

A Hero's Farewell, L.A. Firefighter



Jaime L. Foster, the first Los Angeles female firefighter to die on duty, will be given a hero's farewell today, honored with a solemn procession and a funeral service at the city's Roman Catholic Cathedral.

LOS ANGELES — The first female Los Angeles firefighter to die in the line of duty will be given a hero's farewell today.

It had taken firefighters less than 14 minutes to extinguish the blaze, which was blamed on a terrarium heater system and claimed three small animals -- believed to be a rabbit, a rat and a lizard -- as its only direct casualties.

Witnesses said they saw Foster standing on the back of a hook-and-ladder truck as it backed slowly away from the home. A few seconds later, she had fallen onto the street.

Foster, believed to have fallen off the truck's running board, was transported to a Tarzana hospital, where she was pronounced dead a short time later.

Hundreds of firefighters and police officers from throughout the nation will take part this morning in a five-block walking procession from the south lawn of City Hall to the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, where the funeral service for Foster is expected to last two hours.

A private internment will follow the service, after which the Los Angeles Fire Department will host a memorial reception at its Frank Hotchkin Memorial Training Center on Stadium Way, adjacent Dodger Stadium.

Foster was the first woman in the department's 118-year history to die in the line of duty and the first Los Angeles firefighter killed since three perished in a helicopter crash in March 1998 while ferrying an injured child, who also died, to Children's hospital.

Her name will be the 71st to be engraved on a fire department memorial wall expected to be installed in front of the Hollywood station on Cahuenga Boulevard by the end of the year.

Hundreds of people -- including firefighters, LAPD and California Highway Patrol officers -- attended a candlelight vigil last night outside Fire Station 73 in Reseda, where Foster worked, to celebrate the life of a young woman hailed for her enthusiasm, cheerfulness and dedication to serve others.

Before becoming a firefighter, Foster worked as a licensed vocational nurse at Antelope Valley Hospital.

Bagpipes were played during last night's ceremony, and she was given a color guard salute.

"We loved Jaime here. She was special," her supervisor, Capt. Tim McDonell, told the Daily News.

McDonell, a bear of a man who greets most colleagues with a hug, would refrain from doing so with Foster to maintain professionalism. "I couldn't hug Jaime," he told the Daily News. "I don't get to do that now. It hurts."

Investigations into her death are being conducted by the Los Angeles fire and police departments, Cal-OSHA, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office and the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office, according to a fire department spokesman.

Foster's family has requested that in lieu of flowers, donations be made in her honor to the LAFD Historical Society -- Fallen Firefighter Memorial, 1355 N. Cahuenga Blvd., Hollywood, CA 90028.

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In loving memory
By Jason Kandel
Staff Writer

Thursday, August 19, 2004 -

To the sound of bagpipes and a color guard salute, Firefighter Jaime L. Foster was remembered Thursday as a caring woman who fulfilled a dream to help others as a Los Angeles firefighter.

Hundreds attended the candlelight vigil outside Foster's Fire Station 73 in Reseda to celebrate her life, cut short Saturday after her crew's firetruck backed over her at the scene of a house fire.

"We loved Jaime here. She was special," said her supervisor, Capt. Tim McDonell, a teddy bear of a man who greets most colleagues with a hug, but refrained from doing so with Foster to maintain professionalism. "I couldn't hug Jaime ... I don't get to do that now. It hurts."

Fire Department officials blocked off Reseda Boulevard between Valerio and Saticoy streets for the vigil. A phalanx of uniformed firefighters, California Highway Patrol and Los Angeles Police Department officers stood shoulder to shoulder in the street in front of the station.

Foster's red-rose covered casket rested atop a fire engine ladder bed.

Foster, 25, of Palmdale had served with the Fire Department just three months.

Shaun Gerlach, 24, who worked at Antelope Valley Hospital with Foster when she was a licensed vocational nurse, wore a T-shirt that read, "Her smile and laughter brought joy to us all. Her spirit will forever live in our hearts."

"I'm proud of her," Gerlach said, wiping tears from his eyes. "She was perfect. She was the most fun person I've ever met."

Foster -- badge No. 1021 -- was the first woman in the department's 118-year history to die in the line of duty. Hers will become the 71st name to be engraved on the department's memorial wall, expected to be installed in front of the Hollywood station on Cahuenga Boulevard by the end of the year.

"Jaime had a caring for people, a love for people," said Councilman Dennis Zine, who met Foster in July when he visited the station. "She chose a profession to help people. Jaime gave her life helping people. Her calling was to help people in the city of Los Angeles. Rest in peace, Jaime Foster."

Earlier in the day, Firefighter Stacy Taylor, broke into tears.

"She inspired us and made us excited about the work we do," she said. "Jaime Foster ... will never be forgotten.

"We love you Jaime."

A funeral service is scheduled for 10 a.m today at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in downtown Los Angeles.

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