

Long Island Now

Firehouses cut up cars, remember comrade

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Three years after a Northport firefighter was killed in an auto accident, his legacy continues during the annual Chuck Varese Vehicle Extrication Tournament Saturday at the Northport Fire Department Training Grounds.

Robert "Beefy" Varese, Chuck's father and a former chief of the Northport Fire Department, said his 25-year-old son died about a month before the inaugural competition -- which was already in the works -- so it was named in his honor.

"It just took on a whole new meaning. It has become a labor of love for me," said event chairman Varese. "This is something he loved to do. . . . A lot of people are doing this because he's my son, because they knew him, because he loved this sport, and because he was a good firefighter. He was just a good person."

The Commack Fire Department claimed victory Saturday among 18 departments, completing an extrication in 14:29. East Northport took second place at 20:12, and Cold Spring Harbor came in third at 20:23. Surrounded by judges, firefighters had to follow safety regulations while quickly cutting up donated scrap cars donated by Medford-based Gershow Recycling using the Jaws of Life.

"It is a timed event, but we also want to make sure they are putting the tools in the right place," said Manorville's Joseph Amato, a judge and employee of fire equipment company Firematic Supply.

Amato explained how teams could get time penalties for miscues.

"It all falls back to safety," Amato said. "Not only for the firefighters at the scene, but also for the aided that are trapped at the vehicle."

Pictured: Firefighters compete during the fourth annual Chuck Varese Vehicle Extrication Tournament in Northport Saturday. (May 14, 2011)

[< back to article](#)