

## Mineola Junior Fire Department Hosts German Jr. FD

Since 1976 the Mineola Junior Fire Department has been introducing the youth of Mineola to service to their community. Until recently that service rarely left the borders of Mineola but a dedicated group of juniors and Firefighters sought to expand the department's horizons. In July of 2007 an historic event took place. The FF-STELLINGEN-HAMBURG JUGENDFEUERWEHR a German Youth Fire Brigade, came to Mineola. This marked the first time that a German Junior Fire Department has ever made a visit to America. The purpose of the visit was to allow the youths from both countries to experience each others cultures and of course to participate in firematic training. The ground work for this visit was laid over the course of the last year with visits by German firefighters to Mineola and Mineola firefighters traveling to Germany to foster the exchange. When the arrival day came, some of the members were apprehensive that the language and cultural differences might make the interaction difficult. The fears were quickly put to rest as the teens from Mineola and Hamburg instantly connected. By the end of the ten day visit, the experience had created lifelong friendships.

The German Juniors were met at JFK Airport by a contingent of Mineola Firefighters and Juniors. Ironically, the Plattedeutsche Park was holding their Volksfest that night so both Junior Fire departments traveled to Franklin Square where they were given a heroes welcome. It was here that the bonding began with teenagers joking around learning each others language and experiencing each others foods. The following morning our German guest began touring Mineola and made a stop at the Nassau County Supreme Court. No translation was needed as Judge Ute Wolf Lalley, the highest-ranking official of German descent welcomed them to her courtroom in their native German language. After a tour of the Nassau County Firefighters Museum and the Cradle of Aviation Museum it was time for lunch at Paradise Island in Williston Park. That night the three companies of the Mineola Fire department provided instruction on American Firefighting techniques. The German Juniors paired up with Mineola Junior firefighters to participate in the drills. Language barriers were not an issue as the universal language of firefighting took over.

On the Third day the Juniors from Mineola and Germany were up bright and early and heading towards the Adirondacks. They traveled to the Great Escape Amusement Park in Lake George where they spent the rest of the day. Over the next few days they toured the Lake George region enjoying water parks, Go-Karting and Laser Tag. Laser tag was a big hit as it is not often found in Germany. They rounded out their trip upstate with a visit to the New York State Firemen's Museum. Back in Mineola, our guests enjoyed a traditional Portuguese meal courtesy of our gracious host Manny Carvalho at Barraida Restaurant.

On the Sixth day the German Juniors ventured into New York City. They traveled around Manhattan on a Circle Line Cruise. Later that day they traveled to Brooklyn's famous Coney Island where they enjoyed hot dogs before heading over to Keyspan park. It was Firefighters night and as the juniors watched the minor league Baseball game the highlight came when the Mineola -Hamburg partnership was announced on the scoreboard. The German Juniors also enjoyed the stadium "Wave" as all of the firefighters acknowledged them. From one end of the Island to the other, on day 7 the Juniors traveled out to Southold to the home of Ex-Chief Jack Gayson. Jack and Karen Gayson hosted a poolside Barbeque which was a great time. Ex -Chief Walter Langer and Firefighter Don Franz also arrived with their boats and took the teens out tubing and water skiing.

On day 8 we returned to NYC for a walking tour of the city. The sights included: The Empire State Building, Times Square, Broadway, Central Park and FDNY Engine 34. A solemn and emotional point was the visit to Ground Zero. Ex-Chief Scott Strauss, a Former NYPD Emergency Services Detective recounted the devastation and rescue efforts from that fateful day. On the 9th day it was time to think about the return home and our German guest wanted to go shopping. We headed to Roosevelt Field mall where they had so much fun they asked to return again the next day. That night the Mineola Fire Department hosted a going away party for our German friends. This party was attended by over 200 people including members from five other local Junior fire departments. The German Juniors received numerous proclamations including a presentation from Mayor Jack Martins declaring FF-STELLINGEN-HAMBURG JUGENDFEUERWEHR Day in Mineola. Many other organizations were also on hand to recognize this historic partnership. Several groups provided symbolic gifts to our guests such as Fire Company t-shirts, jackets and hats. The advisors from both Junior Fire Departments joined with Mineola Fire Department Chief Scott Holliday and the Chief of the Stellingen-Hamburg Fire Department to officially sign a partnership agreement. It was agreed that this historic exchange will continue with a trip to Germany for Mineola's Juniors in 2008.

On the Last day we set aside some time to spend with the guests who had now become like family to us. The time came to head back to JFK Airport and we reluctantly boarded the bus to bring them back. As we headed down Jericho Turnpike a remarkable event took place. Passing the Headquarters of the New Hyde Park and Garden City Park Fire departments, their members were standing at attention with the apparatus pulled out. As the Mineola convoy passed by, the brother firefighters sounded their sirens to acknowledge the historic event. All agreed that this was an excellent way to send our brethren back to Germany. Arriving at the airport, both Junior Fire departments spent nearly an hour saying goodbye with hugs, laughs and tears. This marks the beginning of a partnership that is scheduled to extend back to Germany in 2008. Mineola Junior Firefighters will travel there in the summer to complete the exchange.