

[Apparatus](#)

[Equipment](#)

[The
Rig](#)

[The Fire
Station](#)

[FDIC
International](#)

[About](#)

The Fire Station, The Station
Articles

NY Engine Company Gets New Station After Devastating Flood

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By Alan M. Petrillo

Hurricane Irene dealt a severe blow to Niagara Engine Company No. 6's 1957-era fire station in Schoharie, New York, on August 28, 2011, flooding the fire facility with eight feet of muddy, debris-laden flood waters and inundating the town of Schoharie while volunteer firefighters responded and helped neighbors get to high ground, even as their own homes and fire station were submerged in flood waters.



Since the Niagara Engine Co. station is built on a hillside, it has a basement that houses a member's room, exercise room, mechanical rooms, and storage spaces.



Niagara (NY) Engine Company No. 6 had Mitchell Associates Architects design and build a new fire station after its 1957-era firehouse was inundated by Hurricane Irene flood waters. (Photos courtesy of Mitchell Associates Architects.)

The department quickly moved to temporary quarters in a Quonset hut located on high ground on the site of a former machinery dealership, says John Wolfe, board of directors member for Niagara Engine Company and co-chair of its building committee. “Our fire station was a 70- by 120-foot Morton building (pole barn) on the back street in the middle of the village, and after we received eight feet of water inside the structure, FEMA said we had to relocate because the building could not be used again,” says Wolfe. The engine company leased the Quonset hut to house its apparatus and equipment, but it soon became apparent that the building didn’t have the space needed for the department.



An aerial view of the Schoharie Valley flooded by Hurricane Irene.

“The state of New York came in and allowed us to build a 40 by 60 Morton building for our apparatus,” says Martin Shrederis, board president and building committee co-chair, “but it was not the most efficient place that we could be operating from.”



The new Niagara Engine Co. station has four double deep drive through apparatus bays.

Niagara Engine Company No. 6 ultimately put out an RFP that was won by Mitchell Associates Architects to design and build a new firehouse for the fire company. Shrederis points out that because FEMA was involved in funding the new station, the fire company had to justify the need for larger quarters than the former station's footprint. "FEMA wanted us to replace the building in the same size as the old building, but that was a 1957 building that would not meet new NFPA standards or state building codes," he says. "We needed larger quarters in many respects to meet the various standards and codes. Mitchell Associates did an excellent job explaining to FEMA what was needed, and it eventually agreed."



The new station has a room for refilling the department's SCBAs (self contained breathing apparatus).

Bob Mitchell, principal at Mitchell Associates Architects, notes that FEMA originally approved a grant of \$1 million for a station intended to be identical to the fire company's 1957 facility. "Per federal regulations, no upgrades (betterments) would be allowed aside those required by current codes," Mitchell says. "This means that local zoning would apply, but not today's recommended standards for firefighter health and safety, such as decon and laundry facilities and truck clearances."



Niagara Engine Company's radio room, adjacent to the apparatus bays.

Mitchell says his team worked with the fire company and its FEMA consultant, Ron Simmons of Simmons Recovery Consulting, to provide detailed documentation justifying those improvements, resulting in \$6 million for a station that provides essential firematic support that was not

present in the old station. “The building envelope, and all mechanical and electrical systems exceed current energy efficiency standards,” he points out. “The walls are R-33, ceilings are R-37, heating combustion is at 96 percent, ventilators use heat recovery, and fans and motors are variable frequency.”



The new station has a large meeting/training room.

Niagara Engine Company No. 6’s new station has four double-deep, drive-through apparatus bays, flanked on one side by firematic storage and mechanic’s work rooms with a mezzanine that has a bailout window and other training props on it, and on the other side of the bays a SCBA fill station room, men’s and women’s lavatories, and decon laundry. “There’s an airtight boundary between the apparatus bay areas and associated work areas and the living/working spaces,” Mitchell notes.



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On the cold side of the station are a radio room, offices for various company officers, men's and women's bathrooms, a member's room, kitchen, and meeting/training room that's available for use by the public. The new station is situated on a hillside, so Mitchell Associates was able to design in a basement that houses a member's room, exercise room, mechanical rooms, and storage areas.



The kitchen in Niagara Engine Company's new fire station.

Niagara Engine Company No. 6 has 68 volunteer firefighters on its rolls, operating two Type 1 engines, one tanker, one brush truck, one EMS response truck, and a utility vehicle. Wolfe notes that the new station was designed so that it can be used as a Red Cross shelter in the case of another flood event. “We may not see it in our lifetime,” he says, “but it’s not a case of if, but of when.”



A mezzanine covers one end of the apparatus bays and includes a bailout window for training.

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