

# Fire Chief DeMarzo recalled warmly by the community

By Chris Sykes  
Staff Writer

Nathan Parker, the former superintendent of Orange's public schools, was one of the many visiting dignitaries who attended the renaming ceremony of the Fire Department headquarters in honor of fallen Fire Chief Martin P. DeMarzo.

While it was not unusual for a former top school administrator to make an appearance in a city where he once held sway, it may have been something of a surprise for some people to see him so soon after he left the district at the end of the 2008-09 school year to take over the Summit district. But Parker said coming back to Orange was not only natural, but a pleasure, especially since he was there June 25 to honor DeMarzo.

"The chief was an elegant gentleman who was, I think, the first person in the city who came and introduced himself to me when I took over as the new superintendent of Orange's schools," said Parker. "He expressed to me his concern for the children of Orange and said that he hoped that I was interested in the children. I said that was why I wanted to be the superintendent of Orange. For five years, working closely with him, he gave me numerous suggestions of how to make it a better and safer school district and one in which we would care about our kids."

The formula for good schools and educating children was simple and straightforward for DeMarzo, Parker said. The idea was to just focus on the children and what was best for them and everything else would take care of itself.

"If we cared about our kids, we would have a strong city of Orange and a strong nation. Marty taught me in many ways to be a thoughtful and sensitive leader and to know what your priorities are," said Parker. "That's why I was back in Orange that day to celebrate this wonderful and well-deserved dedication of this firehouse that is really a model for the state and also for the country."

Parker said DeMarzo had an "authenticity and sincerity" that you "rarely see in lead-



File photo

The late Fire Chief Martin DeMarzo earned the respect of firefighters throughout New Jersey while he served the Orange Fire Department, but the work of himself and his colleagues to improve the quality of life for city residents was recognized by many people outside the firefighting community.

ers." He said there was "no phoniness about him," because he was simply the person that he presented himself to be and "he gave other people the confidence to be who they were too."

Police Director John Rappaport said he understood Parker's observations.

"He was really a person who stood out.

He didn't have to be asked to do something, he volunteered. I think the best word that I can use to describe him in working with him as another city manager would be 'absolute gentleman,' and I don't use those words often," said Rappaport. "He represented the city of Orange and the Fire Department at its height; he was a wonderful person to the

employees and the people that he managed; and in renaming the firehouse in his honor I believe the city is paying him the tribute that he deserves."

At Large Councilwoman Donna K. Williams said the qualities DeMarzo possessed in life were why the City Council decided to honor him in death by renaming the city's main firehouse after him.

"I have so many stories of the Orange Fire Department, where they have bridged the gap in terms of the needs of the community. Whether it be a young person, senior citizen or organization, they always came out and did exactly what they could do," said Williams. "They made dreams come true, and most of that was because of Chief DeMarzo."

"I remember him playing Santa Claus when they did their Christmas adventure," she continued. "To go inside the firehouse and see how they had turned it into a magical place for the kids was just beautiful. The thought and care they put into doing their research and finding out exactly which kids in the city were really in need of gifts and a helping hand during the holidays, that was exceptional and something I will never forget."

When it comes to memories and the history of Orange, Rappaport has described himself as "Orange's amateur historian." In that role, he said the renaming of the firehouse at Lincoln and Central avenues as the Chief Martin P. DeMarzo Fire Headquarters ensured that the chief's legacy will be inextricably linked to the city.

"He moved out of the city physically, but I don't think in spirit that he ever left the city. Since this building went up at the turn of the century in the 20th century, I think Marty was the type of person who was able to cross over from the old to the new," said Rappaport. "He came here and lived here for a long time and lived through a lot of changes in the city, but he never changed. He stayed the same, stayed active in the community and stayed friendly with everyone."