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— Until eBay establishes an auction Web site for used fire trucks, Dale Clear figures he has the perfect solution for those people who have an extra ladder truck or pumper lying around.

A life-long Kenmore resident and 36-year member of the Kenmore Fire Department, Clear recently returned from an eight-day training trip to Argentina. Clear was there on behalf of the 911 Fund, a national organization that collects surplus fire equipment to give to firefighters in underprivileged nations.

Clear spent his time in Garin, a town about an hour from Buenos Aires, where about 150 firefighters and police officers from several South American nations gathered to learn how to use the equipment and basic disaster management techniques. The Kenmore Fire Department sent an old pumper to the fire department in Garin, Clear said, and additional wrangling by 911 Fund President Stephan Hittmann convinced Clear to make the trip and become a member of the group's International Advisory Board.

"My wife's been telling me for years I need a hobby," he offered as a tongue-in-cheek response to why he joined the board.

The talk turned serious thereafter, though. Clear showed pictures of Argentinean fire houses in which wood planks support the roof. Other pictures showed the fire trucks — many of which were more than 50 years old — that those companies were forced to use. In Garin, the fire chief said the federal government gives the fire company about 7,000 pesos per year in operating funds, which barely covers the cost of fuel for six months.

"It's very heart-warming how much they appreciate how little they have," Clear said.

"The chief there told me that the truck we gave them is the pride of his fleet, and it's one we couldn't even use."

Use of the 27-year-old pumper was prohibited here by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which regulates safety protocol of fire equipment. The pumper and all other donated items fail to meet U.S. safety codes, yet in other nations they're top-of-the-line pieces, Clear said.

"Another pump (truck) we had went to the Dominican Republic," he said. "There, they're still fighting fires with buckets of water."

Clear, a Kenmore West High School graduate, has been with the Kenmore Fire Department since 1973. He and his wife, Jan, raised their three children in the village; one of his children, Kirk, used to deliver the Tonawanda News.

Living a life of service to others, Clear enrolled in the Air Force in 1969 and stayed until 1995, serving tours of duty in Vietnam, Panama and Iraq while working with the 914 Airlift Wing stationed at the Niagara Falls Air Force Base. He then worked as an officer with the Department of Defense Police until 2001. After that, he joined the fire company full time.

The 911 Fund was founded by New York City firefighters in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Those firemen wanted to share the skills they'd learned in emergency management with their peers worldwide, according to the charity's Web site. The charity

neither solicits nor accepts financial contributions from the public.

The group does, however, take any and all equipment it can obtain.

“Basically, because of OSHA, (old firefighting items) are museum pieces,” Clear said.

“We beg, borrow and steal, and if we have to, we pay.”

All Clear had to do to get some fire gear was ask Randall Rider, commissioner of the Sheridan Park Fire Co. in the Town of Tonawanda. A childhood friend of Clear, Rider had about 18 sets of personal protective equipment — coats, pants, boots and the like — for which the company no longer had a need, and he gave it to the charity.

“He told me about the plight of these less fortunate departments, so we figured we’d put it out for their use,” Rider said.

Kenmore and Sheridan Park comprise two of the three fire companies in the state — and 21 in the nation — that are associated with the 911 Fund. Two companies in Argentina and one each in Colombia, the Dominican Republic and South Africa also participate.

Clear is not sure how much longer he’ll remain with the fire department, but he has one definite goal in mind over the next 12 months.

“I was invited back to train again next year,” he said. “I’m trying my darndest to learn a little Spanish instead of just using some (hand) signs.”

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Kenmore firefighter Dale Clear, shown at the fire station on Nash Road, recently returned from a training trip to Argentina. Doug Benz