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Cicero fireman dies in 'freak accident'

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By Aamer Madhani
Tribune staff reporter

Cicero firefighters were mourning the death of a 33-year veteran of the department who died early Friday morning from injuries he sustained in what fire officials described as a "freak accident."

Lt. Robert Augustyn, 57, died from multiple fractures and internal injuries at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood after a 45,000-pound fire engine backed over him Thursday afternoon.

Augustyn was pinned under the slow-moving fire engine that was leaving an accident scene near 25th Place and Laramie Avenue, Cicero Deputy Chief Louis Guido said. Augustyn was directing the engine just before he was hit or

tripped and subsequently caught under the truck's gas tank, Guido said.

"It was absolutely accidental," Guido said. "This was a freak accident that was no one's fault."

Cicero police and Illinois State Police are conducting investigations of the incident, Guido said. The driver of the fire engine, whose name is being withheld by the Fire Department, was given drug and alcohol tests, but did not appear to be under the influence, Guido said.

Guido said the driver of the truck has worked for the department for at least 12 years and was a friend of Augustyn's.

On Friday afternoon, the U.S. flag at the fire station was flying at half-staff, and the de-

partment had draped black and purple bunting over the fire engine garage. Near the accident scene, only two blocks from the station, someone had tied a bouquet of flowers on the pole of a traffic sign.

Andy Xerikos, the owner of a garage about 75 yards from the accident, said it was a haunting scene as firefighters used hydraulic jacks to lift the back of the truck off of Augustyn.

"Everything around here just stopped," Xerikos said.

Augustyn, a onetime Cicero firefighter of the year, had been talking about retirement just hours before the accident, Guido said.

With three grown daughters and seven grandchildren, Augustyn indicated that he was ready to wind down his career,



Tribune photo by Carl Wagner.
Cicero Deputy Fire Chief Louis Guido talks to reporters Friday about the accidental death of Lt. Robert Augustyn.

Guido said. His family and colleagues described him as a private man who had two passions: family and firefighting.

"He died doing what was second best in his life: his family always came first," his family wrote in a statement.

At the firehouse, Augustyn

was known for his quick wit and was affectionately called "Augie" and "Uncle Augie." He was also one of the department's most experienced and capable firefighters, said Deputy Chief Jerry R. Chlada.

"He was a great leader," Chlada said.

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Fallen firefighter is mourned

Cicero colleagues tell heroic efforts in 33-year career

By Kevin Lynch
Tribune staff reporter 3082B

When Cicero's firefighters sat down for dinner, the department's pet Dalmatian usually trotted straight to Lt. Robert Augustyn, begging for scraps.

"He'd always say, 'Go on you flea bag, get lost,'" said Assistant Chief Michael Kolar. "Then I caught Bob feeding him under the table. It was Bob to a T—he'd come on as a tough guy, but deep down he was a softie."

Kolar and hundreds of others shared condolences and traded stories Sunday at a wake for the 33-year department veteran at the Suburban Family Funeral Home in Cicero.

ro. Augustyn, 57, died Friday after a fire engine backed over him a day earlier at the scene of an accident.

He began his career with the department riding ambulances and later drove fire engines. He became a lieutenant only after fellow firefighters prodded him to seek promotion.

"He could have been chief if he wanted to, but he didn't want that. He just wanted to fight fires," Kolar said.

Sometimes gruff and always quick with a barbed one-liner, Augustyn's act never fooled anyone, colleagues said, because it was belied by a string of sacrifices from the heroic to the mundane.

In 1971, after rescuing a woman from a house fire, Augustyn stayed with her in the emergency room while she waited for treatment, recalled Deputy Fire Chief Louis Guido.

"It was bedlam in there, and I

"David had just bought a new snowblower, and he couldn't wait to try it out," Hamilton said. "I got him on the phone and said, 'There should be plenty for you to do when you get home.' All of sudden, here comes Bob with his snowblower, working his way down the block."

Augustyn was "the classic family man," said his son-in-law, John Schuzer, 33, of Wheaton. "He had old-fashioned values, and he always stuck to his guns. He was really a man of the '50s."

Schuzer recalled his first date with Augustyn's daughter. "He came to the door, and I said, 'I'm here to pick up Chris.' The next thing you know, wham. I get the door slammed in my face," Schuzer said. "He was joking, but once he knew you were a good person for his family, you were in. There was nothing he wouldn't do for you."

He could have been chief if he wanted to, but he didn't want that. He just wanted to fight fires.

— Assistant Chief Michael Kolar

think they just forgot about her.... So Augie goes over and says, 'if you're not going to help this woman, we're going to put her back on this stretcher and take her someplace where they will.' The doctors rushed over and took care of her right away," he said.

Neighbors said Augustyn's help usually came with little fanfare.

When the first snow fell last year, Cathryn Hamilton, who lives three doors down from Augustyn in Cicero, called her brother at work with the good news.

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chicago/chi-0109070292sep07.story>

From the Chicago Tribune

Firefighter dies from accident injuries

September 7, 2001

CICERO -- A Cicero firefighter died Friday morning of injuries suffered when he was pinned underneath a fire engine.

Lt. Robert Augustyn, 57, suffered multiple fractures around 4:30 p.m. Thursday, after responding with his company to an automobile accident on the Laramie Avenue bridge, Cicero Deputy Fire Chief Louis Guido said.

At the scene, an ambulance crew told Augustyn the fire engine wasn't needed.

At that point, "the lieutenant got out of the truck to act as a spotter for the (driver)," Guido said.

As Augustyn walked around the back of the 45,000-pound truck, he either slipped or tripped behind the moving engine.

"The engineer kept backing up," not knowing Augustyn was pinned beneath the fire engine, Guido said.

Firefighters used hydraulic jacks to lift the back of the truck and Augustyn was airlifted to Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood where he underwent surgery.

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From the Chicago Tribune

Cicero fireman dies in 'freak accident'

By Amer Madhani
Tribune staff reporter

September 8, 2001

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Lt. Robert Augustyn, 57, died from multiple fractures and internal injuries at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood after a 45,000-pound fire engine backed over him Thursday afternoon.

Augustyn was pinned under the slow-moving fire engine that was leaving an accident scene near 25th Place and Laramie Avenue, Cicero Deputy Chief Louis Guido said. Augustyn was directing the engine just before he was hit or tripped and subsequently caught under the truck's gas tank, Guido said.

"It was absolutely accidental," Guido said. "This was a freak accident that was no one's fault."

Cicero police and Illinois State Police are conducting investigations of the incident, Guido said. The driver of the fire engine, whose name is being withheld by the Fire Department, was given drug and alcohol tests, but did not appear to be under the influence, Guido said.

Guido said the driver of the truck has worked for the department for at least 12 years and was a friend of Augustyn's.

On Friday afternoon, the U.S. flag at the fire station was flying at half-staff, and the department had draped black and purple bunting over the fire engine garage. Near the accident scene, only two blocks from the station, someone had tied a bouquet of flowers on the pole of a traffic sign.

Andy Xerikos, the owner of a garage about 75 yards from the accident, said it was a haunting scene as firefighters used hydraulic jacks to lift the back of the truck off of Augustyn.

"Everything around here just stopped," Xerikos said.

Augustyn, a onetime Cicero firefighter of the year, had been talking about retirement just hours before the accident, Guido said.

With three grown daughters and seven grandchildren, Augustyn indicated that he was ready to wind down his career, Guido said. His family and colleagues described him as a private man who had two passions: family and firefighting.

"He died doing what was second best in his life; his family always came first," his family wrote in a statement.

At the firehouse, Augustyn was known for his quick wit and was affectionately called "Augie" and "Uncle Augie." He was also one of the department's most experienced and capable firefighters, said Deputy Chief Jerry R. Chlada.

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Illinois Firefighter Dies After Accident

LON SLEPICKA
 Firehouse.com News

A Cicero, Illinois firefighter died Friday morning from injuries he suffered in an accident Thursday afternoon.

Lt. Robert Augustyn, 57, responded on the engine accompanying the ambulance to a traffic accident on a bridge, according to Fire Prevention Chief Jerry Chlada. The minor accident was quickly handled and Augustyn and another firefighter were spotting for the driver as he backed the engine down the 50 to 60 feet of the traffic-congested roadway to exit the bridge and return to the station.



Family Photo

Somehow, Chlada said, Augustyn slipped under the engine and was pinned. A truck company with extrication tools including air bags was dispatched. Using the air bags, Augustyn was removed and transported by Loyola University's Life Star helicopter to the Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood.

Augustyn suffered from injuries to his pelvis and lower extremities and internal bleeding. Chlada said he made it through surgery but went into arrest and died early this morning.

Augustyn was a 33-year veteran of the department and a Cicero native. Chlada said he was contemplating retiring soon. "He was a great fireman and would do anything. You could count on him."

"It was a freak accident at a minor traffic incident," Chlada said. "How do you explain that?"

Augustyn is survived by his wife Sharon, three married daughters and several grandchildren.

Wake is Sunday, September 9, from 3 to 9 p.m. at Suburban Funeral Home, 5940 West 35th St. Cicero, IL

Funeral Monday, September 10 at 9 a.m. at the Suburban Funeral Home, mass following at 9:30 a.m. at Our Lady of Charity Church 3620 South 57th Court in Cicero, IL. Interment at Resurrection Cemetery on Roberts Road and Archer Avenue,

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Cicero colleagues tell heroic efforts in 33-year career

By Kevin Lynch

Tribune staff reporter

Published September 10, 2001

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