

Lime Rock Firefighter, O'Neill March With FDNY On Sept. 11

By **MARCIA GREEN**, Valley Breeze Editor

LINCOLN - Joseph Amaral, the Lime Rock firefighter who rescued a 15-year-old boy from Scott's Pond a year ago, was the guest of the Dean Street firehouse in Brooklyn, N.Y., last week where he experienced the solemn Sept. 11 anniversary ceremonies observed by this station and the city.

On the eve of the 8th anniversary of the terrorist attack, he shared dinner with the Brooklyn firefighters and stayed overnight at the house where the turnout jackets of seven who died that day in 2001 still hang from their pegs.

Amaral was invited to the station by state Sen. Edward O'Neill of Lincoln who returns every Sept. 11 to join the men and women in their annual vigil and remembrance of the day.

O'Neill says met the company during the winter of 2002 when he organized a chance for some New York firefighters to escape the city's pain for a few days by heading down to a North Carolina condominium complex where owners opened more than 40 units to the heroes, spouses and children.

The men and women of the Dean Street station who had lost so many were chosen for a few days of boating, golf and barbecues that helped the traumatized firefighters reconnect with families after months devoted to funerals and searching the remains of Ground Zero, said O'Neill.

Ever since, says the freshman senator, he's remained close with the firehouse. Amaral's first-ever trip to New York City had started last Thursday at the Rhode Island Statehouse, where he was one of three who received a citation from the governor for his off-duty rescue of the drowning youth on June 10, 2008. After that ceremony, he and O'Neill took the train to New York.

O'Neill says the eve of Sept. 11 is always a solemn night at the firehouse. Amaral chose to sleep over to experience the city atmosphere while O'Neill chose the quiet of a hotel room.

The next morning, the active firefighters were joined by visitors who, like O'Neill, make an annual pilgrimage there. Wearing dress blues, marching to bass drum beat and carrying flags, they took the subway to Ground Zero and then all marched across the windy, rain-swept Brooklyn Bridge to attend an annual Mass at St. Augustine Roman Catholic Church.

"The bass drummers pounded the drums in defiance of the wind and rain," said O'Neill.

Amaral later described a "chilling feeling that wouldn't leave my body" as he surveyed the procession of firefighters in Manhattan and Brooklyn that day. "I saw a motorist come to an abrupt and complete stop and immediately jumped out of his vehicle and snapped to attention and saluted to show his respect until we proceeded past him."

More than 1,000 family members, retired and current firefighters joined together for the Mass, said O'Neill.

At a collation served all the firefighters following the Mass, Amaral said, "I just sat, listened, and watched sensing a sad feeling of how these families lost fathers, sons, brothers and husbands on that day. I saw a family of 10 siblings sitting together who had lost their father and are much older now since 9-11.