

Snow rig kills worker

BY MAUREEN SEABERG
and BILL HUTCHINSON
DAILY NEWS WRITERS

A HARDWORKING federal parks employee was killed early yesterday when he was mowed down on Staten Island by a 14.5-ton Sanitation Department front-end loader preparing for a big snowstorm that never came.

Joseph Sordi, 59, of Brooklyn, frantically tried to dodge the rig as it bore down on him at 20 mph in a South Beach parking lot, but was clipped by the tractor's heavy scoop.

The driver, identified by sources as sanitation worker Vito Peragine, 52, of

Staten Island, told investigators he lost control when the 2004 Daewoo loader's accelerator stuck.

"The driver took severe action to avoid him . . . but the guy just couldn't get out of the way," a police source said of the 2 a.m. accident in a park-and-ride lot on Sand Lane at Father Capodanno Blvd.

Sordi was conscious after being struck, but later died at Staten Island University Hospital from severe internal bleeding, officials said.

"He was everybody's friend," said Sordi's heartbroken wife, Susan, 58, as she left her Marine Park, Brooklyn, home to arrange her husband's funeral.

Sordi, a retired Transit Authority worker who in 2000 became a heavy equipment operator at the Gateway National Recreation Area on Staten Island, had been called in on overtime to spread salt on the park's roads. He was waiting for his rig to be filled when the accident happened.

Heavy snow had been forecast for early yesterday, but the storm only left a dusting in the area.

"He can't understand how it happened. He repeated twice that he can't believe he killed someone," Thomas Zarcone, borough chief of sanitation for Staten Island, said of the driver.

Sordi was the father of three adult children and was awaiting the birth of his third grandchild in January.

"He was always there to lend a helping hand to everyone," said his daughter Stacey, 27.



Joseph Sordi was hit by front-end loader in a Staten Island parking lot.

Despite preliminary findings, Sordi's brother rejected the notion of equipment failure.

"We're angry at the cause of death and we're concerned there's some kind of negligence here," said James Sordi, 60, a retired NYPD lieutenant, who now works as the safety director for a sanitation company.

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Killed worker's family mourns a life of promise cut short

Federal parks worker who died in freak accident was the father of 3

By SALLY GOLDENBERG
STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

December promised a world of happiness for Joseph Sordi.

He was planning a fishing trip with his family in Pennsylvania this weekend.

He was preparing to host relatives at his home in Brooklyn's Marine Park section for the family's traditional Italian seafood dinner on Christmas

Eve.

And the 59-year-old father of three was anxiously awaiting the birth of his third grandchild — keeping his fingers crossed for a boy.

But those hopes and plans ended when Sordi, a National Park Service employee, was struck by a front-end loader heaping rock salt into his open-bed truck at the Sanitation Department salt pile in South Beach early yesterday.

Sordi died of his injuries a little over five hours later, in Staten Island University Hospital, Ocean Breeze.

His family is stunned.

"It's devastating that we lost him like this. He was such a safety-conscious guy. We know that somewhere along the way, there was a grave mistake made," James Sordi, Joseph's older brother, said in a hushed voice over the phone.

Police deemed the crash an accident and have not issued any summonses. Cops from the NYPD and the National Park Service are jointly investigating, and have not released



Joseph Sordi — seen here with his wife Susan and two of their grandchildren — was awaiting the birth of his third grandchild.

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Family mourns life cut short

the name of the 52-year-old man who was operating the front-end loader.

"Right now he's in the hospital. He's been traumatized," said Keith Mellis, a spokesman for the city Sanitation Department.

As Joseph Sordi's family arranged for his funeral, his neighbors cried when they heard the news.

Nanci Solo, who moved into the house next to Sordi's four years ago with her husband and three sons, wiped away tears as she recalled the compassionate gestures with which Sordi welcomed her family to the block.

Like the time he helped the parents assemble a crib for their youngest son, Jack, who is now 4 years old.

Or the time he sent Mrs. Solo and his wife, Susan, inside during a snowstorm so he could work the snowblower while they kept warm.

And the time he crawled onto his roof to get a ball for her boys.

"He's such a rock," the shaken woman said.

"He'd always make you feel so welcome," she added. "My little guy, who's so timid in a lot of ways, he'd walk into [Joseph's] house like it was his house."

Joseph Sordi even left an opening in the fence he con-

structed around their homes so her kids could easily get into his yard.

James Sordi said his brother, who maintained the turf at Miller Field in New Dorp, hurried over the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge when his bosses called him late Monday night asking him to work an extra shift in preparation for a storm that never materialized.

That sort of behavior was typical of Joseph Sordi, a Vietnam veteran who was born and reared in Brooklyn, his brother said.

"Any time they called, they needed help, he'd show up," he said.

Brian Feeney, a spokesman for the National Park Service, painted a similar picture of Sordi, who joined the agency in 2000 after a career with the city Transit Authority.

"This guy was very well-liked, very hard-working," Feeney said, noting the irony of danger befalling an employee who worked for others' safety. "[Here's] someone in the line of duty like this, trying to get the salt down so nobody has an accident in the park.

"It's just a sad day."

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