

# The Bell and Siren Club, Inc.

1949-2014



## 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

Iberia Restaurant

82-84 Ferry St.

Newark, N.J.

December 10, 2014





# CITY OF NEWARK FIRE DEPARTMENT OFFICE OF THE FIRE CHIEF



Fire Department  
Administration

James W. Stewart  
Fire Director

1010 Eighteen Avenue  
Newark, New Jersey 07106  
Tel. 973-733-5187 / 973-733-7423  
Fax 973-733-5410

John G. Centanni  
Fire Chief

November 12, 2014

Ira Cohen  
The Bell and Siren Club, Inc.  
PO Box 269  
Caldwell, NJ 07006

To the Officers and Membership of the Bell and Siren Club:

It is with great enthusiasm and appreciation that I write this letter to you on behalf of the Officers and members of the Newark Fire Department to commemorate your 65 years of service and dedication. First, I would like to express how during my 30 year career in the Newark Fire Department, there have been many cold nights and hot days that the Bell and Siren Club have been there for relief and comfort for me and my fellow Firefighters.

Now, as Fire Chief of the Newark Fire Department, I continue to witness the tremendous commitment of the members of this faithful organization, not only at emergency scenes within the boundaries of the City of Newark and the County of Essex, but also your support at our many events, services and ceremonies that your presence is implored upon.

Once again, I would like to extend my sincere thanks and admiration on behalf of myself and the members of the Newark Fire Department. If there is anything that our Department can do for you, ask and we will be there to support you as you have tirelessly and endlessly supported us. Keep up the good work, and may God bless you.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John G. Centanni".

John G. Centanni  
Fire Chief  
Newark Fire Department

## *Newark Firefighters Union, Inc.*

CHARLES H. WEST  
President

KEVIN SIMPSON  
Vice President

REYNIEL IRIZARRY  
2nd Vice President

JAMES WILLIS  
Treasurer

DANE RISPOLI  
Recording Secretary

238 Murray Street  
Newark, New Jersey 07114  
(973)733-7515 Fax: (973)642-4503  
nfu@newarkfd.com



President Pelaia,

December 3, 2014

It takes great pleasure to wish the Bell and Siren Club a happy 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I am a proud 26 year veteran of the Newark Fire Department. In those 26 years, I have witnessed, first hand, the importance of the Bell and Siren Club. I have spent many a cold nights, as a member of Engine 6, huddling by your truck, trying to get warm. Always greeted with a smile, your friendly group of volunteers makes a rough night, that much easier.

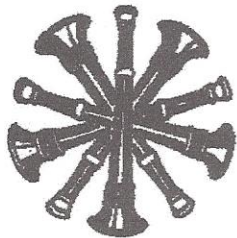
Now, as Newark Firefighters Union President, I appreciate your staff even more, knowing that my members are well cared for. I can't begin to tell you how important the Bell and Siren Club has been through the years. As the fire service is ever changing, the one constant has been the Bell and Siren Club.

On behalf of our NFU Elected Board and any man or woman that has worn the NFD patch, we say thank you. Thank you for all that your organization has done for us through those 65 years.

In keeping with the fine tradition of the Newark Fire Department, we say congratulations and keep up the great work that you do!

Sincerely,

Charles West, President, NFU



**ECFCA**

**ESSEX COUNTY FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION**

**J. Michael Roberts, President**  
**Andrew Williams, Vice President**

Mr. Thomas Pelaia, President  
Bell & Siren Club  
East Orange, New Jersey

December 2, 2014

Dear President Pelaia;

On behalf of our entire membership, I want to congratulate you and the Bell and Siren Club on the milestone of serving the fire service of Essex County for 65 years. We are so fortunate in each of the 21 communities in the county to have the availability of your all volunteer team to provide refreshments and nourishment to firefighters around the clock at major incidents.

I can remember when the Bell and Siren Club only served Newark, South Orange and East Orange in your earlier days. I remember the difficulty in maintaining the canteen truck and seeking funds to purchase a new one to serve our members. Today, through the hard work of your members, you not only serve the County of Essex, but other counties that call for assistance.

Today in this poor economy and with volunteerism down throughout the country, I salute you and the Bell and Siren Club of Essex County for your outstanding dedication, service and time of the past 65 years and wish you continued success in the future. Each and every one of us owes you a debt of gratitude for being there every time we need you.

Yours in Fire Safety,

Chief J. Michael Roberts,  
President

Essex County Fire Chiefs Association  
300 Millburn Avenue  
PO Box 51  
Millburn, NJ 07041

# The Bell and Siren Club, Inc.

Organized 1949

Charter Member International Fire Buff Associates

[tpelaia@bellandsirenclub.org](mailto:tpelaia@bellandsirenclub.org)

**REPLY TO:**  
Thomas Pelaia, President  
1 Baker Road  
Livingston, NJ 07039  
973-332-2855



**EMERGENCY CALL:**  
Newark Fire  
Headquarters  
973-733-7400

December 10, 2014

Dear Bell and Siren Members and Guests:

I would like to welcome each and every one of you to our Annual Holiday Party commemorating the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Bell and Siren Club.

Our Anniversary provides an opportune time to reflect on the importance of our club and its contributions to the firefighters in our area. Although we have progressed throughout the years such as building custom canteens rather than converting milk trucks and being notified of fires and responses via state of the art radios rather than a telephone call, our mission has always been constant - one of service to firefighters. We could not have achieved this if it were not for our dedicated members and the dedicated firefighters who we serve. We have created a partnership which is second to none.

As we move into the future all of us must strive to continue this partnership. Doing so will insure that this great organization will become even greater in the next 65 years.

Once again, I would like to thank everyone for attending this evening and wish everyone a joyous holiday season and a healthy new year.

Fraternally,

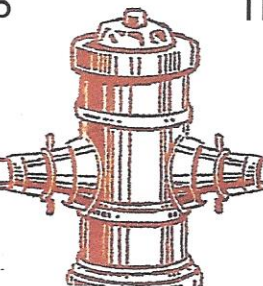
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom', with a long horizontal line extending to the left.

Tom Pelaia  
President



## Bell and Siren Club Presidents

John Edelen	1949	Robert Kalkman	1977-1978
Joseph Kunze	1950	Grant Miller	1979
Fred Bissinger	1951-1952	Thomas Cora	1980
Elmer Birdsall	1953	George Ottley	1981-1982
"Doc" Devlin	1954-1955	Phil Brower	1983-1984
Ed Massmann	1956	Thomas Pelaia	1985-1986
Leo Curtis	1957-1958	Mil Thatcher	1987-1988
Bill Conradi	1959-1960	Al Smyth	1989-1990
Robert Kalkman	1961-1962	Felim Doherty	1991
Stanley Zach	1963-1964	George Ottley	1992-1993
John Zach	1965-1966	Bill Hicks	1994-1996
Donald Roth	1967-1968	Frank Sapienza	1997-2004
Thomas Cleary	1969-1970	Chris Coon	2005-2006
Bill Kroeschel	1971-1972	Frank Sapienza	2007-2009
Ira Cohen	1973-1974	Danny Espallat	2010-2012
George Ottley	1975-1976	Thomas Pelaia	2013-2014



# Bell and Siren Members (as of Dec., 2014)

## Charter Member

John Edelen          4/9/1949

## Life Members

Ira Cohen            1/9/1964

Martin Litowitz    6/9/1966

Joseph Mongiello 7/10/1975

George Ottley      10/13/1966

Tom Pelaia          12/9/1976

Sheldon Reynolds 1/10/1981

Millard Thatcher 4/12/1979

## Inactive Member

Jeff Tilley           4/13/1972

## Active Members

Joseph Bray        4/8/2010

Shannon Casserly 1/10/2008

Daniel Espaillat   11/9/2006

William Hicks       5/9/1991

Otis Johnson        4/14/2011

Peter Mykowski    2/12/1987

Nancy Renzulli     9/17/2014

Frank Sapienza     4/12/1990

Joseph Sapienza   9/14/2006

Lois Tanis           9/11/1997

Leon White          10/22/1992



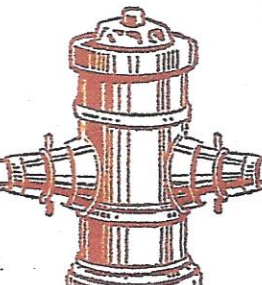
Circa 1952 photo of Bell and Siren Ambulance



## In Memory Of Those Members Who Have Answered the Last Alarm

Saul Bartelstone	3-18-52
Charles Cohen	10-18-52
John Cosgrove	4-30-61
Herbert Seaman	1-22-62
Robert James	10-21-67
John Cogan	1-11-69
Ernest Putrino	3-26-71
Alvin Baer	4-12-71
Benedict Stevens	12-1-71
Frederick Gordon	5-8-76
Dr. Arthur Devlin	4-10-77
Wm. Kroeschel	5-20-77
Milton Hauck	1-9-78
Paul Hollywood	4-10-78
Thomas Cleary	3-17-79
Col. Joe Kunze	3-27-80
Meyer Fenichel	4-2-81
Thomas Cora	8-10-81
John Wilson	10-15-84

George Mango	4-23-85
Don Roth	1-19-87
Leo Curtis	6-16-87
Fred Bissinger	9-23-88
Carl Mueller	5-24-89
Stanley Bozym	2-9-90
George Brown	3-18-92
Raymond Pirotte	12-29-92
Al Graul	8-10-93
Joseph Rienzo	4-24-95
Walter Harris	10-14-95
Stanley Zach	4-9-96
George Hospodar	4-27-96
Ed Massmann	1-30-03
John Zach	4-29-03
Melvin Epstein	2-1-05
Edward Sager	10-5-06
Albert Smyth	12-6-07
Grant Miller	3-14-02



## History of The Bell and Siren Club, Inc.

During February of 1949, two young men, John Edelen and Jerome Seigel, decided to form a fire buff club. Knowing that there must be others who shared their interest in the fire service, they asked an old friend, Newark Firefighter James Donlan (later to be Deputy Chief) for assistance. With his help they visited the Newark Firehouses, and were able to compile a list of names of other buffs. Included was Retired U.S. Army Colonel Joseph Kunze, who would later become very influential in securing the cooperation of the City of Newark and the Fire Department in helping this group of fire buffs organize.

Two months later, on April 23, 1949 the Bell and Siren Club was formed. The main objective of the Club was the same then, as it is today—to provide support services to the Firefighters at multiple alarm fires. Originally the Club only provided canteen service to Newark, East Orange, South Orange and later Bloomfield. In these early days members responded to fires in their own cars, and served coffee or cold drinks from portable urns. By September of 1950 the Newark Fire Department gave Club members permission to wear distinctive red helmets and badges. Originally members were informed of fires via the telephone, but in the 1960's members were provided with Plectron Alerting radios and today members are notified on their cell phones via the "E-Dispatch" paging service. All requests for the Bell and Siren Club are processed through Newark Fire Headquarters, and they dispatch the Rig.

In January 1952 the Club took a giant step, when its first truck was placed in service. A milk company had donated an old truck to the Club and it was modified to become the first Mobile Canteen Unit. While crude by today's standards, it was better than setting up portable propane heaters on the sidewalk to make coffee.

A short time later the Bell and Siren Club made another significant move to aid the Firefighters. It provided an ambulance for the exclusive use of the Firefighters and their families. Besides the canteen truck (the Rig), the ambulance also responded to multiple alarms and helped aid and comfort many Firefighters who had to be transported to the hospital. For about 10 years the Club provided ambulance service, and it was only because the rising cost of insurance and the difficulty of getting First-Aid certified manpower, that the Bell and Siren Club had to suspend ambulance operations.

Another used vehicle was secured; this time an old laundry truck to replace the "milk wagon" as our second Rig. Finally enough money was saved to purchase a brand new canteen in 1965. This truck was built to Club specifications and was similar in design to our last Rig, which was purchased new in 1982. Besides having built in coffee urns, stove, microwave oven, refrigerator/freezer, and water tank, it also has a full bank of radios, enabling the Rig to be used as a mobile field communications center and/or command post.

The Bell and Siren Club is a charter member of the International Fire Buff Associates (I.F.B.A.), an organization of 75 fire buff clubs in the United States and Canada. About half of the clubs also provide canteen service, and the Bell and Siren Club is partners in a Mutual Aid agreement with the Box 54 Club in Teaneck, the Gong Club of Jersey City, and the Bayonne Fire Canteen. This cooperation worked very well during 9/11 when the Bell and Siren Club, along with the other canteens provided almost around the clock service for several days to the various emergency workers on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River.

After the horrors of 9/11, it became apparent that the Club needed to give serious attention to replacing the current Rig. The truck was beginning to have major mechanical problems, and it was time to consider a new Rig. In 2005 a committee was formed and they visited other I.F.B.A. clubs in the Northeast that had recently purchased canteen trucks. All the ideas were consolidated, and specs were drawn for a new Bell and Siren Rig.

Early in 2006 a contract was signed with Krammes Custom to build a custom canteen for us on a new 2007 GMC, 5500 chassis with a 6.6L Duramax 6600 Diesel Engine. Features include: a 50 gallon potable water tank; Onan 8.5KW diesel generator; brushed aluminum cabinetry with Stainless Steel countertops; Bunn automatic coffee urns and hot chocolate dispenser; refrigerator/freezer & microwave; and a built in mister on the side of the Rig for firefighter rehab.

The final cost of this new vehicle was \$150,000 and the bulk of the money came from donations from the firefighters of the communities we serve, as well as Club savings in our capital account. Even though there is federal and grant money available to volunteer fire departments, we found that we did not qualify since the Bell and Siren Club is technically not a "fire department" in the eyes of the government. Thus we were forced to borrow \$50,000 through a program the state of New Jersey has for volunteer organizations. We were fortunate to qualify for this, and with the loan we were able to meet our financial obligations.

The Bell and Siren Club is a 501 C (3) charitable organization and we do not receive any municipal or government money to help our operations. Our primary source of funding is through a payroll deduction with the Newark Firefighters. This was instituted in 1982 to help raise money for the then new canteen truck, and through the years this funding source has only gotten stronger. Besides Newark, the Firefighters of East Orange also contribute through a payroll deduction and donations are also received annually from the unions and other fire departments we service. All the Bell and Siren members are very appreciative of this financial support.

Our new Rig was formally dedicated on November 4, 2007 with an old-fashioned fire department "wet-down" at Newark's Orange St. firehouse. We were honored to have Newark Mayor Cory Booker, as well as fire officials and firefighters, fire buffs and the general public in attendance to help us dedicate the Rig.

Every year at its annual convention the I.F.B.A. presents the "Henry N. Wilwers Fire Buff of the Year Award." Member clubs are encouraged to nominate individuals whom they feel demonstrate leadership in their club, service to their local fire department and are involved in their local communities. This is the most prestigious award that the I.F.B.A. can present and the Bell and Siren Club is honored that we have had 5 winners, the most of any club:

1975	Arthur "Doc" Devlin, MD
1980	Edward A. Massmann
1984	G. Grant Miller
1996	George Ottley
2014	Ira Cohen

Through its many years of service the Bell and Siren Club has always been a volunteer organization. Members donate their time, efforts and money, and this is supplemented by contributions from the Firefighters. Also through all the years of service, the Rig has always been

stationed in a Newark firehouse. However, in the mid-1990's, with the closing and consolidating of many of Newark's firehouses, the Club was told that space was no longer available, and they would have to look for quarters outside of a Newark. Fortunately, room was found in an old ambulance garage adjacent to East Orange Fire Headquarters, and in 1996 the Bell and Siren Club moved into their new home.

At the same time, change was also affecting the fire departments in Essex County. Budgetary cuts causing reductions in the fire fighting forces and the closing of various fire houses resulted in the greater use of mutual aid. Increasingly the Club was called to communities that we had not serviced in the past. Major fires necessitated the calling of many neighboring fire departments, and the Bell and Siren Club was one of the support organizations also dispatched. Thus our response area grew from the original 4 towns to all of Essex County, and on occasion, to other counties as well. The Bell and Siren Club is proud to be an Associate Member of the Essex County Fire Chief's Association as well as having representation on the Board of the 200 Club of Essex County.

Another change occurring at this time was the developing concept of "rehab" at fire scenes. Medical research indicated that in stressful situations firefighters should not be drinking caffeine, and highly sugared drinks, and eating cookies. The Bell and Siren Club incorporated the suggestions and changed its basic serving menu to Gatorade and cold water; fresh fruit and granola bars; and hot chocolate. In an effort to help cool the firefighters during extremely hot days, the Rig carries ice-cold towels, and portable misting, cooling fans.

After 65 years, the Bell and Siren Club continues to provide 24/7 service, averaging 75-100 runs a year. While there have been some changes through the years, the basic function remains—to serve and support the Newark Fire Department, as well as the firefighters in the rest of Essex County.



Founding members John Edelen (left) and Jerome Siegel (right) flank members Bob Kane, Grant Miller and Ira Cohen at the June 1981 Valhalla Muster

# Disaster Fighters

by JESSIE FRANKL

A MAN WITH A HOBBY is a happy individual indeed. One of the most unusual hobbies being practiced in ever increasing numbers by men, boys and some women, is that of "Buffing." Webster defines a "buff" as an "enthusiast about going to fires." The oldest and one of the most active "buff" organizations in the Metropolitan Newark area is the "Bell & Siren Club Inc."

The objectives of this organization in part, as outlined in its Constitution, are as follows:

To aid our fellow man without regard to race, creed or color.

To perpetuate the memory and spirit of the men of the fire-fighting profession.

To preserve documents, photographs and relics pertaining to the history of fire-fighting.

The Bell & Siren Club has been in active operation since 1949. Its membership of 50 includes a doctor, business executives, a bus station master, a chemist, a plumber, a painter and a mortician. Jack Huffman of EB Assembly and John Zach of the Order Department are also members.

The Club responds to every multiple fire alarm or disaster in Newark on call from Fire Headquarters and is on tap for bordering cities and towns. The club members participated in all phases of work at two of the recent plane crashes in Elizabeth. More recently they operated at the Anheuser Busch disaster. In fact, they were the last unit to leave the scene.

A majority of the members take active part in the Civilian Defense activities of their respective communities. Many have received auxiliary fire training. It is a common sight to see the men of the "Bell & Siren Club" working long hours side by side with their professional brothers at scenes of large fires. At such times the organization operates under the orders of the Chief in charge of the fire-fighting forces. When the situation demands it the hard pressed police are aided in maintaining police lines thus giving the fire forces adequate room in which to operate.

Since April of 1953 the Club operates its own ambulance. This piece of equipment and the "Emergency Field Unit No. 1," the "Rig" as it is more commonly known, are familiar sights at scenes of large fires. Either or both units are often "special called" to scenes of smaller fires. The only female member of the organization does the dispatching. Members keep in touch with operations by phone and radio.

Thus far this past year the Bell & Siren Club has responded to 48 alarms. A total of 273 gallons of coffee, 29 of bouillon were made and distributed at scenes of fires. 184 gallons of water, 1140 half-pints of milk and 586 sandwiches were dispensed. The ambulance gave first aid to 50 firemen, 5 civilians and 1 soldier.

• A 3-alarm at Lafayette & Madison Aves., Newark, brought prompt action from the Bell & Siren volunteers.



The question most frequently asked of the club members is "Why do you do it? Why do you get out of bed at all hours of the night in all sorts of weather to help the firemen? After all, they're getting paid for it." Our reply, "We consider it a small token of our appreciation to the men who are daily risking their lives on behalf of all of us. If you have ever watched a fireman bring a child safely out of a burning building, or have seen him dragged out gasping and perhaps dying from poisonous smoke and fumes, then perhaps you may understand why the men of the Bell & Siren Club in their small way carry on in this hobby which is rapidly turning into a part-time profession."



Ruth Conradi, the club's first dispatcher notifies members by telephone.  
In the 1960's the Club installed a Plectron System which notified members by radio  
of a multiple alarm fire



Circa 1950 photo of the Club's first ambulance and canteen, a converted milk truck



The first Bell and Siren Canteen – a converted Milk Truck



The Bell and Siren Club operating at a major fire in Newark  
Circa 1954



Second Bell and Siren Canteen



Bell and Siren in Action Circa 1960



May 1 1965 Dedication of New Rig in front of Newark City Hall. From Left to Right: Retired N.F.D. Chief John Wilkinson; South Orange Fire Chief Joseph Allen; N.F.D. Chief Joseph Redden; N.F.D. Director John P. Caufield; N.F.D. Chaplain Msgr. Mc Cabe; Ira Cohen; Fred Bissinger; N.F.D. Surgeon Padullo; John Zach; Arthur "Doc" Devlin, MD; Harold Burns





Newark City Hall banner proclaims May 1966 as “Bell & Siren Month”



1970's photo of Club members: Back Row, Left to Right—Ed Massmann; Phil Brower; Grant Miller; Tom Cora; NFD Director John Caufield; Bob Kalkman; John D'Ascensio; John Shoemaker; Ed Burbank. Front Row—Tom Pelaia; George Ottley; John Zach; Ira Cohen; and NFD Deputy Chief Robert Marron



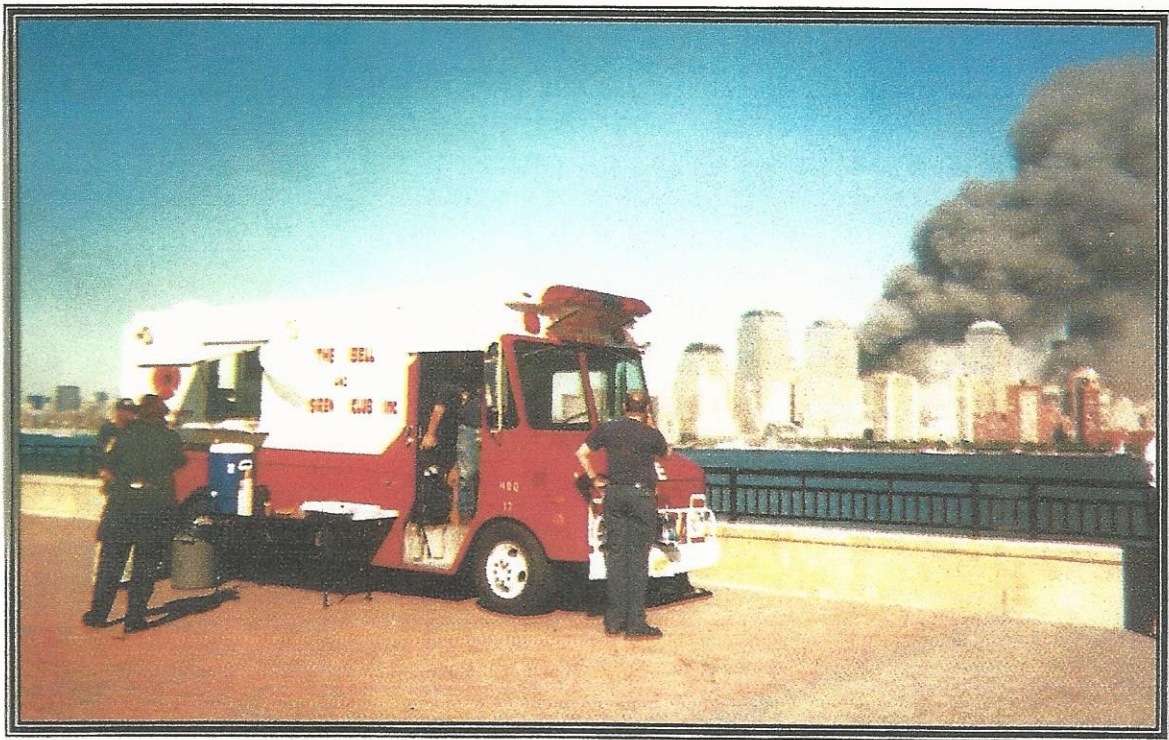
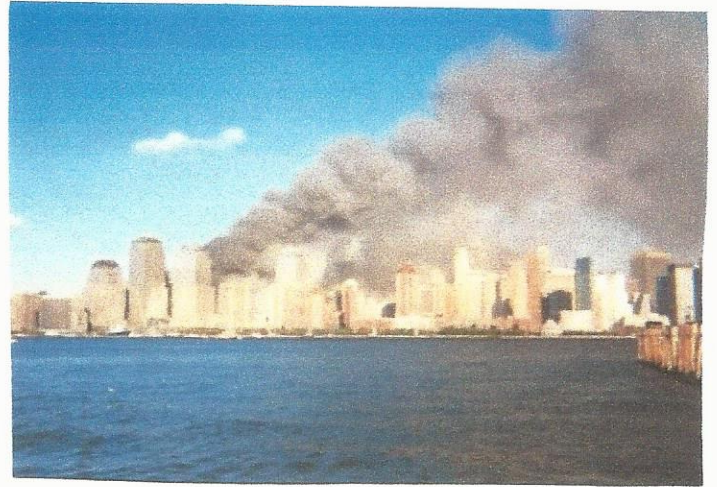
1982 Grumman Olsen/K & B custom built canteen



Same canteen after being refurbished by Kenco Manufacturing in 1992



Headquarters 17 on the scene in 1999 at a Three Alarm Fire in East Orange



Headquarters 17 operated for over 10 hours in Liberty State Park on the fateful day of Sept. 11, 2001



Former Mayor and present U.S. Senator Cory Booker addresses members and guests at the 2007 Christmas Party

**The Bell and Siren Club  
Dedication of  
2007  
GMC / Krammes Kustom Canteen**



**Sunday November 4, 2007**

**1pm-4pm**

**Newark Fire Department**

**Rescue 1 / Truck 1**

**191 Orange St. Newark, NJ**

**Refreshments will be served  
Apparatus welcome**

# Rig Dedication, November 4, 2007

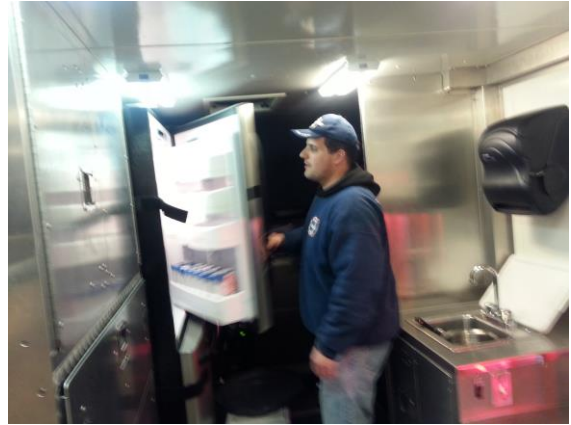


Top Photo: Club President Frank Sapienza & Tom Pelaia

Bottom Photo: Newark Apparatus "Wet Down" New Rig



**Member Leon White**



**Member Joe Bray**



**Leon White and Otis Johnson responding**



**Headquarters #17 in action**



As a member of the International Fire Buff Associates the Bell and Siren Club participates in a Mutual Aid group of Northern New Jersey Canteen Clubs. From left to right, The Bell and Siren Club, the Gong Club of Jersey City, the Box 54 of Teaneck and the Bayonne Fire Canteen