

Focus on health

Digging in to help fellow firefighters

Fire Department, landscaper lend services to spruce up SB University Cancer Center

By LISA MANCUSO

Stephen Mazelis, a Smithtown volunteer firefighter and owner of Mazelis Landscape Contracting Corp. in Smithtown, believes in paying it forward. Last year, he donated his services to Army Corporal Chris Levi of Holbrook, a young soldier who was seriously injured in Iraq, by donating a complete landscape makeover of the Levi home.

So when fellow Smithtown firefighter Tony Cruz approached him a few months ago asking for his help with another landscape project, Mr. Mazelis didn't hesitate to once again donate his company's time and landscaping skills. This time, the location of the landscape project was not at someone's home, but at the Stony Brook University Cancer Center.

Mr. Cruz is the director of the New York Chapter of the Firefighter Cancer Support Network (FCSN), an organization that provides support and assistance to fire department members and their families who are dealing with cancer. A cancer survivor himself, Mr. Cruz is also active at the Stony Brook Cancer Center and he and a fellow FCSN member sit on their advisory board. "Ron Barz and I are on the Stony Brook Cancer Advisory Board. We are the only two males among 15-20 women," he

said. "A few months ago, they were talking about landscaping and creating a place where patients and their families could sit and reflect. They looked at the two of us, we looked at each other, and I said to them, 'Let me see what I can do.'"

The first person who came to his mind who could help with the project was Steve Mazelis, said Mr. Cruz. He recalled Mr. Mazelis' generosity with the project he did for Army Corporal Chris Levi. "I walked in to see Steve. I said, 'I got to ask you a big favor.' He said, 'What is it?' I said, 'It's really big.'" Mr. Cruz said he explained to his friend what he needed done and Mr. Mazelis quickly agreed to help. "He didn't hesitate for a second," said Mr. Cruz.

Mr. Mazelis said he was only too happy to help with the project. Paying it forward, he said, has become "an important part of my life." He is the proud son of a retired New York City Firefighter and his wife is a cancer survivor. "Saying yes to donate this landscape was an obvious answer for me." He said.

The area that was landscaped is called



"The Garden of Hope." It is approximately 60' x 25' and is located at the entrance of the treatment facility, bordered by the parking lot. A walkway takes visitors through the garden and there are three benches where people can sit and gaze at a cascading waterfall. Mr. Mazelis said plants were carefully selected to attract local birds and butterflies and a scalloped picket fence was installed to block out the parking lot and to help create a cozier atmosphere.

As with his other donated landscape project, Mr. Mazelis said he had plenty of help from not only his employees, but other vendors he works with. "I made

several phone calls reaching out to some of my vendors and without any hesitation they were all on board with anything I needed to get the job done," said Mr. Mazelis. Local businesses that contributed material and/or services were: Patricia Hopkins, Landscape Designer; Bisset Nursery; Sam's B.C. Nurseries and Victorian Fence Inc. "They all made it possible for me to get the job done. I am very fortunate to be surrounded by such vendors and friends who have such big hearts." The Garden of Hope was dedicated by the Stony Brook University Cancer Center on Wednesday, October 27.

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