour of the local fire station. While we were getting the grand tour, one of the firefighters let me try on some of his gear and hold some of the equipment. Just then a call came in about a motor vehicle accident on a highway that would be the equivalent of I-95,” he said.

While he was wearing the firefighting gear, a member of the department told him to get on the engine and ride with them, so he did.

“We drove to the scene of the accident and I helped with the hosing of the highway and dealing with hazardous material. I was totally shocked they let me help out. I don’t know if a fire department in the U.S. would allow it,” he said.

As the firefighters finished and were packing their equipment, a TV crew from Swedish national television showed up. The crew had been following the Kungälv fire department on a regular basis for a documentary they were filming. When they found out Mr. Russo was American, they interviewed him for the film, and asked him questions about Weston and the difference between

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American and Swedish fire departments.

“The documentary aired in Sweden on national television,” Mr. Russo said.

The Kungälv fire department was so happy that an American had stopped by and helped them out that Mr. Russo gave them his Weston firefighter’s T-shirt which they put on display in the main lobby of their firehouse.

“It was quite an experience. Nothing I ever expected. They treated me like royalty. But it also made me realize that wherever you go, firefighters are like brothers, and everyone treats you like family. I’m so glad I became a volunteer firefighter. I wish I had done it 20 years earlier. I wouldn’t trade these experiences for anything,” he said.