Funeral Picture

Pappa Joe's last ride

Riverdale fireman "Pappa Joe" Ezzo went home the way he wanted to yesterday — on board a fire engine riding down the Main Street of the town he loved. Firefighters from many area communities were on hand to pay their last respects to a fallen comrade at Ezzo's funeral yesterday morning. Ezzo died Wednesday morning while answering a fire call.

(Trends: Michael S. Mayer)

Firefighters mourn Pappa Joe

By HOWARD L. RALL
EDITOR

RIVERDALE — "Pappa Joe" Ezzo went home the way he wanted to yesterday — on board his beloved 1926 American LaFrance fire engine — accompanied by his fellow firefighters down Main Street of the town he loved.

The last act of his distinguished 45-year career in the fire service was to answer an alarm Wednesday morning. He never arrived at the scene. A massive heart attack struck him as he drove his tank-truck to the car fire and he passed away, alone in the truck.

"Pappa Joe" was found by firefighters returning from the call. He was slumped over in the seat with the two-way radio microphone in his hand as though he had been trying to summon aid when he was stricken. He had pulled the vehicle to the side of the road and the engine was off.

"To the end he did what was right," said Fire Chief Ken Reuter. "Even when he probably knew he was very sick, he thought of the safety of the other people on the road and of the equipment."

"Pappa Joe's" fellow firemen used all their training to try and revive him. They removed him from the vehicle and began Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation.

"In the midst of a driving rain storm they did their best, but he was beyond their help. He was transported to Chilton Memorial Hospital, Pompton Plains, where he was pronounced dead.

Since he first lay in state at the Richards funeral home, literally thousands of firefighters and friends have filed past the casket.

News of his death had shocked this close-knit community. Many residents, like Police Chief Harry Rensland, have known Pappa Joe for a lifetime.

"He was my Little League Coach when I was a kid," says the chief, as he and his men stand respectfully in the ante-room of the funeral home. "I really can't picture Riverdale without him. He did so much for the town, you will never be able to write it all down,