

How to honor hundreds of first-responders after Hillsborough fire? A giant BBQ!

By Dan Alexander February 16, 2016 1:23 PM



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A huge fire ripped through a Hillsborough warehouse, sending smoke for miles Thursday, Feb. 11. (Courtesy of Northeast Bravest)

A Manville man has created an online fundraiser to pay for a “thank you” dinner for the firefighters who battled **the massive Hillsborough warehouse fire**.

Firefighters from more than 30 fire companies helped put out the flames on the fire that consumed two 240,000 buildings at the Somerville Industrial Park in sub-freezing cold. Two firefighters were injured during the two days the fire burned, sending plumes of black smoke into the sky that could be seen **at least as far as 130 miles away**.

“I live one mile from the fire. My uncle worked at that facility for many years. I see how it affected him and his his friends,” Derek Basista, the owner of Charity Events Groups, said. “I live a half mile from every firehouse in Manville, I know these people personally. I just see the affect the fire had on everyone from losing the building to the firefighters out there with the water blowing back and freezing on them.”

Bastista said he wanted to do something to thank the firefighters for their efforts and realized that he could use his business to show his appreciation.

He said he thought, “Why don’t I plan a dinner and invite all the firefighters?” and began planning the event.

He created a **GoFundMe page** to collect donations and handed out flyers at businesses in Hillsboroug on President’s Day and has already found a lot of support for his idea.

“The amount of people that have reached out wanting to help has been amazing,” Bastista said, just a few days into the effort. “I’ve always believed in Manville and Hillsborough but just to see the amount of people and how far away these people are from and wanting to help has been unbelievable.”

Bastista was in for a surprise when he spoke wit the Somerset County Fire Coordinator about his idea and found out there were more than 450 fire, rescue and police personnel that helped with the fire.

“It was a shock to me. When I am planning a dinner for 200, 300 it’s hard but manageable. Now we’re jumping up to the 500s to maybe even 600s and it made it that much more difficult,” he said.

He has made contact with a member of a Hillsborough firehouse that owns several softball fields that has offered to donate the fields and the parking. Several caterers have offered to donate food and equipment, Bastista said.

“Everything is falling into place and it looks like we’re shifting towards a massive barbecue,” he said.

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