

Ex-firefighter honored for search effort

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ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

A retired Great Kills firefighter who "symbolizes the goodness of Staten Island" was honored by the Advance in a ceremony held yesterday in the newspaper's Grasmere offices.

George Kramer, 56, was honored for his efforts that led to the discovery of Jennifer Schweiger's body last month in a wooded area on the grounds of the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC).

The 12-year-old Westerleigh girl with Down's syndrome had been missing since July 9, setting off a massive Islandwide search.

Advance Editor Les Trautmann presented the soft-spoken Kramer with a \$100 U.S. Savings Bond while the retired firefighter's wife, Nancy; son, George, and daughter, Linda, proudly looked on.

Chief Anthony DeVita and Deputy Chief Warren Haring, representing the Fire Department, were also present.

Trautmann noted that the Advance regularly honors members of the Fire Department but that a special category — Retired Firefighter of the Month — was created in this case because Kramer

is retired and still represents the high ideals of the department.

"Mr. Kramer symbolizes the goodness of Staten Island," Trautmann said. "I think Mr. Kramer is a symbol of a good citizen, a concerned Staten Island, and of a fine Fire Department."

For nearly 20 years, Kramer worked with Engine Co. 156 out of the Broadway firehouse in West Brighton.

Trautmann called Kramer's efforts "important" and a "good moment in a deplorable situation."

Kramer, who works nights as a security employee at a Manhattan construction site, had been helping in the search for Jennifer "off and on" for about three weeks.

Several days before his discovery, Kramer and his wife, Nancy, joined the Friends of Jennifer group in a massive search of the SIDC grounds when something about a 15-foot-wide span of earth that opened off a path through dense woods behind Building 27 struck him as strange.

The patch Kramer discovered wasn't examined further because SIDC security guards were trying to clear the area of scores of searchers as darkness neared.

"It was a path, but it wasn't a well-used path," Kramer said yesterday. "There were clumps of dirt mixed with clay. It wasn't natural. It just didn't look right."

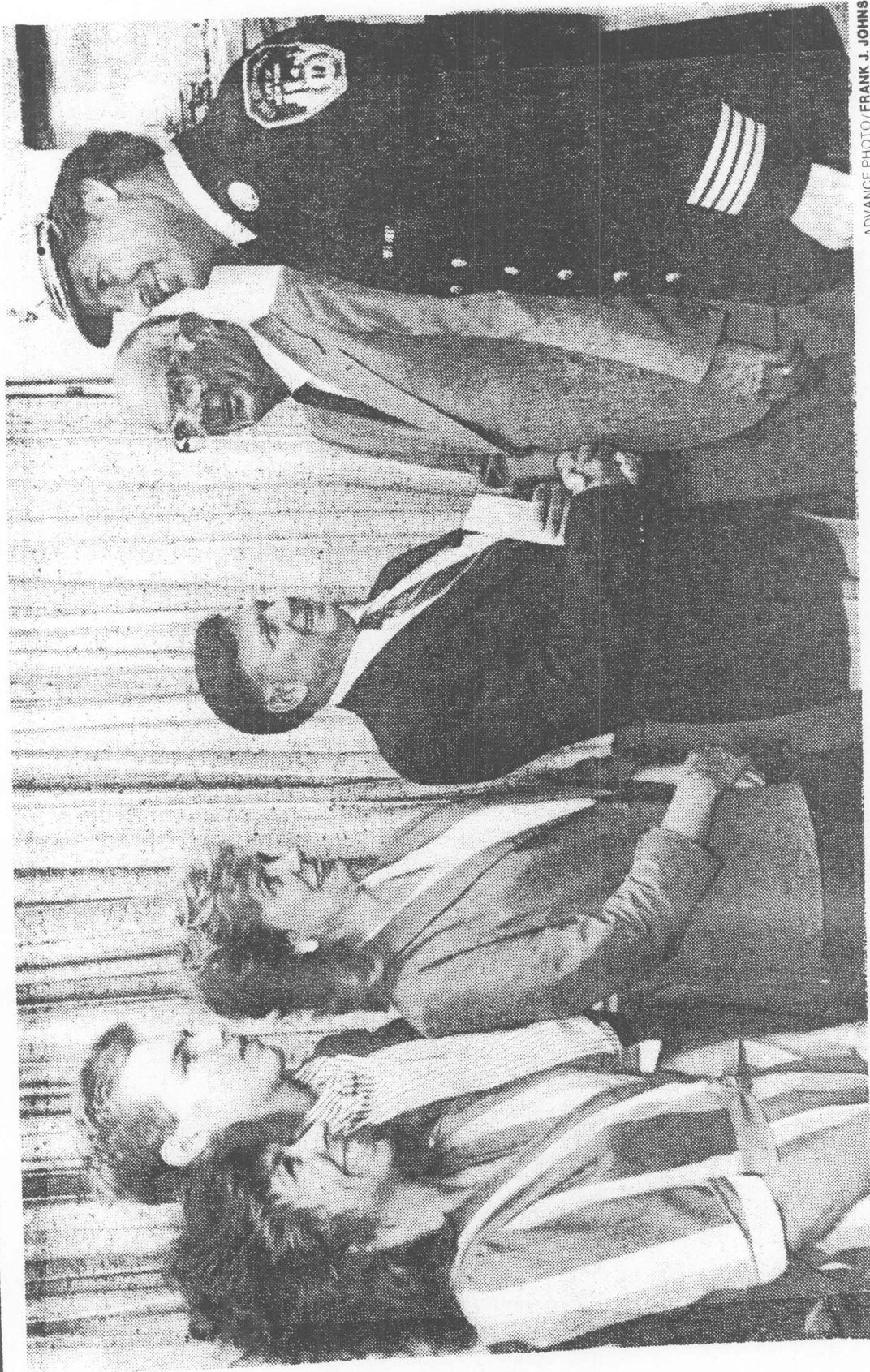
Since his discovery, Kramer has been "out every day" and even keeps a shovel in his car.

"We're still continuing to search for the other missing people and for Jennifer's clothes," the retired firefighter said.

Kramer believes that God and his years of hunting and camping experience provided him with the ability to notice minor details that other searchers may have missed.

"I've been a camper and a hunter all my life and I know the woods," Kramer said.

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ADVANCE PHOTO: FRANK J. JOHNS

Advance Editor Les Trautmann, second from right, congratulates retired firefighter George Kramer in the newspaper's Grasmere office. Looking on, from the left, are his daughter, Linda; son, George; wife, Nancy, and Chief Anthony DeVita.

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