

Firemen honor fallen medic

By Jim Custer
Staff Writer

They came from Ronkonkoma in the east, Glen Oaks in the west, Nyack in the north and all points in between. Their freshly pressed uniforms and the flower-decorated fire engines gave a festive look to the gathering, but it was an occasion for deep sorrow. An intermittent drizzle from the gray clouds above added to the pall below.

It was an assembly that firefighters and police alike always dread. They were at the Nassau Knolls Cemetery in Port Washington to honor a fallen comrade. Up to 1,000 uniformed and civilian mourners were drawn to the town for the day's solemn ceremonies.

Ingrid Sowle, 52, and mother of three grown children, had been a volunteer medic with the Port Washington Fire Department for just over a year. She died Feb. 21 from severe body trauma as a result of injuries sustained when she was hit by a car driven by a man who has been charged with driving while intoxicated and leaving the scene of a fatality.

At the time of her death, Sowle was returning to her car after stopping at an accident scene on West Shore Road to offer assistance. When she crossed the road to return to her own car, a station wagon driven by Michael Giovannotto, 38, of 2376 Willoughby Avenue, Seaford ended her life.

"The irony of it is she had stopped voluntarily that night to offer assistance at an accident scene," said six-year volunteer fireman Lt. Gary Zirpolo. "And she became the victim of an accident herself."

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Photograph by John Cotsifas

Firefighters from across the Island attended the funeral of Ingrid Sowle, 52, a volunteer medic with the Port Washington Fire Department who was killed by a hit-and-run driver at the scene of an accident to which she responded.

NEW YORK STATE DIVISION OF FIRE

Sowle: Remembered fondly

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Sowle had known some difficult times during her life. Born in Berlin in 1937, she grew up in a Germany that was being ravaged by war. She came to America at the age of 16 along with her mother and an aunt.

"Her death makes absolutely no sense," said Roy Smithheimer, president of the Port Washington Chamber of Commerce. "Everybody who knew her loved her. She was a very giving person."

Following 9:30 a.m. services at Our Lady of Fatima Roman Catholic Church in Manorhaven, where department chaplain Thomas Tobin delivered the eulogy, the entourage of mourners, led by a contingent of motorcycle police, drove slow-

ly down Shore Road, across Main Street through Port Washington. They turned right and began Ingrid's last mile down Port Washington Boulevard to the Nassau Knolls Cemetery.

Another irony was that the cemetery where she was laid to rest is directly across the street from the fire department's Fire Medic Company stationhouse where she had served.

Many of the mourners, both uniformed and civilian, spoke of Ingrid's selflessness and her eagerness to help people. It was her willingness to aid humanity that put her in harm's way that fateful night.

As the fire engine carrying Ingrid's bier passed through the cemetery gates, the mourners softly uttered their final sentiment — "Rest in peace, Ingrid."