

Local families enjoy learning about first responder vehicles

BY CAREN CATERINA
THE COAST STAR

BELMAR — From sirens to horns, plenty of sounds could be heard on Ocean Avenue, here, on Saturday, as the borough hosted its Touch a Truck event.

Families were given the opportunity to touch and sit in first responder vehicles that helped to assist the Borough of Belmar last year during Hurricane Sandy, as well as some newly acquired vehicles.

The Touch a Truck event, which was hosted by the Borough of Belmar, was purposely held close to the one year anniversary of Hurricane Sandy to showcase the borough's fleet of vehicles.

Hurricane Sandy struck the area last Oct. 29.

The borough's vehicles on display included fire, first aid and police vehicles, as well as the newly acquired military vehicles.

Through the United States Department of Defense's Law Enforcement Support Office [LESO] and the United States General Services Administration [GSA] programs, the bor-

ough was recently able to acquire four: five ton, high water trucks that are able to drive through 7 feet of flood water, four Hummers, one unimog, two bulldozers and one trailer bed, at no cost to the borough.

The borough also acquired 10, 60-kilowatt generators, 11, 10-kilowatt generators and 10 generator trailers.

Many of the vehicles lined Ocean Avenue between 17th and 20th avenues.

In addition to showcasing the borough's fleet, attendees also enjoyed refreshments and Halloween-themed games.

On Saturday, Doug Brand, who serves as the 1st assistant fire chief with Volunteer Hook & Ladder Fire Company, said the Borough of Belmar wanted to host the event on Saturday.

"So, the town reached out to the fire department and asked us to participate," he said. "They are the ones who put this all together."

"We want people to know the equipment we have here," said Belmar Department of Works Director Mike Campbell. "We lost a lot of police fleet, and two-thirds of the

DPW's" which were "wiped out with Sandy."

Most of the equipment was ruined due to salt water, he said. Mr. Campbell said the borough was proud to have received the new vehicles through LESO.

Mr. Campbell also commended Belmar Police Department Capt. Andrew Huisman, who spearheaded the initiative in helping to get the vehicles "to make sure the town is ready" in another event like Hurricane Sandy.

During such events like Hurricane Sandy, police cars will be taken to high ground and the other vehicles will be utilized instead.

"We've been blessed by the government in getting these things," he said.

Mr. Campbell also commended Mayor Matthew Docherty and borough administration for all of their efforts.

Mr. Campbell also said the event provides a chance for families to see the vehicles up close, and to learn about the different equipment.

With the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Sandy, Mr.

Campbell said the event also provides some comfort to families knowing the town is ready.

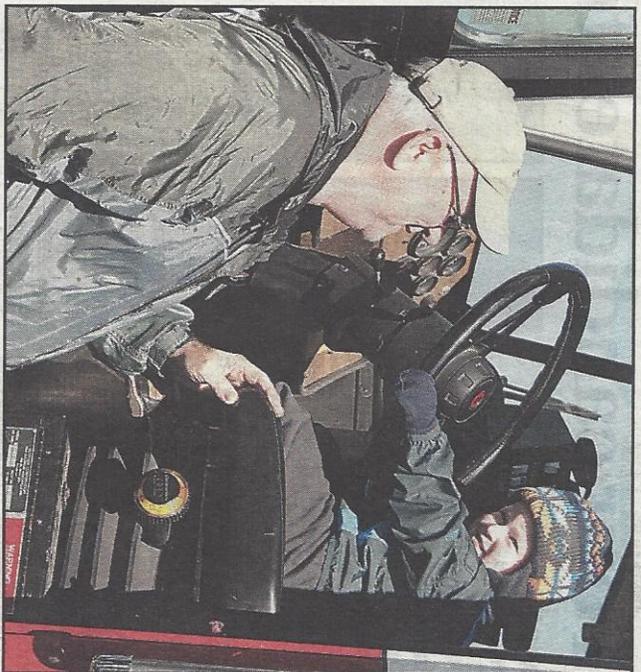
"You can see all this great stuff. We are ready for the next event," he said. "It is great for families. Parents should be proud of what Belmar has done."

Fran Hines, of the borough's DPW and a member of the Belmar First Aid Squad, said during Hurricane Sandy, about 300-400 people were rescued during the storm. There are also 23 members who are a part of the borough's water rescue team.

"It is an incredible event for kids and parents to see the vehicles we have and see they are all kept protected in Belmar," Mr. Hines said, including a jet ski and some small boats.

"They are here to protect and serve them. We have been building a fleet of high water vehicles. We learned an invaluable lesson," Mr. Hines said.

Families walked to all the different vehicles, allowing their children to sit in each one, play with batons, press horns and so on. Officials were happy to explain the various



SUENNE GOSS THE COAST STAR

Charlie Wilkins, of Wall, and his grandson, Max Wilkins, 2, of Manasquan, got a chance to see different vehicles during the Touch A Truck event held on Saturday in Belmar.

roles of each vehicle to parents and children.

Spring Lake Heights residents Gina and Michael Cappello and their children, Chase, 4, and Kylie, 3, were among the many families enjoying the event.

"The kids love it," Mrs. Cappello said.

With Hurricane Sandy, she noted that seeing all the brand new vehicles provided a sense of comfort and relief.

"We are really prepared, which is nice," she said. "We have heard the stories of all the equipment they have used, but to see it is reassuring."