

New York, Danville firemen cement bond



Richard T. Davis/Register & Bee

From left, Jim Hohorst, New York Fire Department; Kea Jones, Danville engineer; Bob Peterson, NYFD; Bob Korfman, NYFD; Danville Fire Department Capt. Steve McDowell; Danville Fire Department Lt. Billy Scearce and Pat Astegher, NYFD, discuss racing Friday at the West Main Street station.

New York City firemen and members of the local fire department will share a weekend of camaraderie and NASCAR events together.

By LAUREN CHESNUT

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DANVILLE, Va. — When the Twin Towers collapsed Sept. 11, 2001, seven Danville firefighters traveled to Ground Zero to help with recovery efforts. They transported priests and counselors to and from the site and delivered helmets of firefighters who were confirmed dead back to the firehouses where they had worked.

Two years later, local firefighters Ken Jones and Billy Scearce returned to the scene for a memorial service.

They stayed with the firefighters of the New York City Fire Department's Marine Company One and forged friendships based on their common experiences, one of which turned out to be a love of NASCAR.

This weekend, the Danville Professional Firefighters Association is hosting a visit by four members of Marine Company One. The group will enjoy food, fellowship and a trip

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to Martinsville Speedway's Nextel Cup race on Sunday, thanks to tickets provided by Robert Woodall Chevrolet.

New York City firefighter Jim Hohorst explained the bonds firefighters from any region of the country can share.

"The general public doesn't know what going into a real fire is like," he said.

"When you go into a real fire, you can't see your hand in front of your face. You're bouncing off walls, tripping over things.

"You have to count on the person next to you. You basically become family."

Jones recalled his first trip to help the New York firefighters.

"The devastation was so great," he said.

Returning for the 2003 memorial service, Jones said he was relieved to see rebuilding efforts and was moved by hearing stories about the many lives affected by the World Trade Center bombings.

He reflected on the similarities between his colleagues and the men and women firefighters he met in New York with both humor and solemnity.

"You can switch them back and

forth, and they're all practical jokers," he said, laughing.

Then, in a more serious tone, he added, "They're all brothers of the bell."

Hohorst said the trip to Danville was bittersweet, as colleague Billy O'Brien could not travel with them. O'Brien is ill with cancer, he said.

He credited O'Brien with spearheading the camaraderie that led to this weekend's reunion.

"If it wasn't for him, this whole thing wouldn't be happening," he said.

Hohorst, along with his Marine Company One colleagues Bob Petersen, Bob Korfman and Pat Astegher, arrived in Danville on Friday. They joined Danville firefighters Friday evening for a cook-out at Fire Station No. 4.

They planned to go to the truck race in Martinsville on Saturday and the Nextel Cup race on Sunday.

Hohorst said local residents may be under the misimpression that NASCAR is just a southern sport.

"I don't think they realize how big we're into it," he said of himself and his colleagues.

"I love it."

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