

# Firefighters complain after HQ's facade collapses

By Chris Sykes  
Staff Writer

Last week part of the façade of the Chief Martin DeMarzo Memorial Firehouse fell onto the sidewalk. Some members of the Fire Department say they believe it could have been prevented.

After the collapse, Fire Chief Robert Manganelli issued a memorandum to fire personnel which stated he has contacted Arlene Kemp, the city engineer who doubles as director of the Department of Public Works. Some firefighters said they are upset because someone, a fireman or a pedestrian walking past the building, could have been seriously injured by the Jan. 26 collapse.

Firefighter Elvin Padilla, president of the city firefighters' union, said he believed city officials could have prevented the collapse had they heeded his and others' warnings prior to the incident.

"The entire overhang that runs around the whole building had been hanging off for some time before the accident last week," Padilla said. "We had been complaining about the situation to the city for several years now and we have the documentation to prove it. It finally happened last week as two of our guys were preparing to back into the headquarters after a long night of plowing snow at the Station 2 firehouse on Washington Street that is closed right now."

In his memorandum, Manganelli stated Kemp had visited the headquarters building to review the damage. He added she is waiting to consult with an inde-

pendent engineer, who will determine the extent of the damage and the likelihood that it might happen again, before she recommends fixing the façade.

"On Jan. 29th, Chief Manganelli sent down a memo saying that the city engineer has hired a structural engineer to determine the status of the remaining façade," Padilla said. "In the meantime, we are asking members of the public, as well as the Fire Department, to be as careful as possible in and around the affected area."

Padilla claimed Station 2 along Washington Street was closed as a result of the layoffs, demotions and cost-cutting measures the city has undergone. While it is now the city's responsibility to clean the snow from in front of the former station house, Padilla said fire staff was there because old habits are hard to break.

Padilla also said he knew there might be issues with snowplows and snow clean-up in other parts of the city, so firefighters decided to help out by doing their own plowing. The idea, he said, was to give the city one less thing to worry about.

"We do maintenance over there twice a day, where we check the building and make sure that everything is secured; there are no leaks or running water; and just make sure the boiler is running so the pipes don't burst, especially at this time of year when it's so cold outside and inside," said Padilla. "Our guys had pulled over to open the garage bay doors when the accident happened. Usually our guy gets out to check around and open the door, but as



Photo By Barbara Kokkalis

The sidewalk along the Lincoln Avenue side of the Orange fire headquarters building is blocked to pedestrians during the weekend after part of the facade collapsed last week.

he was getting out, it fell and he heard a loud crash and felt the impact."

Some of the debris had remained last weekend when a staff member from

*Orange Transcript*, en route to an assignment, photographed the site. Padilla said he was upset because he claimed the city had not removed the debris shortly after

the collapse. He said he believed it represented a safety hazard since students from three schools walk past the building every day to and from classes.