



# The AJ Stanke Story

There are days when Past Chief Arnold "AJ" Stanke rearranges equipment in the borough's fire station just like he used to do. Except now when he is done, firefighters place the equipment back in its proper place. Stanke, or AJ to all his friends, including a large number in this borough, where he served the volunteer fire department for 17 years, has Alzheimer's disease. Nearly three and 1/2 years ago at the age of 51 AJ was diagnosed with Early Onset Alzheimer's Disease. He is now in the advanced stages needing 24 hour care. When he was diagnosed his world changed and yet he still found the courage to tell his wife over and over that he was going to beat this disease and that he would be okay.

AJ grew up in Union County with his parents and a younger sister and brother. They were an average family with many relatives living in the neighborhood. Like many children he enjoyed playing pretend cowboys and Indians with his brother. AJ and his brother also loved to torment their sister.

AJ attended St. Joseph's Grammar School and graduated from Emerson High School, where he made a name for himself on the school baseball team. Shortly after graduation he received letters from the Detroit Tigers and the New York Mets to try out for their teams. After much thought he decided to attend New Jersey College of Engineering and Jersey State College.

After graduation still unsure about his career choice he started to work for the North Bergen Post Office. During his 30 year career, he worked in many offices including Fairview, Cliffside Park, Fort Lee, Parsippany, Roseland, Netcong and Rockaway. Last year he was awarded a certificate from the Post Office recognizing his many years of service.

In 1980 AJ decided he wanted to become active in the community. He was interested in the fire department and how these volunteers served the community. He became a member of the Fairview Volunteer Fire Department where he trained in fire service.

In 1989 he moved his family to Rockaway, and joined the Rockaway Borough Fire Department. AJ was very active in the department serving for many years as lieutenant, captain and fire chief in 1999. He was active in working with surrounding communities encouraging fire departments to work hand and hand with each other during times of need. He also loved working with children. Annually he would visit the local schools to teach fire safety and conduct monthly fire drills. He invited all of the school children to the fire house to make them more comfortable with the firemen and their equipment in case the department was ever called to their homes.

AJ also coached Little League for many years, taking pride in helping the boys learn the game. Last year he was filled with pride when he saw his son and his team win the New Jersey State Babe Ruth Championship for 15 year old boys. The team later went on to finish second in the Mid Atlantic Regional Tournament.

AJ has found much happiness in life. AJ and Carol have been married for 26 years and have two children, Maggie and Kevin. They are expecting their first grandchild in February.

AJ has always lived by the motto "Do the best you can and accept the things you can't change." Even though he can not change the hand he has been dealt, AJ is still fighting and will continue to fight.