

Extraction tourney brings out best in 'bravest'

By Karen Forman

[Write The Author](#)

May 19, 2011 | 11:11 AM

For the fourth year in a row, firemen from 18 different districts on Long Island gathered to practice their vehicle extraction techniques in a tournament commemorating Chuck Varese, a 25-year-old member of the Northport Fire Department who died in a motor vehicle crash three years ago.

The 32 teams competing in the 2011 Chuck Varese Vehicle Extraction Tournament at Steer's Pit this past Saturday were from various Long Island fire departments, including but not limited to Centerport, Cold Spring Harbor, Commack, East Northport, Eaton's Neck, Halesite, Huntington, Huntington Manor, Greenlawn, Nesconset and Northport. Coming in first place with a time of 14 minutes and 29 seconds was Commack; second at 20:12 was East Northport and third at 20:23 was Cold Spring Harbor.

In the final of four rounds, teams had to take apart a minivan. Though it's a timed contest, doing everything safely and correctly factor in as well.

"This training is stuff we have to do," said Chuck's father and former Northport fire chief, Robert "Beefy" Varese, who is also the code compliance officer for Northport village. "This is training we can actually use. We have to rescue people trapped inside cars all the time. Sometimes there will be multiple people pinned inside a vehicle, and it's very important that we don't jeopardize the passenger compartment when we're doing this extraction. The inside of the vehicle is off-limits at all times. No tools can be inside the car either. Everything has to remain outside the vehicle. We also have to make sure the car is stabilized so it doesn't move at all and we can never put ourselves between the tool and the car. The tool is freestanding and we are holding it. We have to be very careful not to hurt ourselves or the passengers."

Teams are penalized for any of those mistakes, said Northport Fire Department member Lyndsey Ciaccio, who was assisting the event.

Each team was made up of five members, including a cutter, a spreader, a safety officer, a lube man and a pump operator, Ciaccio said. Two teams would go head-to-head in each round, with the winner of each round advancing to the next. Judging the contest were firefighters and chiefs from various districts.



From left, Northport Deputy Mayor Henry Tobin, town Councilwoman Glenda Jackson, Councilman Mark Cuthbertson, Northport Fire Chief John McKenna, Robert "Beefy" Varese, Gershow Recycling's Huntington Station manager Rich D'Angelo, Councilwoman Susan Berland, Northport Trustee Tom Kehoe, Gershow's Steve Rossetti, Northport Trustee Damon McMullen, Gershow Safety Director Charles Keeling and Councilman Mark Mayoka. Photo by Rick Recard ([click for larger version](#))



Huntington Fire Department members practicing an extraction on a car this past Saturday. Photos by Karen Forman ([click for larger version](#))

CHARIOT COLLISION CENTER
10% OFF BODY WORK [Click Here!](#)
LIFETIME GUARANTEE
 91 Gnarled Hollow Rd. • E. Setauket

Write Your Own Classified Ad!
EASY • SECURE
AVAILABLE 24/7
northshoreoflongisland.com
 Times Beacon Record Media

Stony Brook Vision World

 631
 246
 5468

WORTH PAINTING
 Interior/Exterior
 "Painting With Pride"
 631.331.5556



An East Northport team. (click for larger version)

Rossetti, director of special projects, were on hand for the event.

Rossetti said they donated 35 cars from Gershow's Medford location; all the cars were de-polluted and had their fluids removed so that they wouldn't catch on fire, he said. The cars are crushed and shredded after the event.

D'Angelo said that the firemen had been training for this tournament every night this week at his Huntington Station yard.

"I'm happy to do this," Rossetti said. "It's great training for the first responders and they're also having fun."

The tournament was started in May 2008 and coordinated by Varese. Every year, the event has raised \$1,000 for the Suffolk County Volunteer Firefighter Burn Center, which is part of Stony Brook University Hospital, but Varese's main goal is keeping the memory of his son alive.

"Chuck loved competing in these tournaments," said Varese, recalling that his son used to compete in a similar competition in Ridge. "To see his name on everyone's shirt here today is important to me," Varese said.

Chuck was riding his motorcycle on 25A early in the morning of April 16, 2008 when he was struck and killed. "My brother was the Centerport chief and he responded to the call, he was running the scene. The guy who killed Chuck was high and he's in jail now and he admitted to everything," Varese said. "But Chuck is really missed. All we do is think about it. I try not to. My whole family is in the fire department. My father is still in the fire department. I spent 37 years doing this. This is my life. It's very rewarding to help people."

He added, "Without Gershow, we couldn't do this. We could have all the T-shirts and hot dogs you want but without the cars, we'd have nothing. It was a huge effort for Gershow to get all the cars here and then take them away afterward. And Northport was wonderful to open their doors and host this event for us. A lot of people have put a lot of time and effort into this. Everyone got together and worked together. That's the premise."

Northport Fire Department member Tony Guido, who was Chuck's best friend, also attended. Recalling the 2010 Vehicle Extraction Tournament winners as Huntington Manor (first), Greenlawn (second) and Garden City Park (third), Guido commented upon the distance other fire departments are willing to travel for the event. "We were so glad to see Garden City Park come all the way down here," he said, noting that department's return this year.

The camaraderie among the firefighters is also remarkable, Guido said: "Everyone's rooting everyone on. Everyone's high-fiving everyone. ... You see people you don't always get to see. It's a really nice day. ... This is also great practice for the firefighters. Practice does make perfect. None of us wants to cut a car up because we know that means at least one person was in a bad accident. But we need to know how."

Print |
 Email Link |
 Feedback |
 Share

Tags: Featured News Around Town

Reader Feedback Submission

Submit

Use this form to submit Reader Feedback. Your submission will be reviewed by our staff before appearing on the Web site.

* required value

Title:

*Body: