Malverne ceremony pays tribute to fallen firefighter

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By AISHA AL-MUSLIM aisha.al-muslim@newsday.com

Photo credit: Steve Pfost | Volunteer Perry Cuocci, center, talks with his daughter Michelle, 9, left, as he shows his family the newly purchased ambulance by the Malverne Volunteer Ambulance Corps. (Nov. 23, 2013)

The Malverne Volunteer Ambulance Corps unveiled its first new ambulance in nearly 12 years in a ceremony at its headquarters Saturday that paid tribute to a Malverne volunteer firefighter killed last weekend while hunting upstate with other members of the department.

Malverne's ambulance corps volunteers and elected officials held a moment of silence in tribute to firefighter Charles Bruce, 52, of Franklin Square, who appears to have been accidentally killed by a single shot to the chest fired by a close friend on Nov. 16 in a wooded area in the Town of Westford.
"It's been a really rough week for me and for my fellow officers," said ambulance corps president Joseph Karam, a 20-year volunteer with the fire department and ambulance corps. "We lost our brother and firefighter Charlie Bruce, a good friend of mine that would always be missed."

Bruce, a divorced father of two who had been an active volunteer with the Malverne Fire Department for 17 years, was buried Saturday morning.

"He was loved not only as a person and a father, but also as a volunteer for this village," Mayor Patricia Ann Norris-McDonald said at the ceremony in the ambulance corps' first permanent headquarters, which opened in July 2012, on Hempstead Avenue.

The new $190,000 ambulance is equipped with air bags in the patient compartment, two temperature-controlled cabinets for all medications, brighter LED lighting and reflective paint, and a solar panel on the roof.

After a two-year process, the ambulance was paid for with a $160,000 grant from the Department of Homeland Security and a $40,000 donation from the Lord & Taylor department store in Garden City. The department's last ambulance was purchased in 2002.

The 29-member volunteer force responds to about 500 aided cases a year, with a fleet of two ambulances. It serves Malverne, Malverne Park and North Lynbrook, and occasionally Franklin Square and North Valley Stream.

"Like they say, 'Out with the old and in with the new,' " said Karam, adding the new ambulance replaces one bought in 1996 when his father, John Karam, who is still a volunteer, was president. "It took a lot of work to get here, but we did it."