

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

October

Fire prevention week

Fire Prevention Week is traditionally a time for the firefighters to demonstrate the lessons of fire safety, visiting classrooms throughout the town. That pattern is one I still remember from my own elementary school in Kansas, and one that continues today. It is always a good time for the Byline to support the safety message of fire departments.

This year, however, with the heroism of the Fire Department of New York fresh in our minds since the attacks on the World Trade Center, the week calls for more than simple safety reminders. So the column will expand beyond the security tips of other Fire Prevention Weeks.

Our town approached the week with a new show of appreciation for the ongoing work of our Longmeadow Fire Department. Along with other townspeople I took the opportunity to honor our fire department by participating in the events.

The department hosted a Saturday open house at the new station. Children loved their rare opportunity to climb around in the cabs of the fire trucks, and it was great to see the enthusiasm they took to that occasion. They were invited into the demonstration trailer, a model of a house that shows both hazards and safety tips. The lessons taught in school classrooms are reinforced with the use of the teaching tool, owned jointly by Longmeadow and East Longmeadow.

Firefighters were gracious hosts to the visiting children and their parents, and the visitors also witnessed the serious side of a fire department's job when the town ambulance was called to respond to several emergency calls. The children were simply relishing the day of fun, but adults seemed changed by the recent television images of fire personnel doing their life-threatening work in New York.

After the open house came Firefighters' Sunday, a day when members of the Longmeadow Fire Department and their families attended Sunday worship service at St. Andrew's Church. On behalf of townspeople, Tina Schwartz presented a plaque of appreciation to Chief Madison. Selectman Jerry Nolet and I thanked the firefighters and their families for their service to all of us.

Congressman Richard Neal attended the service, and he used the occasion to present an American flag previously flown over the Capitol in Washington to the department's chaplain, St. Andrew's rector Larry Provenzano. As a member of the state's corps of chaplains, Father Provenzano has worked two tours of duty ministering to the crews still working at the Trade Center site.

After Sunday's church service I returned to my work at the State House. Our Longmeadow firefighters returned to their work for all of us. They may work as paramedics when we have medical emergencies. They may instruct our children in such safety strategies as "stop, drop and roll." They may remind homeowners to check and replace smoke detector batteries. And they will be ready to protect our lives and our homes in the event of a fire.

Our witness to such professionals in action deepens our appreciation of that security. Thank you.

NOTE: The state budget is not yet adopted. Cuts of as much as \$300 million are needed because of falling tax revenue in the first quarter of the fiscal year. Immediate resolution is unlikely, but it must be voted by the legislature by mid-November.