NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

NEW YORK POST, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2001

FDNY morale a burning issue

By ROBERT HARDT Jr.

While he'll be struggling to rebuild the financial district and keep the city's finances afloat, one of Mayor-elect Michael Bloomberg's most daunting tasks next year is raising the morale of the devastated Fire Department.

Several Bloomberg aides have asked Fire Commissioner Thomas Von Essen to consider staying on — if only briefly to help make next year's transition easier.

"Some Bloomberg people have asked him to consider it, and he's thinking it over," said one source.

But observers say it's more likely that someone else will lead the department next January.

Names being mentioned include First Deputy Commissioner Michael Regan; former Assistant Fire Commissioner Peter Madonia; and Dennis Smith, who penned "Report from Engine Co. 82" as a firefighter.

After losing 343 firefighters in the World Trade Center attack and having labor disputes with Von Essen — who was booed at a memorial concert — New York's Bravest will need a lot of attention from the incoming mayor.

Also adding to the department's headaches was a fracas at ground zero between cops and firefighters earlier this month, which resulted in more than a dozen FDNY arrests.

Tensions were still running high yesterday when Mayor Giuliani and Von Essen spent more than 15 minutes at a City Hall press briefing taking fire union officials to task for calling city brass uncaring.

"They really are so off-base that it's a sin — and I mean that in a moral sense: it's sinful," Giuliani said.

Von Essen also admitted that he "dropped the ball" by cutting back the number of firefighters assigned to the recovery detail at the trade center site before explaining it to the rank and file. Trying to ease tensions, the city has agreed to double the number of firefighters at ground zero.

CITY_21MC100_011832693

NYC-WTC_000414711