

In Memoriam
Raymond J. Baker, Sr., 64
Deputy Chief, Golden's Bridge Fire Department

Raymond J. Baker, Sr., Deputy Chief of the Golden's Bridge Fire Department, died unexpectedly in his sleep at his home on Saturday, March 9, 2024. He was 64 years old. From adolescence to his death, Deputy Chief Baker's time in the fire services as both a career and volunteer firefighter spanned more than four-and-a-half-decades.

He retired in 2013 after a 33-year career with the Hartsdale Fire Department in the Town of Greenburgh in Westchester County. In addition to responding to thousands of fire alarms and other emergency calls as a firefighter, he was a certified bailout training officer and licensed to operate all of the department's fire trucks. Trained and licensed in the electrical trade, he also served as the Hartsdale F.D.'s lead electrician charged with maintaining, repairing and replacing the hamlet's alarm boxes.

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City, Deputy Chief Baker joined hundreds of other firefighters at the World Trade Center site and also was stationed for a period of time supporting firehouses in The Bronx, New York, whose personnel were working in the recovery effort.

Overlapping part of his full-time service with the Hartsdale F.D. was a decade as a volunteer with the Somers Fire Department – where from 2007 to 2017 he held several leadership and officer ranks, which included Lieutenant, Captain, Second and First Assistant Chief, and Fire Chief.

Deputy Chief Baker joined the Golden's Bridge Fire Department in 2016 as a mutual aid member, reuniting in the fire services with the eldest of his two sons, Raymond Baker, Jr., who was already an active volunteer firefighter with the Golden's Bridge F.D., and who had previously served with his father when he joined the Somers F.D. at age 16.

One of Deputy Chief Baker's proudest moments in his fire services career was serving alongside his son for the past eight years, and together rising through the ranks of the Golden's Bridge Fire Department – he as Deputy Chief and Baker Jr. as Fire Lieutenant. Baker Sr. became a full member of the Golden's Bridge F.D. in 2017 and prior to his appointment to the Deputy Chief position, he served in other posts, including as the department's Certified Training Officer and Captain.

Deputy Chief Baker was always more than willing to share his lifetime of experience, expertise and knowledge about firefighting with his colleagues, especially newcomers and young members of the departments he served. He held numerous federal, state and county certifications in fire and emergency response – such as incident command, firefighter survival, essentials of firemanship, firefighter assist & search team tactics, passenger train emergency rescue, accident victim extrication, trench rescue, hazardous material incident command, national incident management system, national response plan, and many others.

Deputy Chief Baker was consistently among the Golden's Bridge Fire Department's most active firefighters in terms of responding to emergency 911 calls – such as structure fires, vehicle accidents, brush fires, and storm-related and all other types of emergencies – participating in training drills and attending department meetings, and signing up to work special details and community events. He looked forward to fire prevention day every year at Increase Miller Elementary School – where he would give tours of the fire trucks to the students and talk about fire safety – and the annual community day event at the firehouse, where he would assist youngsters in operating a water hose to knock down pretend flames, always using the opportunity to encourage them to volunteer when they are old enough.

“Ray Baker was the quintessential public servant. All he wanted to do was help people on the worst day of their life. He was a great firefighter and an even better human being,” said Fire Chief Albert Melillo of the Golden's Bridge Fire Department. “He could've spent his free time doing anything else, but because of his self-sacrifice and commitment to safeguarding others, he would come off shift from his career firefighting job and still find time to volunteer with the Somers Fire Department.”

Chief Melillo continued, “Even when he could’ve been fully enjoying retirement, he continued giving back to the community by doing what he loved most – being a firefighter, and putting the safety and well-being of Golden’s Bridge residents ahead of himself. Ray was always a selfless person, always doing for others. We were fortunate to have his friendship, example, and service.”

Deputy Chief Baker is described by his close friends as a loving and devoted husband and father, a conservationist who enjoyed the great outdoors, especially hunting and fishing, and a model train enthusiast who relished the challenge of building replicas and learning everything he could about trains.

Born in Hartsdale to Raymond and Millie Baker on July 1, 1959, Deputy Chief Baker was captivated by firefighting at an early age, watching his father, a licensed electrician, respond to alarms as a volunteer firefighter with the fire department in the Greenburgh hamlet of Greenville (better known as Edgemont).

As soon as he became age-eligible, Deputy Chief Baker joined the Hartsdale Fire Department as a volunteer and then went on to become a career firefighter with the department in 1980. He met the love of his life, Ann (Duggan), in 1991 after an introduction by a mutual friend in the department. He and Ann, a retired educator who taught for more than 35 years at Our Lady of Sorrows Elementary School in White Plains, New York, were married in 1993 and moved from Hartsdale to Somers in 1995. They had two children, Raymond Jr., who is also a Lieutenant with the Lewisboro Volunteer Ambulance Corps and an emergency room technician at Northern Westchester Hospital in Mount Kisco, New York, and Ryan J. Baker, a mathematics teacher at BOCES Westchester.

Deputy Chief Baker is survived by his wife Ann, their children, Raymond Jr. (Laura) and Ryan (Julianna), and his Golden’s Bridge and other fire department colleagues, whom he always considered his sisters and brothers. He is predeceased by his parents, Raymond and Millie, and a sister, Louise.

A wake will be held at Beecher Flocks Funeral Home (418 Bedford Road, Pleasantville, New York) on Friday, March 22, 2024, from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., with a fire department service at 7 p.m. A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated for Deputy Chief Baker at St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church (94 Plumb Brook Road, Somers, New York) on Saturday, March 23, 2024, at 11:30 a.m. A reception will immediately follow for family, firefighters, and friends at the Golden’s Bridge Firehouse (254 Waccabuc Road). #