

## 07-01-1997 – PA – Joseph M Vagnier – FF Rescue Attempt Flood

### 1997 Pitcarin Flood

<http://www.weather.gov/pbz/pcarin#5> Fatalities/Property Damage

Unfortunately, a fire-fighter was critically injured the evening of 01 July 1997 on Route 48, just north of Pitcairn. The excessive rainfall inundated part of Route 48 with nearly 4 feet of water.

Firefighters attached ropes to themselves as they investigated several stranded vehicles. Mr. Joseph Vagnier (21 years old) was leading an effort to search for motorists in an overturned vehicle. Mr. Vagnier was not tethered as the group made their way to the vehicle.

One of the rescuers that was tethered was momentarily swept under, but surfaced and suffered no injuries. However, as the rescue crew focused their attention on the worker that was swept under, Mr. Vagnier disappeared.

No one knew exactly how long he was under water. They found him trapped under a vehicle.

Emergency medical attention was immediately given to Mr. Vagnier and he was transported in critical condition to the hospital. Tragically, Mr. Vagnier died on Thursday 03 July 1997. Amazingly, there were no injuries in the town of Pitcairn which was actually the hardest hit community.

### Firefighter killed during search for flood victims

<https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/89625718/>

JULY 5, 1997 PITTSBURG I POST-GAZETTE By the Associated Press

Mr. Vagnier, 21, of Plum, died Thursday night at Allegheny General Hospital from injuries sustained two days earlier. Swift currents dragged him under water along Route 48 while he was checking stranded vehicles for any occupants who may have needed assistance. Friends and colleagues said Mr. Vagnier, a plant protection officer at the Edgar Thomson Works in Braddock, was the type of individual to always lend a hand to others in need. "He made this sacrifice doing something he loved to do, and doing it quite selflessly," said Doug Cole, deputy chief of Fire Company No. 4.



Mr. Vagnier had been living at the No. 4 firehouse on Northern Pike , and was on call for the fire company 24 hours a day. He was the oldest of three children and the son of a volunteer firefighter. He became a junior firefighter at age 16 while attending Plum Senior High School, from which he graduated in 1994. He later attended the Boyce campus of Community College of Allegheny County, where he received training as an emergency medical technician. Mr. Vagnier was also considered a fine athlete, playing shortstop and outfield for the firehouse softball team and performing as a defense-man on its hockey team. He is survived by his parents, Matthew and Linda Vagnier of Plum; two brothers, Matthew and JonPaul, at home; and his grandparents, Elizabeth Vagnier of Columbus, Ohio, and Frank and Gerda Grassinger of Altoona

### **JOSEPH M. VAGNIER**

<https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/89625718/>

JULY 5, 1997 By Gary Rotstein Post-Gazette Staff Writer

Joseph Vagnier, 21 , a volunteer firefighter, drowned from his efforts to rescue occupants from their cars during flash flooding Tuesday.

Hundreds of firefighters from around the region are expected to pay tribute Wednesday to Joseph M. Vagnier, the young volunteer who drowned from his efforts during flooding east of Pittsburgh.

He will be honored as a firefighter dying in the line of duty, with more than 100 fire engines and other emergency vehicles expected to carry mourners who respect the sacrifice of a colleague dedicated to helping others.

Mr. Vagnier's body will be transported via a fire truck to the Mass at 11 a.m., Wednesday at Our Lady of Joy Church, 2000 O'Block Road in Plum. After the Mass, a large procession of firefighters and equipment will travel the six or so miles from the church to a reception at Monroeville Volunteer Fire Company No. 6, 'at 600 Garden City Drive.

Comrades are establishing a memorial fund for Mr. Vagnier, who served with the fire company for two years.

Contributions should be sent to the Joseph Vagnier Memorial Fund in care of S&T Bank, 4385 Old William Penn Highway, Monroeville 15146.



## Joseph M. Vagnier

<https://apps.usfa.fema.gov/firefighter-fatalities/fatalityData/detail?fatalityId=88>

Firefighter Vagnier and two other firefighters were attempting to rescue a flood victim when Vagnier was swept under the wheel of a truck by raging waters. Firefighters found Vagnier, treated him at the scene, and immediately transported him to a local hospital where he subsequently died. Reports indicate that either Vagnier was pulled under when another firefighter who was holding his security rope went under or he was pulled under after attempting to help rescue another firefighter that went down. The incident occurred on 7/1/97, Firefighter/EMT Vagnier died on 7/3/97.

### Department Information

#### Monroeville Volunteer Fire Company No. 4

4370 North Pike  
Monroeville, Pennsylvania 15146  
Chief: Robert Wratcher

## Joseph M. Vagnier

<https://www.firehero.org/fallen-firefighter/joseph-m-vagnier/>

Monroeville Volunteer Fire Department #4

Pennsylvania

Year of Death: 1997



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*Submitted by his Father*

### National EMS Memorial Service Honoree

#### Joseph M. Vagnier

Monroeville Fire Department  
Monroeville, Pennsylvania

During the July 1st floods that hit Monroeville and Pitcairn, Joe Vagnier died in an attempt to rescue people believed trapped in an overturned vehicle. He was at the safety ropes tie-off point when two other firefighters were swept under four feet of rushing water estimated at 30 mph. It was believed at that point Joe tightened the slack in the line to help the other two people and was pulled in himself. The others were saved but Joe was found pinned under the right rear tires of a thirty-foot panel truck. The rescue team had already completed three previous rescues pulling stranded victims from vehicles in the rushing waters. Joe's cause of death was drowning. He was 21 years old when he died on July 3, 1997.

Joe served Monroeville Fire Co. #4 as an EMT/Firefighter. His EMS activities included EMT/Driver with the ambulance and a Rescue Technician. Calls ranged from medical to vehicle accidents and other specialized rescue calls.

Joe is survived by his parents, Matt and Linda Vagnier, and two brothers, Matt Jr. and Jon Paul.



Honored 1998

## **Monroeville firefighters remember losing colleague in 1997 floodwaters**

<http://triblive.com/neighborhoods/yourmonroeville/yourmonroevillemore/2235768-87/monroeville-pitcairn-bacco-1997-flood-floodwaters-character-colleague-contribute-cross>

July 19, 2012 KYLE LAWSON

When a flash thunderstorm dumped rain and sleet on Monroeville in early July, volunteer fireman Kevin Bacco thought about the friend and colleague he lost 15 years ago.

"The torrential downpour we had yesterday was a haunting reminder," Bacco said.

Reminders of the 1997 flood that took one life and displaced hundreds are scattered throughout Monroeville and Pitcairn -- from the wooden cross on Mossie Boulevard, to the flood mitigation project in Pitcairn.

Each year in July, Monroeville volunteer firemen pay tribute to former member Joe Vagnier, who sacrificed his life to save others. He was searching for trapped motorists on Route 48 when a swift current trapped him under a truck. He died two days later.

"We try to take our new members (to the cross) to appreciate the history," Bacco said. "To realize that those things happen and that you have to prepare for those things in the future."

The dedication shown by firefighters who live at the station and serve the community 24-hours a day pays living tribute to Vagnier's character, Bacco said.

"You see a lot of the same character in the guys that come through here. They're eager," he said.

Bacco was a firefighter in both Monroeville and Pitcairn in 1997, so he witnessed the damage in both communities. Floodwaters gushed downhill from Monroeville to Pitcairn.

While there were about 100 homes damaged in Monroeville, the number was four times that in Pitcairn.

While it is important to reflect on the tragedy, it's more important to plan ahead, Bacco said.

Improvements and planned improvements to the infrastructure should prevent flooding in the future, including a flood mitigation project in Pitcairn that has been discussed for decades but is finally gaining momentum.

The state Department of Environmental Protection has agreed to contribute more than \$10 million to a concrete channel that would guide floodwaters from Sugar Camp to Turtle Creek, said Pitcairn Councilman Rollo Vecchio.

The borough will contribute around \$800,000 he said.

There also is \$2.4 million of storm-water management behind UPMC East, and Monroeville public works employees routinely clear trash racks that collect falling debris, said Mike Adams, director of public works.



<http://mvfc4.org/never-forgotten/>



It was 19 years ago today that Monroeville #4 FF/EMT Joe Vagnier lost his life in the line of duty during the July 1st flash floods that hit Monroeville and Pitcairn.

After making several water rescues that day Joe Vagnier died in an attempt to rescue people believed trapped in an overturned vehicle on route 48. Joe was at the safety ropes tie-off point when two other firefighters were swept under four feet of rushing water estimated at 30 mph. It was believed

at that point Joe tightened the slack in the line to help the other two people and was pulled in himself.

As we go into this 4th of July weekend let us all take a moment to remember the life of Monroeville #4 FF/EMT Joe Vagnier.

