

CHICAGO SUN-TIMESwww.suntimes.com[Back to regular view](#)<http://www.suntimes.com/output/news/cst-nws-firecrash29.html>[Print this page](#)

Chicago paramedic mourned after fire truck collision

*April 29, 2004***BY ANNIE SWEENEY AND CHERYL V. JACKSON Staff Reporters**

Police on Wednesday began reconstructing the gruesome collision of two fire rigs that killed a Chicago Fire Department paramedic who was also a part-time firefighter for Stone Park.

Jeffrey Bergstrom had been in Chicago's department just short of a year when he was killed in Tuesday's accident at a busy Melrose Park intersection. He had worked part time for the Stone Park Fire Department since 2001 and was the first firefighter or police officer in the village's 65-year history to die in the line of duty, officials said.

Friends said Bergstrom, 34, loved his job. He previously worked for a private ambulance service and kept working part time for Stone Park even after getting hired by Chicago in May 2003 because he loved saving lives, said Jennifer Shannon, a Chicago paramedic who worked with Bergstrom on Ambulance 44.

"He treated every patient equally," Shannon said. "It didn't matter who you prayed to, who you slept with, what color you were. He and I believed in the same things, and it's rare you get a partnership like that."

Bergstrom was one of three firefighters on Stone Park Engine 911 -- named for the emergency workers who died on Sept. 11 -- which was headed to a residential garage fire during Tuesday evening rush hour. Heading north on Mannheim, the rig broadsided Engine 807 from the Northlake Fire Department at Armitage. The Northlake engine also was carrying three firefighters.

The five other firefighters were injured, including one from Stone Park who remained in critical condition Wednesday at Loyola University Medical Center, authorities said.

Melrose Park Police Lt. Gary Montino said police were looking at data from the stop light at the intersection to see which rig had the right of way.

Montino said the Northlake engine had an Opticom device, which should have triggered the stop light to turn or remain green as it approached the intersection. The Stone Park engine did not have the device.

At the Stone Park fire house at 1745 N. 35th, members of the police and fire departments built a memorial of candles and flowers around Bergstrom's helmets. Purple ribbons also were tied around trees and poles in the village.

Copyright © The Sun-Times Company

All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.

Chicago Tribune
— ONLINE EDITION —

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/west/chi-0404290248apr29,1,6560387.story>

Chiefs await crash data

Site of fatal firetruck collision had emergency system in place

By Brett McNeil and Angela Rozas, Tribune staff reporters. Tribune staff reporters Alison Neumer and James Kimberly contributed to this report

April 29, 2004

The intersection where two firetrucks collided Tuesday night, killing a Stone Park firefighter, was outfitted last year with a system that allows emergency vehicles to trigger the green light, but only one of the trucks was equipped to do so, officials said Wednesday.

The vehicle without an emitter, a pumper truck from the Stone Park Fire Department, broadsided a Northlake truck at Mannheim Road and Armitage Avenue in Melrose Park, investigators said.

The collision injured five other firefighters, one critically.

As Stone Park and firefighters across the area mourned the death of Jeffrey Bergstrom, 34, Melrose Park police and Illinois State Police were piecing together the sequence of events leading to the crash.

Melrose Park Deputy Police Chief Sam Pitassi said investigators determined that only the Northlake truck was outfitted with an emitter.

The devices are designed to help emergency vehicles move quickly through intersections while avoiding collisions, a leading cause of death for firefighters.

Last year, 13 west suburbs, including Northlake, outfitted their vehicles and traffic signals with the devices. Stone Park did not participate in the program.

Stone Park Mayor Beniamino Mazzulla said his firefighters reported that they had a green light as they headed into the intersection northbound on Mannheim.

Mazzulla said the village's acting fire chief was following close behind the truck in a sport-utility vehicle equipped with an emitter.

Northlake Fire Chief Robert Hjelmgren and Acting Stone Park Fire Chief John Cummins issued a statement Wednesday saying they would not comment on the crash until the investigation is complete.

Northlake Mayor Jeffrey Sherwin said, "We need to learn from what happened, but we need to wait for the investigation results."

Advertisement

**GET BLUE,
SEE GREEN**



**UP TO 5%
CASH BACK**
on all purchases

► CLICK HERE
For a 60 Second Decision

Bergstrom, a Chicago Fire Department paramedic who worked part time for the Stone Park Fire Department, went into cardiac arrest at the scene and died later in Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood.

The driver of his truck, Ricardo Mendoza, 27, underwent surgery Tuesday night and remained in Loyola's intensive-care unit Wednesday.

Three Northlake firefighters and a third Stone Park firefighter were treated in local hospitals and released Tuesday night.

Both fire departments were responding to a garage fire at a home near Dora and Dickens Streets in Leyden Township. The fire, which officials are investigating as a possible arson, was brought under control quickly by the township and Franklin Park departments, said Leyden Fire Chief John Campbell.

The trucks collided about 5:50 p.m., less than three blocks from the fire, in a violent crash that left mangled wreckage and twisted truck parts strewn across the streets. Northlake firefighters scrambled out of their damaged truck to assist those injured in the Stone Park truck, officials said Wednesday.

Hours later, Stone Park firefighters escorted Bergstrom's body from Loyola to the Cook County medical examiner's office draped in American and Stone Park flags, Mazzulla said.

A makeshift memorial was erected at the crash site Wednesday, and candles and flowers were placed outside the Stone Park fire station, where Bergstrom's colleagues remembered him as a dependable yet fun-loving guy.

"From day one, I knew Jeff was the type of person I wouldn't have to worry about, that Jeff would be behind me," said Jennifer Shannon, his ranking officer on Ambulance 44 in Chicago's Wicker Park neighborhood.

In addition to working two shifts a week in Stone Park, Bergstrom worked full time as a Chicago paramedic.

"He was just the best friend, the best partner you could ask for," Shannon said.

Bergstrom had worked for the 35-member Stone Park department since 2001, Stone Park officials said. He began his career years earlier as a medic, first in Houston, then in Chicago with Pulse Ambulance, a private service.

His ex-wife and daughter, 10, live in Houston, friends said.

Mazzulla ordered that all flags in the village be flown at half-staff, and black and purple bunting was draped across the fire station's facade.

Meanwhile, investigators said they will be analyzing computer chips from the trucks that record the speed of the vehicles.

Donna Fleming, a spokeswoman for 3M, the company that manufactures the traffic-signal system, said the device on the traffic signal will record which vehicle tripped it.

If two vehicles with devices approach an intersection at the same time, the closest vehicle would get priority, Fleming said.

"It's first come, first served," she said. "There's no such thing as arriving at the same time. Even if it's a billionth of a second, one of them would get priority."

Last year, 33 firefighters were killed nationwide in collisions while on duty, accounting for 30 percent of all firefighter fatalities that year, according to the U.S. Fire Administration, which is working on a report on firefighter and emergency responder safety, including the use of pre-emptive devices on traffic signals.

Fire department officials say that safety on the road is a major concern. While trying to navigate traffic and get to a scene quickly, firefighters often are unable to hear little from the firetruck other than their own sirens, they said.

"It's tough. You see flashes and lights go on and sirens go on," said Richard Jaehne, director of the Illinois Fire Service Institute, which trains about 38,000 responders annually. "Intersections are known hazards, where many of our accidents occur. You're always cautious."

Copyright © 2004, Chicago Tribune

Improved archives!

Searching [Chicagotribune.com](http://www.chicagotribune.com) archives back to 1985 is cheaper and easier than ever. New prices for multiple articles can bring your cost as low as 30 cents an article:

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/archives>

Chicago Tribune

— ONLINE EDITION —

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-040428firetrucks,1,6161629.story>

1 dead, several hurt as firetrucks collide

By Brett McNeil and Angela Rozas.
Tribune staff reporters

April 28, 2004, 9:55 AM CDT

One firefighter was killed and several others were injured Tuesday evening when two firetrucks collided in Melrose Park as they were responding to a garage fire in unincorporated Leyden Township.

A Northlake Fire Department truck struck a Stone Park firetruck at Mannheim Road and Armitage Avenue about 5:50 p.m., said Dean Krone, village attorney for Stone Park.

The impact hurtled the Stone Park truck, smashing its front and sides before it landed on its side facing south across Armitage.

Two firefighters from Stone Park were taken to Loyola University Medical Center, where one died.

The Cook County medical examiner's office identified the fatality as Jeffrey Bergstrom, 34, of Chicago.

Bergstrom worked for the Stone Park Fire Department on his days off from Ambulance Co. 44, at Division Street and Western Avenue, at the Chicago Fire Department, WGN-Ch. 9 reported.

The other firefighter was seriously injured and remained hospitalized at Loyola this morning with head and leg injuries, CLTV reported.

Another Stone Park firefighter was taken to Elmhurst Memorial Hospital, where he was treated and released, according to a hospital spokeswoman.

Three firefighters from Northlake were taken to Westlake Hospital in Melrose Park, where they were treated and released, a hospital spokeswoman said.

It was not clear how the Stone Park truck, northbound on Mannheim, collided with the Northlake truck, heading east on Armitage, but both appeared to arrive in the intersection at the same time, Krone said.

"My understanding is they were both in motion when the collision occurred," he said. "This is a tragic event for both communities, and I'm sure the workers at both departments feel very deeply (about it)."

The intersection's traffic lights are equipped with a system that allows emergency vehicles to override the signal. Officials could not say if either truck had activated the system.

Melrose Park police and Illinois State Police are investigating, authorities said.

Advertisement



Blocks from the scene, traffic on both roads came to a stop for several hours. Dozens of people gathered at the usually busy commercial intersection to view the wreckage.

Cecil Graham, 39, a mechanic with Pollard Motor Co. in Melrose Park, was walking outside when the crash occurred, he said.

"As soon as (the truck) crossed the first lane of traffic, that's when I heard the bomb, the big explosion," he said.

More than half a dozen emergency agencies responded to the crash. One firefighter had to be extricated from a truck as others fought shooting flames.

After Bergstrom was pronounced dead at Loyola, Stone Park firefighters and police escorted his body, draped in U.S. and Stone Park flags, to the Stein Institute, where they held a brief memorial service early this morning, WGN reported.

An American flag was lowered to half-staff at the Stone Park Fire Station, where firefighters declined to talk.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

Copyright © 2004, Chicago Tribune

Improved archives!

Searching [Chicagotribune.com](http://www.chicagotribune.com) archives back to 1985 is cheaper and easier than ever. New prices for multiple articles can bring your cost as low as 30 cents an article:

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/archives>

CHICAGO SUN-TIMESwww.suntimes.com[Back to regular view](#)<http://www.suntimes.com/output/news/cst-nws-crash30.html>[Print this page](#)

Firefighter injured in fire truck collision files suit against Northlake

*April 30, 2004***BY STEVE PATTERSON, ANNIE SWEENEY AND CHERYL V. JACKSON Staff Reporters**

A firefighter who was critically injured this week in a collision between two suburban fire trucks filed a lawsuit Thursday alleging that one of the rigs failed to yield the right of way.

The lawsuit was filed in Cook County Circuit Court by Ricardo Mendoza, a Stone Park firefighter who was driving a fire truck that collided with a Northlake fire truck on Tuesday as they both rushed to the same garage fire. One firefighter on the Stone Park truck was killed.

Authorities were still investigating the crash Thursday and officials were releasing no findings.

The lawsuit claims the Stone Park truck driven by Mendoza was eastbound on Armitage Avenue and had the right of way at the Mannheim Road intersection in Melrose Park.

The driver of the Northlake fire truck "failed to yield to traffic," it continues, "failed to decrease speed so as to avoid colliding" and "failed to give audible warning" that it was approaching the intersection, as required by law.

One of Mendoza's attorneys, Richard Blass, said that account of the accident was confirmed by "independent sources" he declined to identify. He and attorney Robert Kuzas are hoping to persuade a judge today to agree to a protective order preserving all evidence and allowing an independent accident investigator to study it.

Mendoza has bad timing and the wrong defendant, Northlake Mayor Jeffrey Sherwin said, noting the engine involved in the crash belongs to the Northlake Fire Protection District, not the city of Northlake.

"Their attorney should do a little more research. All they had to do was read what was on the side of the fire truck," Sherwin said.

The Northlake Fire Protection District serves the majority of the city of Northlake and is governed by a three-member board of trustees and three fire commissioners.

The suit is premature, coming before the conclusion of the crash investigation, Sherwin said.

"I guess that's the new American way," he said. "It's a shame when there's a tragedy like this everybody runs to the courthouse first."

"Now that they've opened this Pandora's box of lawsuits, there could be a wrongful death investigation into this [Stone Park] driver," he said.

Kuzas said the lawsuit is likely to be amended next week to include all proper Northlake entities, but "our main objective right now is to protect our client, and to protect the evidence."

The village of Stone Park has set up a fund for Mendoza to help defray his medical costs, said Mayor Ben Mazzulla. Part-time firefighters like Mendoza do not have medical insurance, although they do receive workers compensation, Mazzulla said.

"Money will be coming," he said. "We are going to do everything we can to assist him."

Mazzulla said there were no official findings yet on the accident. When asked about the lawsuit naming Northlake, Mazzulla said, "It's too soon to make any kind of judgments. We work very closely with Northlake and they are very good neighbors. I am not going to point any fingers at anybody."

Copyright © The Sun-Times Company

All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.

CHICAGO SUN-TIMESwww.suntimes.com[Back to regular view](#)<http://www.suntimes.com/output/news/cst-nws-firecrash29.html>[Print this page](#)

Chicago paramedic mourned after fire truck collision

*April 29, 2004***BY ANNIE SWEENEY AND CHERYL V. JACKSON Staff Reporters**

Police on Wednesday began reconstructing the gruesome collision of two fire rigs that killed a Chicago Fire Department paramedic who was also a part-time firefighter for Stone Park.

Jeffrey Bergstrom had been in Chicago's department just short of a year when he was killed in Tuesday's accident at a busy Melrose Park intersection. He had worked part time for the Stone Park Fire Department since 2001 and was the first firefighter or police officer in the village's 65-year history to die in the line of duty, officials said.

Friends said Bergstrom, 34, loved his job. He previously worked for a private ambulance service and kept working part time for Stone Park even after getting hired by Chicago in May 2003 because he loved saving lives, said Jennifer Shannon, a Chicago paramedic who worked with Bergstrom on Ambulance 44.

"He treated every patient equally," Shannon said. "It didn't matter who you prayed to, who you slept with, what color you were. He and I believed in the same things, and it's rare you get a partnership like that."

Bergstrom was one of three firefighters on Stone Park Engine 911 -- named for the emergency workers who died on Sept. 11 -- which was headed to a residential garage fire during Tuesday evening rush hour. Heading north on Mannheim, the rig broadsided Engine 807 from the Northlake Fire Department at Armitage. The Northlake engine also was carrying three firefighters.

The five other firefighters were injured, including one from Stone Park who remained in critical condition Wednesday at Loyola University Medical Center, authorities said.

Melrose Park Police Lt. Gary Montino said police were looking at data from the stop light at the intersection to see which rig had the right of way.

Montino said the Northlake engine had an Opticom device, which should have triggered the stop light to turn or remain green as it approached the intersection. The Stone Park engine did not have the device.

At the Stone Park fire house at 1745 N. 35th, members of the police and fire departments built a memorial of candles and flowers around Bergstrom's helmets. Purple ribbons also were tied around trees and poles in the village.

Copyright © The Sun-Times Company

All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.

Jeffrey C. Bergstrom



Bergstrom, Jeffrey C. Paramedic-CFD and Firefighter-Stone Park FD, in the line of duty April 27, 2004, beloved son of Fay and the late Charles, loving brother of Jennifer (Jeremiah) Brainerd, dear uncle of Sydney. Funeral services Monday, 10 a.m., at Freedom Baptist Church, 4541 Harrison St., Hillside. Cremation Oakridge Cemetery. Visitation Sunday, 3 to 9 p.m., at **Hursen Funeral Home**, S.W. corner of Roosevelt & Mannheim Rds., Hillside/Westchester. In lieu of flowers, memorials to Stone Park Firefighter's Fund c/o International Bank of Stone Park, 1615 N. Mannheim Rd., Stone Park, IL, 60165. Funeral info toll free: 1-800-562-0082 or **www.hursen.com**
Published in the Chicago Sun-Times from 4/30/2004 - 5/2/2004.

[Back](#)

Chicago Tribune

— ONLINE EDITION —

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/west/chi-0405040275may04,1,3611258.story?coll=chi-newslocalwest-hed>

Firefighter is laid to rest

Family, colleagues mourn Stone Park department member

By Angela Rozas
Tribune staff reporter

May 4, 2004

When Jeffrey Bergstrom first showed up at the Stone Park Fire Department three years ago, he was like most recruits: shy, quiet and wide-eyed. That lasted about two days, colleagues said.

"Jeff was the type of guy that just fit in," said Nino Morrone, a former Stone Park firefighter and friend of Bergstrom's. "He had a way of giving you this half-eye roll, head-tilt thing that said, 'What is this?' without saying a word."

At an emotional memorial service in Freedom Baptist Church in Hillside on Monday, hundreds of firefighters, emergency workers, friends and family mourned the loss of Bergstrom, a Chicago Fire Department paramedic and part-time Stone Park firefighter. Bergstrom died last week when the firetruck in which he was riding collided with a Northlake firetruck as both crews responded to a garage fire in Leyden Township.

Bergstrom, 34, had wanted to be a firefighter since he was 4 years old, family members said. Once at Stone Park, Bergstrom became well known for his love of motorcycles and fast cars--and napping.

"When we needed Jeff, we could always find him in his bed or on his cell phone or sometimes both," said Stone Park Fire Chief John Cummins, addressing a packed church. Bergstrom often joked that calls to battle fires interrupted his "naptime."

"Now, when we have to roll out, it'll be good to know we're interrupting your nap," Cummins said, choking up.

Other colleagues remembered Bergstrom's eagerness to help out at the fire station, though colleagues joked he sometimes had ulterior motives.

"He'd say, 'Chief, can I wash your car?' But it was just because he wanted to drive the stupid thing," said former Stone Park Fire Chief Bryan Lewis, now deputy chief in Winfield. "I'd say, 'Jeff, you have a motorcycle that goes over 400 miles an hour. Why do you want to drive a Crown Vic?'"

Advertisement

How-To Guide

A RESOURCE DIRECTORY OF HELPFUL TIPS



Choose advanced skincare options

Decide if a facelift is right for you

Determine if laser vein treatment is right for you

Plus much more!

CLICK HERE FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF TOPICS

sponsored by
Pure: Laser Hair Removal

"But that was just the kind of guy he was. Courteous, helpful. Just the best firefighter," Lewis said.

Even after Bergstrom joined the Chicago Fire Department as a paramedic in 2003, he worked two shifts a week in Stone Park. He told colleagues it was because he needed the money.

"But in my heart I know he stayed in Stone Park for the same reasons I did," Morrone said. "He loved Stone Park. He loved the community and he loved being a firefighter."

Following tradition, firefighters honored Bergstrom with a final fire call, ringing a silver bell at the end of the service.

"To our comrade and brother. His last alarm. He is going home," said one firefighter as people wept in the audience.

Bergstrom's coffin, covered in a purple memorial flag, was laid in the back of a firetruck decorated with purple bunting and flowers. More than a hundred pieces of fire equipment led the service from the church past the Stone Park Fire Department, then to the Oak Ridge Cemetery in Hillside.

Police are investigating the crash at Mannheim Road and Armitage Avenue in Melrose Park on April 27 that killed Bergstrom and injured five other firefighters from Stone Park and Northlake.

Copyright © 2004, Chicago Tribune

Improved archives!

Searching [Chicagotribune.com](http://www.chicagotribune.com) archives back to 1985 is cheaper and easier than ever. New prices for multiple articles can bring your cost as low as 30 cents an article:

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/archives>

Chicago Tribune
— ONLINE EDITION —



Firefighter is laid to rest

Chicago and Stone Park firefighters place Jeffrey Bergstrom's casket onto a firetruck Monday outside Freedom Baptist Church in Hillside. Bergstrom died in a collision of firetrucks.

(Tribune photo by George Thompson)

May 4, 2004

Related content

[Firefighter is laid to rest](#)

Copyright © 2004, [Chicago Tribune](#)