

Edward “Red” VerWeire

November 28, 1925–December 13, 2007

Edward “Red” VerWeire was a member of the Gates-Chili Fire Department since 1948 who advanced through the ranks to become fire chief and who served for 30 years as a Gates fire district commissioner.

Born and raised on Lyell Road in Gates, Mr. VerWeire joined the fire department at the age of 22 following four years in the U.S. Navy. His father, Jerome, was a charter member of the fire department and his mother, Mary, was in the auxiliary.

“I’ve been around the firehouse all my life,” he said in a newspaper interview in 1999.

When he joined, Station No. 2 on Long Pond Road was a small wooden building with one Mack pumper truck and a stove for heat. Firefighters’ gear was stored on the truck and everything was one size fits all.

“Sometimes you went (to the fire scene) like this,” he said in the interview, referring to his street clothes.

There were no masks. “You sucked the smoke in and came out coughing and spitting,” he recalled of the early days.

A resident of Koladyne Avenue, Mr. VerWeire served as lieutenant in 1952, captain in 1954, battalion chief in 1956, assistant chief in 1958, and fire chief from 1960 to 1961. He was instrumental in the development of the Monroe County mutual aid plan for local fire departments and established a point system to record firefighters’ training and responses to emergencies that remained in use until it was updated more than 30 years later.

Mr. VerWeire’s term as fire chief is especially remembered for the serious fire at the Wishing Well Restaurant on Chili Avenue that started on January 13, 1960, just 13 days after he

took office. Less than a month later, he directed a three-day standby at all three Gates fire stations because of a winter storm that began on February 2, 1960.

Mr. VerWeire joined the Gates Fire District board of commissioners in 1966, served as chairman in various years, and was elected to a total of six five-year terms, having retired from the commission in 1996 following 30 consecutive years of service.

He was a member of the executive committee of the Firemen's Association of the State of New York (F.A.S.N.Y.), the Monroe County Volunteer Firemen's Association, the Monroe County Fire Advisory Board, and he served as Monroe County deputy fire coordinator.

In 1991, the Monroe County Fire Chief's Association established a scholarship fund in his name.

At a fire department banquet in 1999, at which he was recognized for 50 years of service, he was honored in a letter from President Bill Clinton.

"Having devoted yourself to the needs of your fellow citizens, you exemplify the determination, hard work and civic involvement that characterize the spirit of service," wrote President Clinton in the February 5, 1999, letter of congratulations. "Because of the efforts of dedicated individuals who, like you, place the safety and well-being of others above their own, our nation is a better place in which to live."

Following 42 years of employment at the Genesee Brewing Company in Rochester, Mr. VerWeire retired in 1988 as assistant district manager of operations of city sales and delivery. During his years at the brewery, he received the salesman of the year award from among the nearly 100-member sales force.

He is survived by his wife of 60 years, Loretta VerWeire; three children; seven grandchildren; and six great grandchildren.