

V_Maggiolo_8_14_24

00:00:01 **Amy Mauro**

My name is Amy Mauro. I'm Executive Director of the DC Fire and EMS Foundation. I'm here today, Wednesday, August 14th at around 10 a.m. at Foundation Headquarters with Vito Maggiolo. Vito, if you could introduce yourself and spell your name.

00:00:25 **Vito Maggiolo**

The name is Vito Maggiolo. It's Vito m a g g I o l o.

00:00:34 **Amy Mauro**

So, Vito, let's start from the beginning. We're here to talk about your life as a fire buff. And you can explain what that is at the appropriate time. And also your connection to the DC fire and EMS Department. You're obviously, a huge resource in terms of the history of that agency. So I'm looking forward to the conversation today. Tell us where you were born and raised.

00:00:56 **Vito Maggiolo**

I was born and raised in the Bronx, in New York City. I happened to live right around the corner from my local firehouse. Engine 62 and Ladder 32. And as far back as I can remember, or my relatives can remember, I was obsessed with visiting the firehouse. I'm told I used to make my mom carry me to the firehouse. One of my aunts blames this all on me getting a toy fire truck. That's how it all started. Living around the corner from a firehouse in the Bronx and finding that as my my place to go.

00:01:36 **Amy Mauro**

So you may not remember your earliest memories of being at that firehouse, but can you tell us what your earliest memories were and why you think you may have been attracted to to spending time there?

00:01:48 **Vito Maggiolo**

Well, there were good people there. You'd stand in front of the firehouse and you'd get invited in and as I spent more time there, I took on some unofficial duties as a young fellow. When they went out on a run, I would close the apparatus doors. At that time they were sliding doors, they were cast iron. They were very, very heavy. So I used to do that. I would run errands. At one point, I was thinking I was running book but didn't know it. Firemen would give me a piece of paper and tell me to take it to the local candy store, which I did, and I'd get, you know, soda or something out of the deal. But run errands, kind of watch over the firehouse. I quickly learned the firehouse way of life.

00:02:45 **Vito Maggiolo**

Back then, all the calls came in by bells. I learned how to count the bells, what the bells meant, what units they were dispatching. And just a side story to that... So when I was maybe eight, ten years old, my mom took me to the New York City Fire Museum, which at that time was run by the department down on Duane Street. So we go in, it's winter time, take off our winter coats, and they used to have a house watch desk, just like in the regular firehouses, and they had firemen who were on light duty due to injuries and such manning that house, watch desk, watching the museum. So I go in and right around that time, the bells start to hit, and this fireman at the desk looks at me and he says, you know what it means when those bells go off, sonny? I said, yes, sir. They just special called engine 24 to box five nine, eight, and I thought he was going to fall out of his chair. And my mom looked at him and said, he's been hanging around the firehouse for a while. So.

00:03:50 **Amy Mauro**

And so when you talk about the bells dispatching, approximately what year was that?

00:03:55 **Vito Maggiolo**

That would have been in the late 50s, early 60s. They used the bells to dispatch calls right up into the early 70s. New York City was still using the Bell System.

00:04:08 **Amy Mauro**

And can you explain what that means?

00:04:09 **Vito Maggiolo**

It means...it's a telegraph system. So there's a fire box on the corner, and that fire box has a designated number, let's say box three, six, one, two. That was my home box, the box closest to my home that was located at White Plains Road and Magenta Street. If somebody pulled that box at the communications center, the box would come in. It would come in on a buzzer. Buzz buzz buzz buzz buzz buzz buzz buzz buzz buzz buzz. The dispatchers then had a card they would pull, told them which units to go, which units went, and what the location of the box was. They would then get on it like a telegraph key, and they would key out that same series of numbers, which would ring on the bells in the firehouse and the firehouse. They would pull the card 3612, White Plains and Magenta Street. Everybody goes, we're first due. It would tell which companies went and those companies assigned would go. But as things got busier, it became very complex because these bells were going off constantly and there were certain signals to call special units to scenes, signals indicating a multiple alarm fire. So it was quite a complicated process. Also, they used to use a telegraph key; when the units came back to the firehouse, there was a telegraph key where the bells were, and you would telegraph a signal that you were back. And they used to let me do that. And I got a big kick out of doing that -- telegraphing that the engine or the truck or somebody was back in service. That became one of my other fun responsibilities.

00:06:01 **Amy Mauro**

And DC had a similar system with the boxes until...

00:06:05 **Vito Maggiolo**

They did. But DC as far back, I think, as the 40s, also had a voice alarm system. They had a vocal alarm. I think it was called the vocal alarm in New York. It's called the voice alarm, but that would do an audible dispatch as well.

00:06:21 **Amy Mauro**

So how did you end up in DC?

00:06:26 **Vito Maggiolo**

Well, due to some family situations...I had an aunt and uncle who both lived here. They had a house in Cleveland Park and ... I used to visit with them every summer. So every summer I would come visit with my aunt and uncle. And of course, the first thing I did was find and become friends with the local fire company. In this case, it was Engine 28 and Truck 14 on Connecticut Avenue in Cleveland Park. That was where I buffed when I first started coming down here. And then for my high school years, I came to live with my aunt and uncle. So that was from 67 to 70. I went to high school here in D.C. Originally, Wilson, then what is now Duke Ellington, but then was Western High School. So I, of course, continued my activities with the fire department. I also started to spend time with the Friendship Fire Association, which was the fire buff club here in DC, which maintained a small museum. And also the biggest activity was providing canteen service at the scenes of fires and other emergencies.

00:07:48 **Amy Mauro**

And so you've used a phrase called buff. Can you tell us - I don't know if you know the origin of that phrase, but can you tell us more what that means?

00:07:59 **Vito Maggiolo**

I'll tell you the origin that I've heard, but a buff is an enthusiast, and I think it started with the fire service, but it's extended to other hobbyists, like there's railroad buffs and there's plane buffs. It means somebody who's whose

hobby is an interest in that particular type of business or service. Allegedly, back in the horse drawn era when the horses would take the units to a fire in the winter time, of course, once they got there, the horses had to stay. It could be extremely cold and there were followers, hanger-oners who would bring buffalo robes for the horses to keep them warm, and they became known as buffs. At least that's the story that I heard.

00:08:53 Amy Mauro

I imagined buffing vehicles, but that that sounds plausible. And you mentioned the Friendship Fire Association. So I think when you were in high school, the small museum must have been at Engine. 31. Is that right?

00:09:07 Vito Maggiolo

Yes. Chevy Chase.

00:09:08 Amy Mauro

Tell us more about the FFA.

00:09:15 Vito Maggiolo

There was a corps of auxiliary firefighters during the Second World War, and that was because so many firefighters had been drafted that there was a manpower issue. So citizens who, for one reason or another, couldn't go to war were taught firefighting, and they supplemented the regular firefighting force. They were known as auxiliary firefighters. When the war ended, those auxiliary firefighters wanted to continue their service to the department and they created the Friendship Fire Association. Its name is based in part on the friendship in Alexandria, Virginia. There's the fire company that was established by George Washington. The Friendship Fire Company. They have a museum in Old Town. But I think that's where the Friendship Fire Association derived their name from. And they started to do canteen service, like serving out of the trunk of a car.

00:10:21 Amy Mauro

Okay. And the canteen service is - can you explain that as well?

00:10:28 Vito Maggiolo

Canteen service is basically providing refreshments and nourishment to firefighters at the scene of an incident. So coffee. Originally it was coffee. It was water. It was cigarettes. It was salt tablets.

00:10:46 Amy Mauro

Oreos.

00:10:46 Vito Maggiolo

Now it's a bit more sophisticated. You know, in terms of how it functions. Of course, what they would do was ... At one point it was Car 5 - it was known as the coffee car and it had the radio designation car five. And they came out of old Engine 9 on U Street, not the current firehouse, but the one across the street that's now a nightclub or bar. And there was a 24 hour People's Drug store, downtown on 14th Street. So when there was a fire, they'd call him and say, we need a five gallon urn of coffee. They would have the coffee ready. They would stop, pick it up and take it to the fire. So it's coffee and ice water. And, that's kind of it.

00:11:42 Amy Mauro

And the FFA continues to do that today. They respond on - is it second alarms only or does it depend on the weather?

00:11:51 Vito Maggiolo

They are assigned on second alarms, but they have a lot of leeway in responding to incidents. If there's an incident that they feel their services are required, they do have the option of responding to that call.

00:12:11 **Amy Mauro**

So, returning to your high school years, tell us how your career progressed then after high school?

00:12:22 **Vito Maggiolo**

Well, after high school, I graduated from Western in 70. I moved back to New York City for college. My mom was residing in the Bronx, and as such, I could go to City University of New York tuition free. It was tuition free at that time. Open admission and tuition free. So I went to Lehman College, which is one of the four year colleges that are part of the City University of New York system. And going back to New York, I moved back into my old neighborhood, and I re-established my relationship with Engine 62 and Ladder 32. They were still firefighters there who knew me from my previous time there. I also became an auxiliary firefighter there. So they still had the auxiliary firefighter program, which is a throwback to the civil defense days. During the 60s when there was the threat of nuclear warfare, atomic warfare, there was a civil defense program established, Auxiliary Fire Corps. The plan was to supplement regular fire service during a nuclear disaster as such, so I became an auxiliary firefighter at 62 Engine and eventually became an auxiliary lieutenant there. As an auxiliary firefighter I took some basic firefighter training. I could ride with them. I was not allowed in the building, but I could pull hose, help raise ladders, do all sorts of supplementary work outside. We wore yellow helmets to distinguish us from the regular firefighters.

00:14:14 **Amy Mauro**

That's great. So you were there through the 70s?

00:14:20 **Vito Maggiolo**

I was in the Bronx from 70 to 78, and I moved back to D.C. in November of 78.

00:14:26 **Amy Mauro**

And was that to become a journalist?

00:14:29 **Vito Maggiolo**

I was already doing some journalism when I graduated in 75. My first job out of college was co-editing a weekly newspaper, the Co-op City Times. After that I did that for about a year, and there was some politics there I didn't like. I left and began working with a company called Action Movie News. We were freelancers, and we covered New York City by night when all the regular TV crews had gone to bed. And I was the first assignment editor for Action Movie News. And of course, it was the 70s and New York City was burning. And, you know, it wasn't a question of was there going to be a big fire? It was how many were there going to be and where they were going to be every night. Every night - huge fires. Every day. Every night. I mean, it was known in the New York City Fire Department as the war years.

00:15:34 **Vito Maggiolo**

Let me transgress a little bit back to D.C., okay? My high school years. So I was here for the 68 riots after Doctor King was shot. And I recall I was watching TV, and I recall seeing the news reports that Doctor King had been shot, that he had died. So I went up to my room to sort of contemplate. I knew this would have some great significance in our society. I went up to my room to kind of contemplate that. And while I was up there, I had my tunable scanner I could listen to fire calls on. And I heard them send a call out for 14th and Florida for a report of two vehicles on fire in a used car lot, which was an unusual call back then. And so they got there and, I remember the engine company calling in that they had two cars on fire. One was overturned. And the voice of the officer was very tense and very low, and I knew something wasn't right. Something, you know, something was going on that was not ordinary. And then one of the truck companies returning to their firehouse called in and said, they're breaking windows on 14th Street ... 14th and Belmont. And then I realized the significance of what was going on.

00:17:09 **Vito Maggiolo**

So the next day I went to school and there was a big controversy over whether to allow the schools to stay open or to close the schools and honor Dr. King. One thought was that by keeping the schools open, we're keeping the kids off the streets. The other thinking was, we have to honor Dr. King. We need to close the schools. Eventually, they decided around late morning to close the schools. So I immediately went to the firehouse. My uncle was at work. I went to the firehouse. So by that time Plan F had been put into effect. Plan F was the riot plan. And what they did at that time, DC had two piece engine companies, an engine, a wagon and a pumper, and each could operate independently if they had the manpower. So they took those 32 two-piece engine companies and they brought in the off duty platoon and we went from 32 two-piece engine companies to 64 one-piece engine companies in a matter of hours. It was a very well thought out plan.

00:18:23 **Amy Mauro**

We interviewed Robert Banasik on Friday. He was at Engine 16 and also talked about that.

00:18:33 **Vito Maggiolo**

So it was at noon. There was something called the 12 noon vocal alarm test. And what would happen is, they would give the ... 12 noon vocal alarm test. All units acknowledged by telephone. So you lift up the telephone handset and the switchboard would light up. And it was a way of testing that the vocal was working because if there was any unit that didn't lift up their phone, they would check to see whether the vocal was... So they did the 12 noon vocal alarm test and immediately afterwards beep beep. Local alarm. Engine 4 wagon. Engine 4 Pumper. Respond for the hardware store on fire. Beep beep 11 Engine Wagon 11. Respond for the store. And then it was like they opened the floodgates and the vocal never shut up. It was just one fire after another, just constantly.

00:19:27 **Vito Maggiolo**

And so by early afternoon, some of the last units left in the city, which were in upper northwest, like 20 Engine, 31, they were all being sent to fires. And so when the last engine company in the fifth battalion went on a call, the chief told his aide, go to the hose bed, go to the hose tower, get several lengths of hose, find a hydrant wrench and find a nozzle. Put them all in the chief's buggy. And then he turned to me and he said, Vito, he says, you know enough about firefighting. If we get a call in the fifth battalion, you're coming with me, because we may be the only people who are going to be able to fight fire in the fifth battalion, which was pretty like - Wow. And then shortly afterwards, we heard a siren coming down Connecticut Avenue. We had no idea who it was. All our units were gone. Well, here comes a yellow fire truck with Chevy Chase Engine 71. I think it's the same one that Billy Fitz owns now. So they pulled up and backed in. They said they were told to transfer in there. Okay. You know, all that nice stuff you've got mounted on the side of your truck, put it in compartments and get it and stow it away. And they were there for not very long and they sent them to a fire. And then we heard another siren, and this time it was a white fire truck. It was Glen Echo. So I mean, and that's how it progressed. I never went into the riot area. Nobody ever. But but you could see the smoke and the glow in the sky from across Rock Creek Park, you know, and I kept, I actually kept - I think I still have it. I had a map of the city and every fire call they put out, I had a red pencil and a black pencil. Every fire they put out, I put a little red dot. Every police call related, I would put a little black dot, and you could look at my map and see the progression of the riot. You can eventually see that 14th Street was on fire from U Street to Park Road. Seventh Street was on fire from K Street to Florida Avenue, and H Street Northeast was on fire from third Street out to the Benning Bladensburg split. Those were the three main fire corridors, and there were hundreds of other fires all around the city.

00:21:57 **Amy Mauro**

I would love to see that if you still have it.

00:21:59 **Vito Maggiolo**

I think I have it tucked away somewhere. I'll have to look for it.

00:22:01 **Amy Mauro**

The website is going to have a section on the riots. So how do you think the riots impacted the fire department? After that experience, which was pretty unique.

00:22:19 **Vito Maggiolo**

I think it spoke extremely well for the fire department. In fact, did you ever read a book called Ten Blocks from the White House? I don't know if you've ever read it.

00:22:29 **Amy Mauro**

Not yet.

00:22:30 **Vito Maggiolo**

It's a great book, but they talk about how efficient and how well the fire department handled things that it didn't. They really didn't need to say much about the fire department, other than the fact that they fought all these hundreds of fires. You know, the fire department continued doing what it was doing. Of course, now we were dealing with a lot of vacant building fires. I mean, there were a lot of half burnt out buildings. The other interesting thing about the riots was almost everybody who died in the riots died in the fires. Very few shootings, you know, other cities where there was a lot of gunfire. And what usually happened was people would be looting inside, deep inside of a store. Somebody not knowing they were in there would come along and throw a molotov cocktail, trapping them inside and burning them to death. They found skeletons in the ruins, you know, months later. And also ... stores were set on fire that were on the ground floor of occupied buildings, and people got trapped. So almost all fire fatalities. But, you know, the department continued to operate as would be expected.

00:23:53 **Amy Mauro**

Okay. So you returned to D.C. in 78?

00:23:58 **Vito Maggiolo**

I did.

00:23:59 **Amy Mauro**

Tell us more about your career progression from there.

00:24:05 **Vito Maggiolo**

So I was working with Action Movie News, you know, covering New York City by night. And by the way, if I may regress a little bit, my plan as a journalist, I knew even back in high school, I wanted to be a journalist. And my plan was to become a print journalist working on a big city metropolitan daily. Working the police and fire beat... Circumstances took me into broadcast. So I'm working for Action Movie News, and then my boss, Sheldon Levy, he also had a production company called Mobile Video Services, and we did work for an outfit called the Independent Television News Association, ITNA. And that was run by a fellow named Reese Schoenfeld. So Reese Schoenfeld was chosen to be the first President of CNN. And so, let me let me let me backtrack a little. So ITNA had a bureau here in Washington that was a film bureau. They shot film for their stories, and Reese wanted to convert it to video. So he asked Sheldon, my boss in New York, to bid on a contract to convert the ITNA bureau in Washington from film to video. He got the contract and I went to him. I was getting burned out on these midnights, and as much as I liked going to fires and stuff, it was wearing me out. And so I, I said, Shelley, I know D.C., I lived there, you know, I think I would be useful to you down in D.C. so he agreed. And I came down here for the ITNA contract. That was in November of 78. And I worked as a soundman, as a cameraman. And a couple of years later, 1980, when CNN was established, Reese, as the first President of CNN, said to Sheldon, I want you to bid on building my CNN Washington bureau. So he did. He got the contract. He put me in charge of operations.

00:26:26 **Amy Mauro**

I had no idea you worked for Sheldon Levy.

00:26:28 **Vito Maggiolo**

I did, yeah, I worked for him in New York. And so then.

00:26:31 **Amy Mauro**

He came to DC to establish the Washington bureau.

00:26:35 **Vito Maggiolo**

He came to DC to establish the Washington Bureau of ITNA. And then, of course, then to handle the Washington bureau of CNN, to build it and to manage it. See, Ted Turner's idea was the broadcast unions are very strong. And Ted Turner knew if he was unionized, it would be the end of CNN. So he contracted all of the technical services to other people, knowing that if something happened, they would be the first to be unionized, but they would be the contractor to get unionized, not CNN directly. So another example of Ted as a businessman being a pretty shrewd character.

00:27:24 **Amy Mauro**

So you were with CNN for, what, 30 years?

00:27:26 **Vito Maggiolo**

35 years.

00:27:27 **Amy Mauro**

35 years. Wow.

00:27:31 **Vito Maggiolo**

Yep. 35 years. Primarily as an assignment editor in the Washington Bureau. I did field produce, mid-span in my career, because of my logistical strengths. I was often sent to the major breaking news stories where we would literally build a bureau from scratch. Columbine, Oklahoma City bombing, those types of events where we flew people in from everywhere. And we were going to be there for a long time. And basically you had to build a bureau. So I was often sent to those types of assignments. And then mid span of my career, they started sending me overseas. And it's interesting, I think, that one of the reasons they chose me for some of these conflict zones or war zones is I think they knew that I would draw on my my experience in the fire service in terms of knowing what danger was, knowing how to deal with those sorts of situations, that I would probably have a pretty good handle on those sorts of things. And so I ended up ... I was in Colombia during the hunt for Pablo Escobar and in Haiti during what was going to be the impending invasion of the US to reinstate Aristide, the duly elected president who was overthrown by the military there. I was in China for what eventually turned into Tiananmen Square.

00:29:17 **Vito Maggiolo**

And the highlight of my career was leading a team into Baghdad and covering Desert Storm from the ground in Baghdad. Being the only Western news organization that was allowed back into Baghdad for an extended period of time. My predecessor there, Robert Wiener, had built a relationship with the Minister of Information who when the war started and everybody left, the only person who stayed was Peter Arnett with a satellite phone. The Minister of Information convinced Saddam that it would be to their benefit to have somebody reporting from their side on the war. And CNN was allowed to return to Baghdad. And I led a team of people in and spent 40 days and 40 nights through the remainder of the air war. All of the ground war until the Shia rose up against Saddam and Saddam needed to massacre the Shia. So he threw us all out.

00:30:34 **Amy Mauro**

Wow. Were you ever afraid during those days, taking on assignments like that?

00:30:40 **Vito Maggiolo**

Yeah. You know, anybody who says they're not afraid is lying. The thing about fear is that it's a useful tool. As long as you control it and don't let it control you. Fear heightens your senses. Fear gives you a good sense of where you should go or where you should not go. But that's as long as you maintain control over your fears. If fear takes control of you, you go screaming into the dark night and get yourself blown away. So. Yeah. It's scary. You know, it's scary to lie in bed and suddenly have the hotel shaking from, you know, an aerial attack or feeling that you're someplace where there's a sniper, you know, pointing their gun at you. So, yeah.

00:31:32 **Amy Mauro**

What was the most dangerous circumstance you think you were ever in? If you can narrow it down.

00:31:38 **Vito Maggiolo**

Well, I actually have a story that's sort of absurd, but I think represents the absurdity of a war zone. So this is actually going back to the Israeli invasion of Beirut. This was in CNN's very early days. And so the PLO was headquartered in Beirut in Lebanon. And they did something that caused Israel to invade Lebanon. But this time the plan was to drive the PLO out of Lebanon. And Ariel Sharon was the general at the time. So the Israelis went into Lebanon and they basically laid siege to Beirut. I ended up in Beirut as a soundman, working with my partner George McArthur and Peter Arnett, who if there was a war, you would find Peter. He was the consummate war correspondent. So, anyway, we were there. And so one day we went out looking for a story, and we went to this mosque where this PLO commander was headquartered. We talked to him about a story. He suggested we do a story on hundreds of refugees who had fled the Israeli invasion. They were living in uncompleted high rise buildings in Beirut. Living under, you know, plastic. And so we did that story. It was a good story.

00:33:20 **Vito Maggiolo**

The next day we went back and during the night, the PLO had bulldozed earthen barriers on the road. Not that an earthen barrier would ever stop an Israeli tank, but, you know, they did what they did. So we went back to the mosque. And so as Peter and our driver and minder, fixer, interpreter, they talked, we asked for permission to shoot the berms, which we did. So we went outside, set up tripod and started shooting these things. Well, a Jeep pulls up with a couple of PLO fighters in it. And, you know, the PLO really didn't have much command and control. So these two guys, this Jeep with these fighters, pulls up, and they're looking at us real mean. Now I'm looking. I can see them because I've got the the tape deck in George's tunnel vision because he's looking through the camera lens. So they come over and they start talking to us in a rather loud fashion in Arabic, which neither of us understood. And so Peter stopped shooting. Well, I'm sorry, not Peter. George. George McArthur, my cameraman. So George was one of these characters who thought if you spoke real slow and gestured a lot, people would understand you. So, George, does one of these. "No, no, it is okay. We have permission." Well, now they're screaming at us and they're pointing at the jeep. Well, yalla yalla yalla. So, "George, I think they want us to get in the Jeep" and George does one of his. "Oh, no, it is okay". Now they're jamming their gun butts, they're jamming their AK 47s in my stomach and screaming and I said, "George, let's just get in the goddamn Jeep, okay? We'll figure this out. But this is not the time to have this discussion." So we get in the Jeep and they drive off with us, and as we're cresting a hill, I can look back and I see Peter and our driver, like, run out of the mosque. And I'm, like, waving at them.

00:35:42 **Vito Maggiolo**

So they take us into a neighborhood of Beirut that is run by the PLO. It's Sabra. And they take us into a building that's like a scene from a grade B movie. We're going down into a subbasement. The only light or bare light bulbs were being run by a generator. There's water dripping from broken pipes. This is a bombed out building. Take us to the subbasement. They put us in a room. So I'm sitting there now with George, wondering what's next. What's next is a fellow walks in who is dressed in civilian clothes. So right away I'm saying to myself, he's a political operative. He's not a military arm of the PLO. He's a political arm. So he looks at us and he says, "what are you doing here?" And so I start with the spiel. "We're the cable news network, we recently came from the United States. We're documenting the atrocities being perpetrated on the Palestinian people by the Israeli aggressors." You know, you know, blah, blah, blah. So he says "You recently came from the United States." I

said, "Yeah, just a week ago." He pauses. He says, "How is Reggie doing?" So I'm like, Reggie, I'm not saying this, but I'm thinking, who the hell is Reggie? He could not. My mind's going like, Reggie. Reggie.

00:37:35 **Vito Maggiolo**

Hang on a second. [Vito takes a phone call].

00:39:20 **Amy Mauro**

All right, so Reggie.

00:39:21 **Vito Maggiolo**

Reggie. Who's Reggie? So I'm like, Reggie, who the hell is Reggie? And he can see the confusion in in my face. He goes, "Reggie Jackson. How's Reggie doing?" ... You know, the Yankees and and I'm like Reggie Jackson. "Oh, the New York Yankees. I'm from New York, the Bronx. Reggie Jackson!" I made up some batting average. I mean, I just made up. Oh, he's doing great. He's batting three. Blah blah blah blah. The guy breaks out into a broad smile. Claps his hands. In comes the tea. In comes the candy. So now we're sitting on these rugs, drinking tea, eating candy, and talking baseball in the subbasement of a bombed out building in Beirut. Now, if that isn't as absurd as it gets. So after a few minutes, we hear, I hear this ruckus upstairs, and I realize it's Peter. He's come to save us. So I it gets louder and he's arguing with people. He's unstoppable. Finally, he bursts into the room, thinking that he's saving us from a fate worse than death. And we're like, Peter, sit down. Ahmed, have some tea. Have some candy. If you ever read the book Live from the Battlefield, which is Peter Arnett's book on his career, that story is in there.

00:40:49 **Amy Mauro**

I love it. I wonder what was their plan when they took you there? Was it just to see what you were up to?

00:40:57 **Vito Maggiolo**

Well, you know, they were they were always very suspicious of journalists. They always thought that you were like the information, whatever you were shooting, whatever images you were capturing, you were doing it for the Israelis. There was this suspicion always. So that's my story. My kidnapping, as it were, by the PLO and the outcome.

00:41:22 **Amy Mauro**

Well, it sounds terrifying and amusing, which makes a good story. So thank you for sharing. So let's go back to DC. Can you tell me about Sheldon Levy? I've tried to do some research on him, and there's not much online. What was he like?

00:41:40 **Vito Maggiolo**

... Sheldon was a character. Sheldon started as a fire alarm dispatcher in New York. And he found out how to use a video eight camera. The old film wind up eight millimeter camera. So he bought one. And I think one of the first times he used it was during the firefighters strike in 72, and he shot a fire. And he brought the film to local CBS, and they paid him 100 bucks. And that was pretty big money. So he started to do that on a regular basis. There's a long, complicated story, but it eventually evolved into him starting a company and eventually leaving the fire department to run the company full time.

00:42:54 **Vito Maggiolo**

I worked for Sheldon for a long time. I got along with him pretty well. But he could be pretty nasty. He could, you know, if you weren't doing something he thought you should be doing, he would go after you. His first wife, Maria, who had connections in the mob. Sheldon would go out and shoot a story. Some guy would be lying in the weeds in Brooklyn somewhere, and he'd be videotaping. And then he'd look through the viewfinder and call his wife and say, hey, your cousin's lying in the weeds. But when they split up. I mean, she was going to have his legs broken. But Sheldon ... just he was a character. A very complex guy. But a fire buff. And the way I got the job, I was, helping another guy out called Harry Rittenberg. Harry eventually became the deputy

commissioner for public information for the FDNY. He and I were roommates in the Bronx for a while, and I thought it was kind of ironic that the of the two of us, one became the public information officer for FDNY. I eventually became the public information officer for for the DC Fire Department. But Harry started to do the same thing Sheldon did, and they would always butt heads over who would get the best video, who would get it to the stations first. And then one day, you know, Sheldon went to Harry. Harry had a couple of guys working with him, including me, and he said, listen, why don't we join forces, start a company, professionalize this, make it worth all of our whiles. And that's how Action Movie News was created. And Sheldon really didn't know me, but Harry said, listen, I know this guy. He's trained in journalism. He's also a buff. He knows how to listen to the radios. He knows what a story is. And you should hire him as your first assignment editor. And that's how that came about.

00:45:15 **Amy Mauro**

And so eventually Sheldon became a member of the FFA. Is that right?

00:45:19 **Vito Maggiolo**

Sheldon became a member of the FFA. I think he was president at one point. He also volunteered his services as a photographer for the DC Fire Department. And so we there was a program - I've got the documents - the establishment of the Car 99 program. So Sheldon said, listen, you don't have a photographer. Basically, he was looking for an excuse to go riding around. So you don't have a photographer, I can go. I'll be your photographer. I'll make everything I shoot, I'll make available, will be available to you guys for whatever purposes you need. And so that was agreed upon. So Sheldon and I became the Car 99 program. We became the unpaid civilian video photographers for the DC Fire and EMS department. Sheldon eventually dropped out of that, and I became the remaining person. And for those many years that I rode around shooting and started shooting video in the 90s when the high eight cameras came out.

00:46:38 **Amy Mauro**

So what year was Car 99 established?

00:46:43 **Vito Maggiolo**

Let's see. We moved down here and it was 78. It was probably sometime in the early 80s. It wasn't long after Sheldon established himself down here.

00:46:53 **Amy Mauro**

I have seen some of Sheldon's photos in the museum's collection. So there's probably a lot from that time period around.

00:47:03 **Vito Maggiolo**

And then Sheldon eventually started freelancing again. I think after the CNN contract ran out and eventually became a photographer for WUSA, he was their nighttime guy. And during that period, he shot a lot of tremendous video of the department in action, including, of course, the Missouri Avenue fire.

00:47:34 **Amy Mauro**

Right. And he worked with Dave Statter, who also covered fire.

00:47:38 **Vito Maggiolo**

He was a reporter for channel nine at that time. We used to hang out at night. We all used to hang out down by Vermont right around 14th Street, 14th and Vermont, which at that time was where all the hookers were. So it was a very amusing place to spend time. It was a very strategic location, too. So, yeah. Dave is working on getting Sheldon's collection of video.

00:48:10 **Amy Mauro**

He shared some with me. So we'll see. I hope to have a section on him on the website as well. We'll see what happens with that.

00:48:19 **Vito Maggiolo**

Sheldon's relationship with the department here started in the 80s, and I've got a file because on every once in a while, you know, there's no institutional memory in the DC fire department. So every once in a while, somebody would say, who authorized you to do this? You know, a new administration would come in and say, why are you running around with lights and sirens? Oh, I'm Car 100. Well, it changed to Car 100. Well, who authorized it? And I pull out the special order. And the Department of Transportation authorizes my vehicle to have it ... There was another fellow out there - Guppy. It was his nickname. He was a freelancer. Guppy would shoot his video and sell it. Everything I shot, I gave to the media free of charge. My point being, I'm out there to show the work of the fire department. I'm not out there to make any money. That would actually be unethical because I'm being given access to the fire ground, and I've got a vehicle, I can respond. And so he hated that because ... Well, I shot better than he did. And they'd say, oh, we've already got Vito's video, we don't need it. So one day, this anonymous letter appeared in the mayor's office claiming to be a TV news cameraman unnamed. Did the mayor's office know that there was this fellow running around the city with lights and sirens? Vito Maggiolo - and selling it, you know, video. And that was Guppy who did that. I know who did that. So of course that translated down. And Milton Douglas called me, and Milton saying, so do you do this? I go, yeah, you do. He goes, well, who authorized this? I say, I've been doing this, and I had the file and, ... I knew it wasn't a real TV cameraman because all those guys knew me and they respected me and they knew I wasn't in competition with them. I was doing it for the fire department and I'd shoot a good job and then I would take it to all the stations. And back then you had to go to station a station and have them dub it and you know, but it was all about showing the work that the department did. That was his goal. That was Sheldon's goal. That was my goal.

00:51:10 **Amy Mauro**

And I do want to talk about 2015 and how you came to to your current position. But before we do that, if you could just look back at the 30 or 40 years you've spent with the department. Talk about how it's evolved, highlights, lowlights, you know, positive negative experiences. Anything you want to share about the history of the department that you think is important.

00:51:41 **Vito Maggiolo**

Well, to some extent it's cyclical. I was here during the budget crisis as I watched them close companies. I watched the manpower being reduced. I watched the whole travesty with Tommy Tippit. When he was made fire chief, he told the city council, the mayor, I'll be your fire chief. If, number one, you reestablish the fifth man on a truck company and the chief's aides and and several other things, and he was promised that. And then, what you would call the control board, cut the rug from under him. And he left ... some people thought it was a noble gesture on his part... And, you know, at the end of the day, it probably did more harm than good. You know, I remember days when of the 17 truck companies we had in the city, there were only seven in service. The rest were broken, unserviceable. And we had two second alarms that day.

00:53:01 **Amy Mauro**

Qas that the Eastern Market?

00:53:04 **Vito Maggiolo**

No, that was the 90s. This was actually one fire was a big storage area over in Anacostia Park that the U.S. Park Service was dumping all kinds of crap. And the embassy of Taiwan, those were two second alarms going at the same time.

00:53:25 **Vito Maggiolo**

You know, our sore spot was always EMS. Always EMS. We were constantly struggling with EMS and EMS was not considered ... most of the firefighters didn't particularly buy into EMS. EMS was always a stepchild, despite every once in a while, despite attempts to make it the EMS Division, the EMS bureau, the EMS, this, the EMS that. I mean to see what it was for such a long time and to see what it has become today. I mean, you know, we just celebrated the 100th successful whole blood transfusion, which we're going to make a big thing

out of. We've become very innovative, top of the line equipment, exceptional training. You know, a new generation of firefighter EMTs. Paramedics who buy into it because this is the way it is, you know?

00:54:48 **Vito Maggiolo**

I've been through, you know, I've seen firsthand the tragedies. John Williams, I was at that fire. Cherry Road, I was at that fire. I remember, you know, Cherry Road. I remember. The second alarm, I got up and was going to the fire. And then on the radio, you hear, a medic unit calling in. We're transporting CPR in progress, 25 year old firefighter, 80% third degree burns, CPR in progress. And, my God. I remember arriving at the fire and the guys from Squad 1 were sitting in the back of the squad and they ... I rode with Squad 1, so I walked up and, I was going to say something and ask them what went down, what was going on. And I looked at this one firefighter and I saw the look of horror on his face. And I just kept going. I just I wasn't going to interrupt whatever their thoughts were. You know, John Williams, I arrived at that fire. And when I walked up to the building, they were literally tearing the place apart. I mean, ripping, ripping the walls out. I said, what's going on? And what had happened, of course, John had fallen, had gone through the overhang, but had gone into the basement. But they didn't know he was in the basement. They thought he was on the ground floor. And they're literally tearing this place apart and they can't find him. And then Walter Webb was his spot. His flashlight caught the reflective stripes down in the basement. But when they brought him out and they ran him by me, I looked at him, I looked and he had what I always remember was - one eye was completely shut and one eye was wide open. And I said, no, that's not good.

00:57:05 **Amy Mauro**

Were you at the Kennedy Street fire?

00:57:08 **Vito Maggiolo**

I was working that day, and I could not get out of work. I listened to it. I knew it was going on. I knew, you know, I could hear the struggle, but I was not at that fire. The two that stand out in my mind was on Cherry Road and John Williams. So I've seen, you know, I've seen the tragedies. You know, the thing about this fire department is that the rank and file would make it work, despite the fact that they were not being given the tools or the equipment. You know, management was lacking. But they always made it work. And they were proud of the fact that they made it work despite the challenges. You know, keeping apparatus on the road with duct tape and stuff, you know, stuff like that. I look at the state of the art apparatus we purchase. We're back. We're back where we should be, and we're better, you know, far better than we were when during those lean years.

00:58:31 **Amy Mauro**

Yeah. It's a lot to be proud of. And you're right, I think my the whole time I've worked with the department. It's true. There's a consistency there that no matter what the circumstance, you know, you can rely on them and that they'll pull through somehow. You can't say that a lot about a lot of organizations.

00:58:51 **Vito Maggiolo**

You know, and I think one of the disadvantages to that is there's some municipal governments that know that the firefighters will do whatever it takes, and they take advantage of that. So, yeah, we reduced the manpower. They're still going to go out and put out the fires. You know we you know we're not going to buy apparatus. They're still going to make their operation. So there's some cities that actually know that. And in a bad way. Take advantage of it, I think.

00:59:33 **Amy Mauro**

Any other large incidents you want to talk about? The Pentagon, we haven't discussed that one. September 11th.

00:59:42 **Vito Maggiolo**

Well, I was working at CNN and, I was on the assignment desk, and we had an intercom system that allowed us to communicate directly with our headquarters in Atlanta. And the fellow who was our minder, so to speak, of the Washington bureau, Dave, he calls me on the intercom and he says, Vito. He says, they were having a

morning Bureau conference call. All the bureaus were talking to Atlanta about what their plans were for the day. And he says, Vito. Somebody just ran into the New York bureau meeting and said they saw a plane hit the World Trade Center. Can you start having the bureau make calls, find out what's going on? I said, okay, Dave. And just about then the New York bureau had - they were at number five, Penn Plaza, and they had a camera that looked south. A beauty shot of New York City, and they popped that shot up. And I'm looking and there's a picture of the World Trade Center with, like, a seven story hole in it. And I was like, oh my God. Well, this is serious. And, anyway, so, we started to get in high gear when we were going to send crews to New York and then as all of that was going on, one of our producers on Capitol Hill, Ted Barrett, calls me on the phone and says, Vito, what's all that smoke pouring across the mall? And I'm like, smoke. And I got DC on. I know it's not something happening in DC. So I had this just gut reaction based on experience and just switched one of my radios to the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority fire channel. I immediately did that. And then the first thing I heard was red 341, red three, five one close down the airport. We're responding off field. We have a plane that hit the Pentagon. And so I jumped up in the newsroom and I said, folks, it's our role in the barrel. Pentagon just got hit. So now of course we're focusing on the Pentagon. So all this is going on now. And I'm like, I got to get out of this newsroom. I got to get over to the Pentagon. So I told my boss, John Powers. I said, John, I said I can get up close. I said I know people. I said, let me go. So he let me go. So I jumped in my car and I responded over to the Pentagon and I, you know, got in real close. I remember in the meantime, of course, I had watched the first tower collapse. I was still in the Bureau, and I knew right away that there would have been a catastrophic loss of life of firefighters. There was no doubt in my mind. And then I ran into a buddy of mine from Montgomery County, from the task force, from the USA team. We talked about what happened in New York and what was happening there, but I shot some pretty good video. And so I spent, you know, I spent much of the day there. And then they told me, go get some rest because they were going to send me up to New York to help coordinate coverage in New York. So the next day, I drove up to New York and spent a couple of weeks there.

01:03:42 **Amy Mauro**

Can you describe the scene that you saw at the Pentagon, and the role that the D.C. Fire Department was playing?

01:03:50 **Vito Maggiolo**

Well, when I got there, there's still a lot of fire. Tower 10, our aerial tower was up and operating. Where I was, a lot of D.C. fire was actually taking place around the bend and in the central corridor. So I didn't see as much of D.C. as I might have. But, you know, it was a horrific scene. I'm just looking at the immensity of it. And I was there when they said another plane was coming. And, you know, we all evacuated across the highway and no other plane. There's a story. The deputy fire chief from D.C.. I'm trying to remember his name. His nickname was Fruit Loops.

01:04:46 **Amy Mauro**

So let's not say his actual name, then.

01:04:49 **Vito Maggiolo**

No, but he was quite a character. And the FBI field commanders came up and says - you got to evacuate the building. You got to evacuate. There's another plane coming. And [the deputy chief] turned to the guy. Supposedly he turned and said, well, you better shoot that son of a bitch down, because there's no way we're getting 200 people out of there in time.

01:05:18 **Vito Maggiolo**

... Just an interesting side note. A year later, I'm at CNN and we're going to be doing the first anniversary, and we're getting a video from all of our affiliates. Channel 9 was an affiliate back then, and I was, of course, very interested in watching all of the video, that raw video that was feeding in. So I'm watching a feed from Channel 9 and something catches my attention. I see two guys in suits and they're wheeling a patient, a burn patient, to a helicopter, and there's kind of two guys in suits. They look like they're shadowing somebody. And so what the hell? So I'm watching. And then I realize Donald Rumsfeld is helping to wheel this victim. And channel 9 never knew they had that picture. Are they in all the chaos? I mean, it was one of those you had to look twice, but, you know, it was the suits that caught my attention. And they're watching somebody. And I called Channel 9 and

says, do you guys know you have Donald Rumsfeld on camera with a victim? What you just said, you know, and that's how they found out that's ... kind of a sidebar to the whole thing.

01:06:46 **Amy Mauro**

So Fruit Loops made me think of this. Can you talk about some of the leaders in the department. And not even leaders - I guess leader is a subjective term, right? People in the department who stood out as being particularly strong leaders over the years you've worked with them?

01:07:12 **Vito Maggiolo**

Donald Edwards. I mean, he was a good, solid man. And he was a good leader. And I think that the picture that personifies that is his hugging one of the members at Kennedy Street. He's just. Donnie, you know, he carried the department through some terrible tragedies. A huge burden losing several people in a very short time after we had had a long hiatus of not having fatalities to have so many and in such a short period of time.

01:08:04 **Amy Mauro**

I spoke to him yesterday. I hope to sit down with him soon.

01:08:08 **Vito Maggiolo**

Yeah. Just just a good, solid gentleman. A hell of a firefighter. You know, I remember him, in the squad. Walter Webb. I think Walter, as an officer, I mean, Walter started out as a civilian ambulance guy on the nickel Ambulance 5 when it ran out of Engines 6 and went over to becoming a firefighter. ... The thing about Walter that I'll never forget. [I was] riding with the squad going to a fire. And he had a new guy on the squad, and we got to the fire, and the new guy jumped off the squad and went running past Walter. Walter never ran. ... He was like a panther in that. He wasn't fast, but he always ended up where he needed to be. And later, he called that firefighter over, and he would wag his finger and he'd call them by their last name. That's how you knew something was up. Like he'd go like "Mr. Carmody." And, you know, the guy would come over and he says, "I never want to see you running past me again." He says, "when you run, you're not sizing up. You're not looking at the big picture. Don't run. Never." And that's just something - that kind of leadership. You know, and he knew how to handle his men. He had some real characters on the squad now, which reminds me. You know Carmody?

01:10:20 **Amy Mauro**

Of course, now he's Executive Officer.

01:10:23 **Vito Maggiolo**

We were on 13th Street on a box looking for smoke coming from a house. We were looking for the location, and then somebody on the roof says it looks like there may be smoke coming from a house two doors down. Well, Carmody runs up. This is a beautiful house with a door, probably cost God knows how much. Beautiful door. He kicks that door in. Boom. He kicks that door in just as the homeowner was walking up the street and there was no fire. And that was another ... Walter's, like Mr. Carmody. He was rather sheepish.

01:11:23 **Vito Maggiolo**

But, of course, Ellerbe ... I don't know what to say about. You know, I've been riding with the apparatus forever. And, you know, I'm in the back of Squad 1, coming back. We actually were in a stalled elevator over at the Wilson building. And as we were leaving, I think Ellerbe was coming out and he kind of looked over at the squad. And so I'm on it. We pick up another run. I'm on 13th, we're coming down, some street, 6th Street. And my phone rings. It's Vassapolous. And he says "Vito, where are you?" I go, "I'm on 6th Street." He goes, "I know, but where are you on 6th Street?" I say, "I'm in the back of Squad 1." He goes, "Well, when you get back to the firehouse, get off the squad. Chief Ellerbe says you're no longer allowed to ride." Never an explanation. Okay, well, I was surprised it took that long, frankly. I remember a second alarm on Orange Street. I was there with the canteen, and they had sent an engine company for a trash fire, and they had a building off, and they had people trapped. And the chief got there, and the chief's aide made some rescues, and got burned in the process. But, you know, there was nobody there. I remember Ellerbe coming up and first thing. It's not like, hey, wow, make great rescues. "I want to know why that guy got burned. Why wasn't he wearing his gear? Why wasn't

this? Why wasn't this?" The dude just saved, like, three people, you know? But that was ... he was so many things, a narcissist. Frankly, I thought he was racist ... And it's almost like he hated his people. I mean, I hate to say it.

01:13:36 Amy Mauro

It is hard to understand. Yeah, there's lots of complicated perspectives about him, too, though.

01:13:42 Vito Maggiolo

And, you know, there were some projects that were positive. But, you know, we're not going to buy apparatus, you know, put us behind the eight ball on that. I mean, you worked with him, you know. But in terms of a time when the department struggled, I think that was... Chief Dean, of course, was a very calming factor.

01:14:08 Amy Mauro

Yeah. That's a good, um, segue. So tell what happened in 2015. You've retired.

01:14:17 Vito Maggiolo

I have. I'm in my second year of my buyout, and it's coming to an end. It's a few months. From CNN and it's a few months away. So I'm at Squad 1. Mayor Bowser gets elected. She announces Chief Dean, so they're holding their news conference at 2 Engine, which I'm hanging out at. So I went out on the apparatus floor and I watched the news conference. I went back into the sitting room when it was over, and Chief Dean came in. Gentleman that he is, he came in to introduce himself to the troops and say, you know, I hope to be your fire chief if the City Council approves the mayor's pick. And I hope to be able to, you know, be your chief. And so I just took advantage of that, and I introduced myself. Said "Chief, my name is Vito Maggiolo." I said, "the previous administration was sorely lacking in public affairs. Public relations. I think that I have something to offer. I have considerable experience in the media, and I know this fire department inside out. You can mention my name to anybody in this fire department." And so he said, "okay." He said, "we'll talk." And, you know, several months went by and we would run into each other and just kind of have a conversation. And then at one point he said to me, "you know, I plan on creating the director of communications position. Are you interested in that or the PIO position?" And I thought about it for about 10 seconds, and I knew the director of communications would be a very bureaucratic position and require, you know, a lot of time in the office dealing with the mayor's office. And I'm kind of a boots on the ground guy. And so I told them the PIO position. And then he hired Doug Buchanan, which was a great choice. And then Doug called me a couple of weeks later and said, "Come on in for an interview. I really want you on board." And of course, that's when I really had my my first real contact with you, which I, I got to tell you, I was intimidated by you, I really was. I thought you were a scary lady.

01:16:51 Amy Mauro

That's usually the first impression I give people. I credit my mother, who is from Bensonhurst in Brooklyn.

01:16:58 Vito Maggiolo

Okay. Yeah. No nonsense. And what I do remember is you and Doug were interviewing me, and I was facing the door, which had a window. And so people kept walking by and they'd see me and they'd wave. And I waved back and I think after that happened 2 or 3 times, you were like, excuse me, would you please stop doing that.

01:17:29 Amy Mauro

I want listeners to know that I dispute portions of this story.

01:17:32 Vito Maggiolo

And I said, well, I'm just being courteous. They're waving at me. I'm just waving back. But, no, it took me a long time to get to know you and who you are and not to fear.

01:17:49 Amy Mauro

Well, we were excited. Doug and I knew that you would be a great addition. And it did turn out to be an awesome choice, Obviously. I just remember you saying, you know, this is my dream job.

01:18:04 Vito Maggiolo

Well, it was my second dream job. I mean, 35 years with CNN, travel the world, see the world, and then at this stage in my life to represent a fire department. I mean, again, the fire service has been in my blood. The fire service has been a key part of my life, my entire life, to be able to represent a department I knew and I loved. I've been around since, you know, the late 50s visiting my aunt and uncle, you know, developed my friendships down at Engine 28. And so I always kind of joked about the fact that when I was hired as the PIO, there was nobody in the executive staff, no uniformed personnel in the executive staff who I have not known since they were rookies. They were all rookies when I was there. So it's kind of cool. You guys got nothing on me. That's what I got on you guys. I remember you when, you know ... I consider myself blessed, you know. I mean, how many people get to do what they really want to do in life? Twice over.

01:19:30 Amy Mauro

So what what impact has the fire department had on your life other than what we've talked about today?

01:19:35 Vito Maggiolo

Well, on a personal level, I was ten years old when my father died of a heart attack very suddenly. But by that time, I had 25 surrogate dads. The men at Engine Company 62 and Ladder 32 in the Bronx. They were my father figures. They were my male - represented what was good. I think they probably played a pivotal role in me turning out to be the person I was. So, you know, having that at a time when I had lost my father, my mom was not in good shape mentally and emotionally. That firehouse was a very stable place for me. And I was nurtured there and, you know, respected. And I returned the respect. And when I was in college, I would take my meals there, I would study in the bay, do my studies in the basement, you know, ride as an auxiliary firefighter.

01:20:55 Vito Maggiolo

And that was another exciting thing, I was an auxiliary firefighter with Engine 62 during the New York war years, and we were the interchange company for 82 Engine. So 82 Engine, of course. Report from Engine 82, the busiest firehouse in the world. We were an interchange company, which meant that every other night they would come to our slow neighborhood for a rest and we would go down there. So I went down there and I rode out of 82 firehouse. I got to know all the characters from the book, you know, and became friends with Dennis Smith. In fact, a story I like to tell is, the year after 9-11, when the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation - we had the memorial, but they had it [in DC] because of the number of people that died in the line of duty. They couldn't do it up in Emmitsburg. They had the Capital One Arena, and I had the honor of coordinating canteen service for the for the Sea of Blue. And I had canteens from all over. But anyway, after it was over, I was standing in the back of Squad 1, Engine 2, and I saw Dennis Smith standing there and I went, Dennis, you know, he knew me. He says, I'm waiting, I got to catch a cab. I got to go to the airport. I said, no way, I'm taking you to the airport. I'm driving you to the airport. So I drove Dennis to Reagan. And a week or two later I got a letter. And in it was a card. And Dennis had hand drawn a helmet with 82 on it. And he said, you know, thank you. And it was just - for a very busy man with a lot on his plate. He took the time to do something personal like that.

01:23:22 Amy Mauro

And for our listeners, can you tell them who Dennis Smith is? ...

01:23:28 Vito Maggiolo

Dennis Smith was a firefighter in New York City, and a very, very gifted writer. He's since passed, but he wrote any number of novels, mostly fire department related. But what put him on the map was he wrote a book called Report from Engine 82. He was assigned to Engine 82, a firehouse in the South Bronx, which became one of the busiest firehouses. Well, certainly in the nation, if not in the world. And the South Bronx at that time was an extremely poor area. Fires were constant. And Dennis wrote a first hand account of what it was like to be a firefighter in the South Bronx during those times. And it was on the bestsellers, the New York Times bestsellers

list for several weeks. And I'd be down there and people in cars would drive by, people from Long Island or from, you know, who wanted to see what they had read and wanted to see if it was real. A gentleman, a good firefighter. But he went on to write several other books, some nonfiction, some fiction. He also established a magazine called Firehouse Magazine. He was the editor in chief for a number of years.

01:25:14**Amy Mauro**

So I think he was just honored for that, right?

01:25:17**Vito Maggiolo**

I believe so, yeah. But Dennis was one of one of the key writers for Hal Bruno. You know Hal Bruno, right?

01:25:26**Amy Mauro**

Yeah. But tell tell us about him.

01:25:28**Vito Maggiolo**

Hal Bruno was the chief political analyst for ABC news. So he and I were both journalists. We both shared our love for, passion for journalism and also our love and passion for the fire service. Hal was a member of the Friendship Fire Association. He'd get up at 3:00 in the morning and serve coffee the same way I did. Hal and I both come from big city firehouse origins. Hal's Chicago, me, New York City. So we had a very strong bond, both personally and professionally. And Hal, sadly, has also since passed away. Actually, interestingly enough, Hal's love for the fire service came - His father was orphaned as a young man and he was taken in by Engine 33, on Great Jones Street in Manhattan. So he comes from that legacy. But Hal, at one point, at one time, Hal, who wrote a column, the politics column for Firehouse, sat down with me and said, you know, Dennis is stepping down as editor in chief and asked me if I was interested in the job, and I was very flattered. I seriously thought about it, but I was having a good career with CNN. I was traveling and I declined, and a very, very good friend of mine, Harvey Eisner, got the job, and he's a good friend, and he was a great editor. So I certainly have have no regrets. But, you know.

01:27:23**Amy Mauro**

So for a visitor to our new website, which will be launched soon, what's the one thing that you would want somebody who doesn't know anything about the D.C. Fire Department, who comes on the website to know about our history and our department?

01:27:40**Vito Maggiolo**

This is a fire department with a long, proud history. And we are a unique fire department in that we protect one of the most important, if not the most important city in the world. We protect presidents. We protect the homeless. Jesse Jackson, I think there's a quote that I kind of stole from Jesse Jackson. So we protect the White House to the row house. I mean, you might go out the door one moment and fight a fire in a row house. And the next time you go out the door, you're going to the U.S. Capitol or to the White House for an emergency. It's one of the things that makes the department unique. It's a well run, well maintained fire department and dedicated people. And again ... It's got a great history. And this website is going to reflect the history both, I think orally and visually. And I think I think you'll enjoy what you get to see and hear and read.

01:29:10**Amy Mauro**

Great. Anything we haven't talked about that we should cover?

01:29:13**Vito Maggiolo**

Well, I'd like to talk about my first ride on a fire truck.

01:29:16**Amy Mauro**

Okay.

01:29:17**Vito Maggiolo**

So I guess I was about eight years old. I was in my New York City Bronx firehouse, and a run came in for the hook and ladder truck. Ladder 32 was going on the call. And at that time they had a 75 foot wooden aerial ladder, and the tractor in it was a 75 foot wooden tillered aerial ladder, archaic by today's standards. And the truck, the tractor didn't even have doors on it. It had like, cutouts. So I went over to watch them turn out. And there was a Lieutenant Tim Foley, big roly poly guy. So Tim was getting ready to get on the rig. I'm like eight years old. And he looks down on me and he says, climb up. So I climb up and he puts me in the officer's seat, and he rides the side running board to make sure I don't fall out, and hands me the cord for the bell. And off we go. And I'm in the front. I'm in the officer seat of that fire truck. I'm eight years old. I'm clanging that bell like the end of the world, and we got about ten blocks or so, and then we got turned around. But my very first ride on a fire truck and you know.

01:30:48**Amy Mauro**

You'll never forget.

01:30:49**Vito Maggiolo**

I'll never forget. No. Absolutely not.

01:30:54**Amy Mauro**

Anything else? Anything else you want to talk about?

01:30:58**Vito Maggiolo**

I'm just proud. I'm just so proud and that I've been able to give back to the fire service, you know, by doing the canteen work, which I started doing a long time ago, in the 70s. Well, even before that, I was helping, in fact, with the Friendship Fire Association, you had to be 21 to be a member of the FFA. And they made me an honorary member when I turned 18 because I was going to more fires and helping out more than than some of their regular folks did. But, you know, being able to contribute in different ways as a journalist telling the stories where I could, on the streets as an auxiliary firefighter and as a volunteer with the fire buff clubs and now as the PIO to be able to represent this fire department and tell its story to the public. I feel fortunate, I really do.

01:32:09**Amy Mauro**

Well, I want to thank you, not just for your time today, but for everything you've contributed over these many years, because it is a service to the public to tell the department's story. And you've been that institutional memory over time. And it's going to contribute a lot to the website and to the history. We are very grateful for that. So thank you.

01:32:34**Vito Maggiolo**

I'm very glad to be able to play the role.