

A Visit to the Malabar Fire Station — May 15, 2008

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Malabar Fire Department Volunteers

I didn't know what to expect when I said yes, I would come down to the Fire Station to help serve lunch. It was the Thursday of the massive "wild fire week" and things had settled down somewhat news wise, but I found the volunteers were still busy and the people they served were still vigilantly working. Council woman Pat Dezman, in a bright orange "Information Officer" vest, welcomed me even though she was dealing with several volunteers simultaneously. She made a quick introduction to a couple of ladies scurrying by and went back to her conversation. I was directed to start on a chore which lead me to the kitchen and other tasks to do. Some volunteers were making sandwiches, restocking coolers or putting out pre-wrapped food items, while others were consolidating and inventorying plates, plastic-ware, cups and the like.

Restacking lunch meat and salads as I went, I cleaned the refrigerator then filled the milk container and helped put out food in the buffet line.

Several trucks stopped by and the volunteers unloaded water and food. Some from Winn Dixie, some from Publix, some sandwiches from Subway, a crock pot with ham and beans, baked beans and Cole slaw all began to fill the serving tables.



Police and Firefighters stop for lunch

began to tell stories of how we got here and what had happened to us in the last few incredible days.

Cots were available, although no one slept just yet. A masseuse with table was set up and several people took advantage of her welcomed therapy. The first aid station offered ice packs, IVs and bandages for the weary firefighters who began to trickle in. As noon came and went, the disaster workers appeared. Palm Bay Police Officers, Sheriff's



Walter "Buster" French and The Chief

Deputies, Malabar Volunteer Firemen (and women), Division of Forestry personnel all hot and tired sat and ate from the bounty. A few sat alone, others in groups talking or laughing, glad for the brief break.

I spoke to a couple of firefighters who said they were watching several homes and hot spots for flare-ups. Anticipating more as the afternoon breezes picked up, they finished their lunches and left. Other firefighters just stopped by to grab lunch "to go" for themselves and workers back on the line.

Mayor Eschenberg stopped by to check on things as did Bob Lay of Brevard County Emergency Management. They spoke with Fire Chief Gianantonio who was back from touring the town. He confirmed what I had been thinking, that I couldn't remember this kind of wildfire since I've been here (23 years). He has been here longer.

In a town where folks like to be spread out, there was a close camaraderie and oneness forming. "I don't think I've ever talked to my neighbor so much since I moved here," said one lady I spoke with. "I can see my neighbor's porch now through the woods and that's strange, but it's good we can come together like this in such a hard time. "



Volunteers unload canned water

Talking to the volunteers as we worked, I met folks from Malabar like Stuart and Nancy Borton and their kids. Stuart had a "Yellow Dog Cafe" shirt on (which they own) and they were directing the set up. This was familiar ground for them and it made the craziness seem tame. Working amid the volunteers was Jackie Colon, County Commissioner, and I could see she had been here before as she spoke with many of the staffers. Some of the others I met were firemen's family members or residents from Malabar and Palm Bay who just wanted to help out. Young, middle aged, or older, we



DOF Firefighter



The Mayor and Bob Lay