

In the West Sayville Fire Department dedication is personified in the name of Stanley A. Thuma and defined in the terms of leadership, mentoring and role model. Born the son of Bohemia fire chief Anton Thuma in 1923, the younger Thuma began his sixty-six years of dedicated volunteer fire service in the West Sayville Fire Department on August 12, 1946 after discharge from the United States Navy as a World War II veteran of the Atlantic Theatre and short stints of out of town employment with General Electric and Western Electric.

After settling in West Sayville for good and taking up occupations focused on the bay and ocean, Stanley's firematic avocation began to blossom. Initially serving as a firefighter, he soon took on the added responsibilities of being an assistant chief in the mid-1950s and served in that capacity until being named chief in April 1964. For the two years that followed, the fire department was busy fighting fires under his leadership, often times providing mutual aid assistance to its neighbors for brush fires that scorched thousands of acres. Within the community Stanley and the fire department began a campaign that ultimately was instrumental in persuading Suffolk County to purchase the Hard Estate on the south side of Montauk Highway starting at West Avenue for parkland which was later developed into the West Sayville Golf Course and Country Club (site of this year's annual golf tournament). The fire department also initiated scholarships in both the Sayville and Connetquot School Districts that continue today as well as organized a community blood drive that resulted in 152 pints in donations to aid an eight year-old girl who had been critically burned when her pajamas caught fire while warming milk on the stove for her younger brother.

As a young assistant fire chief, Stanley was also present from day one of the Islip Town Fire Chiefs' Council. He recalls the first and second meetings in 1954 at Bay Shore and Brentwood respectively as if they took place yesterday. Since then he has compiled a remarkable and unlikely equaled attendance record with the organization of making every meeting but five of the 500 plus that have occurred so far. He is one of the last, if not the last, charter member of the Council alive today.

Concurrent with his firefighting commitment Stanley also participated on the fire department's Flying Dutchmen drill team for a number of years and served as the team's captain in 1957. After retiring from the team he continued to remain active on the track as an official until just several years ago.

Over the years the department's most senior past chief has also filled many administrative roles in the form of committee work, particularly as it relates to the finances of the department; became a delegate to the town, county and state firemen's associations and served as a president and, so far, the only treasurer of the West Sayville Ex-Chiefs' Organization in its twenty-eight years of existence. Amazingly, Stanley still enthusiastically contributes in the same manner even today. His seemingly unending commitment to the fire department has been thrice recognized when he was awarded Firefighter of the Year in 1979, 1985 and 1999.

Perhaps Stanley's greatest contribution to the fire department is the least obvious and one that's not measured by badges, plaques or other tokens of recognition nor fanfare. Nearly forty-five years ago he served as a co-director of the then nineteen member junior fire department in West Sayville. On the track he shared his intimate knowledge of firematic competition and, in the firehouse, his firefighting experiences, insight and guidance. More importantly, Stanley provided the motivation to transform childhood activities and dreams into productive years of community service and achievements with the fire department. So much so that fourteen of the nineteen juniors went on to become members of the fire department of which eight still remain today. That was quite an impressive recruitment and retention program at a time when those terms were unheard of in the fire service.

Today when the fire siren sounds you won't see eighty-nine year old Stanley riding the apparatus but you will find him making his way to the firehouse to be available for behind the scene support for those that do respond. He's also there on a daily basis and whenever non-emergency work has to be done. Similarly, Stanley will continue to be a part of the monthly meetings of the Islip Town Fire Chiefs' Council, putting his two cents worth (without consideration for inflation) in on matters that he has been a part of for so many years. Even after six and one-half decades of volunteering, Stanley Thuma's spark of participation still burns as intensely today as it did on his first day back in 1946.