



GONG CLUB, INC.

JERSEY CITY, NJ

by Paul Schaeztle

THE RESURRECTION!

Never mind about the box office hit, "The Passion "; two clubs combine to resurrect a retired rig and restore canteen service to Boston!



Car 26 — Jersey City
The Gong Club Canteen in front of quarters, March 2001, in its last months of service. (Paul Schaeztle Photo)

AN I.F.B.A. SUCCESS STORY

At times, there are those buffs who question "What does the I.F.B.A. do for us?" or "What real benefit comes from I.F.B.A. membership?". Well, this story answers those questions and then some. Thanks to the "I.F.B.A. Network", one of the oldest buff clubs in the nation has realized a dream come true. Only

through the contacts made through I.F.B.A. membership, some fortunate and, actually, some unfortunate circumstances, did this story unfold.

For many years, the Boston Sparks Association operated the Salvation Army Canteen, responding to nearly every multiple alarm in the greater Boston area. However, nearly ten years ago, the Salvation Army focused their energies in other areas and the canteen operation was curtailed.

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Canteen service in Boston and environs became a haphazard affair, with fire fighters often battling major fires without the benefit of such vital relief.

Meanwhile, some 225 miles south west of Boston, the Gong Club replaced their 1976 Chevrolet Step Van Canteen with a 2001 Utilimaster Yaissle Canteen, entering service ~n december 19, 2001. Although the retired canteen was advertised as being available, no takers from the buffing community came forward. The newly-retired canteen was purchased by an equally newly-retired Jersey City Fire Fighter, Edward Brzozowski of Eng. Co. 2. On his last tour of duty, Fire Fighter Brzozowski

drove home with the former Car 26, intending to convert the rig into a catering truck. It appeared that the rig which had served so well at fires for over 25 years would spend its final days dishing out soups and sandwiches to construction workers along Jersey City' s booming waterfront.

Alas, the best laid plans sometimes fall astray. The old Car 26 lay idle for over 2 years, parked outside Retired Fire Fighter Brzozowski's business office at Summit Ave. and 10th St. in Union City. Would this venerable piece of apparatus be relegated to rusting away in the harsh New Jersey winters?



The retired Car 26 sat for two years in this parking spot at 10th St. & Summit Ave., Union City
(Paul Schaetzle Photo)

A CHRISTMAS MIRACLE?

Tuesday December 9, 2003 brought a large gathering of buffs from the Eastern Seaboard to the New York Fire Bell Club's quarters on E. 23th St. in Manhattan for the club's annual holiday party. Among those in attendance were Boston Sparks Association President Paul Boudreau and Gong Club Treasurer Paul Schaetzle. The Gong Club and the Boston Sparks Association have one of the most storied relationships in all of buffdom. For decades,

members of the two clubs have built strong bonds between the two organizations, fostered by meetings at I.F.B.A. functions and frequent visits, both formal and informal between the two groups. While discussing the recent doings at their respective clubs, Boudreau mentioned that he would like the Sparks to re-establish a canteen service for the Boston area fire fighters. The current dormant state of the retired "Gong Wagon" was noted and Schaetzle stated that he would reach out for Fire Fighter Brzozowski

to see if he might be interested in selling the old rig.

Before a call could be placed, two weeks later, Mrs. Helen Brzozowski stopped by the Gong Club quarters and said she had a problem. Her husband had some health problems of late and had decided to retire altogether. They would like to sell the canteen truck, but had lost the title and would need the Club to sign some documents to secure a duplicate title from the New Jersey Division of Motor Vehicles. Oh, and by the way, would we know anyone who might be interested in buying it?

Well, faster than you could say "Strike the Box!" the phone lines were humming between Jersey City and Boston. Boudreau jumped at the chance and asked the Gong Club to arrange a contact with the Brzozowskis. The next day, Christmas Eve, Schaetzle visited Brzozowski and signed the papers and filled him in on the potential interest from the Boston Sparks Assn. Brzozowski said he would love to see the old rig back in action and a deal was in the making! We were certain a Christmas Miracle was in the works, as less than 24 hours later, we spent Christmas Day serving at a 5th Alarm at 1117 8th St., North Bergen, which was described in the last issue of TURN OUT. This address was a scant two blocks away from the retired Car 26's resting place. As Jersey City Eng. Co. 17 hooked up at the corner hydrant to supply water, the old rig looked like it was chomping at the bit to get in the thick of things! Would that dream come true?

A TRAGIC SETBACK

In late January 2004, while working on his new retirement home in West Virginia, retired Fire Fighter Brzozowski suddenly passed away. The sad news was quickly relayed to Boston. There had only been one brief exchange between the Sparks and Brzozowski before his untimely passing. Would the dream also die with this tragic turn of events?

Gong Club members paid their respects to the family and learned that Mrs. Brzozowski was aware of the potential deal. She and her daughters wanted the plan to go forward. In fact, Mrs. Brzozowski would donate the rig to the Boston Sparks Assn. in her husband's memory! A few more phone calls and we were back on track. But first the Division of Motor Vehicles paperwork had to be resolved. Problems in dealing with the New Jersey Division of Motor Vehicles are legendary. There were a few glitches and some research into the Gong Club archives required, but after a few weeks, the problems were resolved and a duplicate title was obtained. At last, the paperwork was in order and title could be passed to the new owners of this proud rig, the Boston Sparks Association!

Next problem was getting it from New Jersey to Boston. A possible flat bed ride was in the works, only to have the window of opportunity pass for that mode of transport. A crew from the Sparks Assn. trekked down from Boston



Car 26 on Congress Street!

After a long Journey from New Jersey, the Gong Club's former canteen arrives at its new home, the Boston Sparks Association, on June 16, 2004.
(Paul Schaeztle Photo)

on June 10, 2004 to attend the annual New York Fire Bell Club dinner and assess what would be needed to put Car 26 on the road for its longest relocation assignment. A plan was devised and the Sparks' crew arrived in Union City on June 16, 2004 to make the canteen road worthy once again and drive it to Boston. An oil change, new spark plugs, a full tank of gasoline and a new thermostat got the crew on their way early afternoon. As luck would have it, Gong Club Treasurer Schaeztle was in Boston on business that day. Of course, he was standing by at the Sparks' quarters on Congress St. as the canteen, still proudly emblazoned "Gong Club Jersey City", journeyed through the streets of Boston to its new home!

A DREAM COMES TRUE!

After a two year hiatus, some work would be needed to get the rig ready for duty. The electrical systems were repaired, the propane system overhauled, the old diner style coffee urn replaced with a smaller electric-powered unit. The generator was nursed back to working order. For its two years of sitting in the elements, the rig was in remarkable shape! Some strategic placement of reflective striping, some alterations of the existing Maltese crosses, a good wax job and the exterior was set. New radios were installed and the interior cabinets were stocked. Willing hands made short work of these tasks and by late July, the ex — Car 26 of Jersey City debuted as A-10 of Boston. The canteen, like the old fire horses of yesteryear, could not be put out to pasture. The rig now sits in the Sparks Assn. quarters waiting for the next alarm. It has answered the bell four times as of mid-

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September in its new life, bringing comfort to the "jakes" of Boston and realizing a dream of the Sparks Association!

The rig won't have time to get homesick; Gong Club members have been

up to visit it twice since it went in service. Best of luck to our friends in Boston for many more years of service from the canteen that can' be stopped!



A - 10 — Boston

The ex-Gong Club Canteen, now the Boston Sparks Canteen, outside quarters, July 2004, awaiting its first run.

(Paul Boudreau Photo)