

Barnegat resident, 9/11 responder Harold J. Smith, 47, loses battle with cancer

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Retired New York Police Sgt. Harold J. Smith died Saturday after a long battle with kidney cancer / Photo courtesy of the family of Harold J. Smith

By Bob Vosseller

BARNEGAT — Charles Giles said what he remembers most about fellow Barnegat resident and 9/11 responder Harold J. Smith was though Smith was seriously ill himself, he would reached out to Giles to offer him help.

Smith, a 47-year-old retired New York Police Department sergeant, lost his battle with kidney cancer Saturday at 12:35 a.m. He had retired and moved from Staten Island to Barnegat in 2007.

His wife Margie said Saturday that in August 2008 his doctor "had discovered that cancer had concentrated in his kidney."

She said doctors found the cause of the cancer to be linked with the toxins that Smith had ingested at a landfill in Staten Island where debris from the Twin Towers had been moved.

"He was in remission after they removed his kidney. He would go every three months for a checkup but it came back in May of 2010," Margie Smith said. "We were married for about 19 years. He was a great man and he'll be missed by a lot of people."

"He was the 995th to die since 9/11," Giles said Saturday afternoon of Smith. "He was a 21-year veteran of the New York Police Department.

Smith's last assignment with the New York Police Department was with the Staten Island Narcotics Squad.

"Smitty" as he was known to his friends, had been suffering for many years and underwent chemotherapy and was in the hospital for weeks," Giles said.

Giles met Smith a year ago as they were comparing notes on their ordeal with 9/11 recovery efforts and about federal legislation which impacted their health care. Giles said he takes 32 medications for the health issues, which are caused by the toxic dust left from aftermath of 9/11.

"He saw my story in the Asbury Park Press and sought me out to find out what he could do for me. Here he was dying of the toxins and he wanted to help me. That is the kind of man Harold Smith was. He was a giant among men," Giles said.

Smith received a proclamation from Barnegat Mayor Jeffrey Melchiondo and township Police Chief Arthur Drexler on Feb. 21 "that recognized his heroism for 9/11 and his being a superb police officer. There wasn't a mean bone in his body. He was very much loved by his family, his friends and the New York Police Department," Giles said. Melchiondo recalled Saturday his President's Day visit with Smith and his family.

"We spoke with him and his family and the experiences he had in 9/11. He was helped out of bed and was in wheelchair but it seemed like a good day for him and he talked to us for an hour. It is a sad day today and sad that so many of those who volunteered to help on Sept. 11, 2001, are still suffering today."

Smith leaves behind his wife Margie, daughters Christina, 24, and Maria, 14, and his 18-year-old son Brandon.

"Smitty was a man of great stature and character and a very compassionate officer. He could be stern with his squad but he was always kind. He will be given a full honor guard funeral by the New York Police Department," Giles said.

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Funeral Arrangements

A wake for Harold J. Smith will be held from 2 to 4 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday at the Hanley Funeral Home, 60 New Drop Lane, Staten Island.

Mass of Christian Burial will take place at 10:30 a.m., across the street from the funeral

home at the Our Lady of Queen of Peace Church.

In lieu of flowers the family is requesting donations be made to the Hope and Heroes Children Cancer Fund, Tumor Research at 161 Fort Washington Ave., IP-7, New York, N.Y. 10032.

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