

We first met Giovanni Castiglione at the 99 Restaurant & Pub in Newport. We had been seated in the area that he was serving. He took our orders and when we asked for a pint of ale, we chided him for not knowing how many ounces there are in a pint.

His Spanish accent should have told us that he was used to a different measuring system all together. His good nature accepted our foible without comment.

Giovanni, or Gio, is from Chile (pronounced, he explained, as Chillyay), where he was a firefighter. We were told that now he is a member of the Jamestown Fire Department.

That's a big transition, both culturally and geographically. He's gone from fighting fires in Santiago high rises to chasing alarms on a small island in Narragansett Bay.

He came to Rhode Island in October of 2003 with his wife, Brooke Manning of Middletown, who was teaching English in Santiago. "She is the most interesting person and the best friend I have ever had," Gio said.

He explained that moving up here was a huge adjustment process. "The change has been some kind of bitter-sweet experience. To learn a new language, with no friends other than my wife and her family, I felt alone."

Giovanni, 30, has a degree in Information Systems Analysis and worked in Santiago as an academic advisor to a university. When he came north he could not find a job in his area of expertise. To keep his firefighting skills intact, he sought out volunteer departments. The only nearby fire department close to volunteer is Jamestown's.

He works at the 99 as a waiter and Old Navy in the same mall area as a logistic associate ("unloading the trucks, changing prices, and cleaning windows and toilets").

It was at Old Navy that he met Dave Stark, a Jamestown firefighter, who invited Gio to the island to visit the fire station. "One of the first things I did was to ask for an application. I was very lucky because they were allowing people from out of town to join the department. Actually, my group was the last class accepted with people from out of town." He is now assigned to Engine 2 fulfilling his probationary requirement to rotate around the companies.

His break with firefighting in Chile was traumatic. "The day I did it, I promised myself I'd come back. Then I realized that to be a firefighter is not a job. It's not a hobby. To

The Walrus Says

By Jim Munro



be a firefighter is a way of life. Once you put that coat and helmet on, you can't take them off."

Giovanni has been with the Jamestown Fire Department for a year this month. "It has been some kind of relearning process, having to know all the tool names in English, and convert liters to gallons, millimeters to inches, and meters to feet. It is interesting the way the department is organized. Its organizational structure covers all the bases. As a bottom line, I can say that a fire station is a fire station anywhere — here in Jamestown or in Santiago."

Giovanni had his introduction to firefighting after re-uniting with a high school buddy who was the first lieutenant in a fire house in El Quisco. He said he was impressed when the two walked into the lounge and the firefighters all stood up as a sign of respect. "We were talking when all of a sudden the tones went off. The company was dispatched to a call, and I found myself alone in an empty fire station. A couple of days later I came back and asked for an application."

After a few months of training, Giovanni became a part of the night-shift known as "The Night Knights." A move in his day job later took him to membership in the Santiago Fire Department, "this time riding on Engine 20, the same truck I saw with all its lights and sirens going down the street so many times when I was a kid."

The Chilean fire services are different than in the States. Gio said that in Santiago, a city of around seven million people, there are three big fire departments, all of them volunteer. "We are talking about 60 fire stations, 130 fire apparatus, and about 4,000 volunteers total. Just in Engine 20's company, we had two engines and 78 volunteers. Calls ranged from the typical cat in the tree to high rise fires and anthrax threats."

"Firefighters are a huge family. You can go anywhere in the world

and say you are a firefighter, and you will be welcome as a brother or sister. It's a very special group of people who are able to give everything, even their lives, to help others."

Giovanni doesn't lack for company to talk about firefighting. His father-in-law, Tim Manning, was a Newport firefighter for 25 years.

Thanks, Gio, welcome to the island.

The Jamestown EMS (Emergency Medical Services) or former Ambulance Association is conducting its annual fund-raising campaign. The organization makes up to 600 calls each year. Volunteer crews are on call 24/7.

The EMS' goals for 2007 are new defibrillators, one for each vehicle, and increasing the kitty for a new ambulance.

Money well invested. Send your checks to Jamestown EMS, 11 Knowles Court, Jamestown 02835.

Kudos to the mystery person who showed up in our back yard Friday with his bucket truck and removed our tattered flag from atop its pole.

He told Mim, "I heard his call for help."

The state flag and U.S. flag will remain at half-staff until Jan. 25 in honor of and in tribute to President Gerald R. Ford, the nation's 38th chief executive.

There would have been a dark side, literally, to the Christmas Pageant on Shoreby Hill except for the fast action of three members of the Jamestown Lions Club.

That Sunday afternoon, Jill Anderson, her husband, Rick, and Bill Munger had traipsed over to the site of the pageant to set up the sound system for the festivities.

Two days earlier, the tree that was to be lighted as the finale to the pageant had been made ready. Now only two hours before the re-enact-



Jamestown Fire Department's Giovanni Castiglione (above) is from Chile, where he fought fires in Santiago high rises (below) before moving to Rhode Island in 2003. He says that fire fighting is a way of life. "Once you put that coat and helmet on, you can't take them off."



ment of the Nativity scene, it was discovered vandals had removed and stolen 225 light bulbs. The bulbs were missing from about five-feet on down indicating that very short people or children were the culprits. Or as Jill put it, "Some low-down rotten thieves."

For two hours the three volunteers scoured their storage areas for replacement bulbs, and went through backup strings trying to find enough to make the tree as beautiful as before.

They did, and it was. Great job!

Dr. Joshua Hatch of the Jamestown Animal Clinic reminds us that with each new year our pets are growing older along with us.

"As technology improves, people and pets are living longer happier lives. This means that many of our pets are commonly reaching senior or geriatric ages. Pets age at different rates depending on their size and species. The rough estimate of

7 dog years or 5 cat years to every 1 human year is about right, but larger dogs age faster and a 7-year-old lab is more a senior pet than a 7-year-old miniature poodle.

"Take a minute to figure out how old your pets are and start making note of changes you may have noticed. Does Fluffy seem slower getting up in the morning? Does he or she get winded on long walks or has their appetite or water intake changed? All of these subtle changes can be signs of aging change like arthritis, heart disease, or kidney disease that addressing with your animal's doctor can help keep Fluffy healthier for as long as possible."

Be true!

Call in your stuff for this column to 423-0383 or 829-2760. You can e-mail us at jtnwalrus@hotmail.com, or drop your items off at the Jamestown Press office.


SOUTH COUNTY SOUND and VIDEO
Jamestown's authorized DirecTV dealer
401-364-9008
www.scsv.net

DIRECTV AUTHORIZED DEALER


Lessons for all ages are available on URI's Kingston campus
"4 Hands Together" piano for 4-7 year olds with an adult
8 weeks begins January 13th \$185
Adult beginner piano
6 weeks begins January 22nd \$150
Private lessons in flute, cello, clarinet, oboe, piano, voice, violin, trumpet, guitar and more
For fees and registration info call:
URI Preparatory Music Program at 874-2798
or use our web site:
www.uri.edu/artsci/mus/prep

Exclusive to Jamestown
Locally Owned
SEASIDE OIL
WE WILL MATCH OR BEAT ANY VERIFIABLE C.O.D. PRICE. GUARANTEED
C.O.D.
560-0223
Lic# 452


FAMILY-OWNED PHARMACY
OPENS AT CROSSING AT THE TOWER
We Will Match Any Local Competitor's Cash Prescription Price!
• Over 600 Insurance Plans Accepted
• Compounding Services • KIDS' PLAYROOM!
FREE  OR TWO 12-PACKS OF COCA-COLA PRODUCTS with new or transferred prescription.
Coupon good thru 1/31/07. Limit ONE COUPON per family member. Restrictions apply on government funded prescription transfers. Coupon needed to redeem offer.
Located at Tower Hill (401) 284-4505
Corner of Rte. 1 & Rte. 138 Toll-free (866) 716-1502
South Kingstown, RI M-F 9-7, Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-2
www.bayviewrx.com