

78 Islanders in new class of firefighters

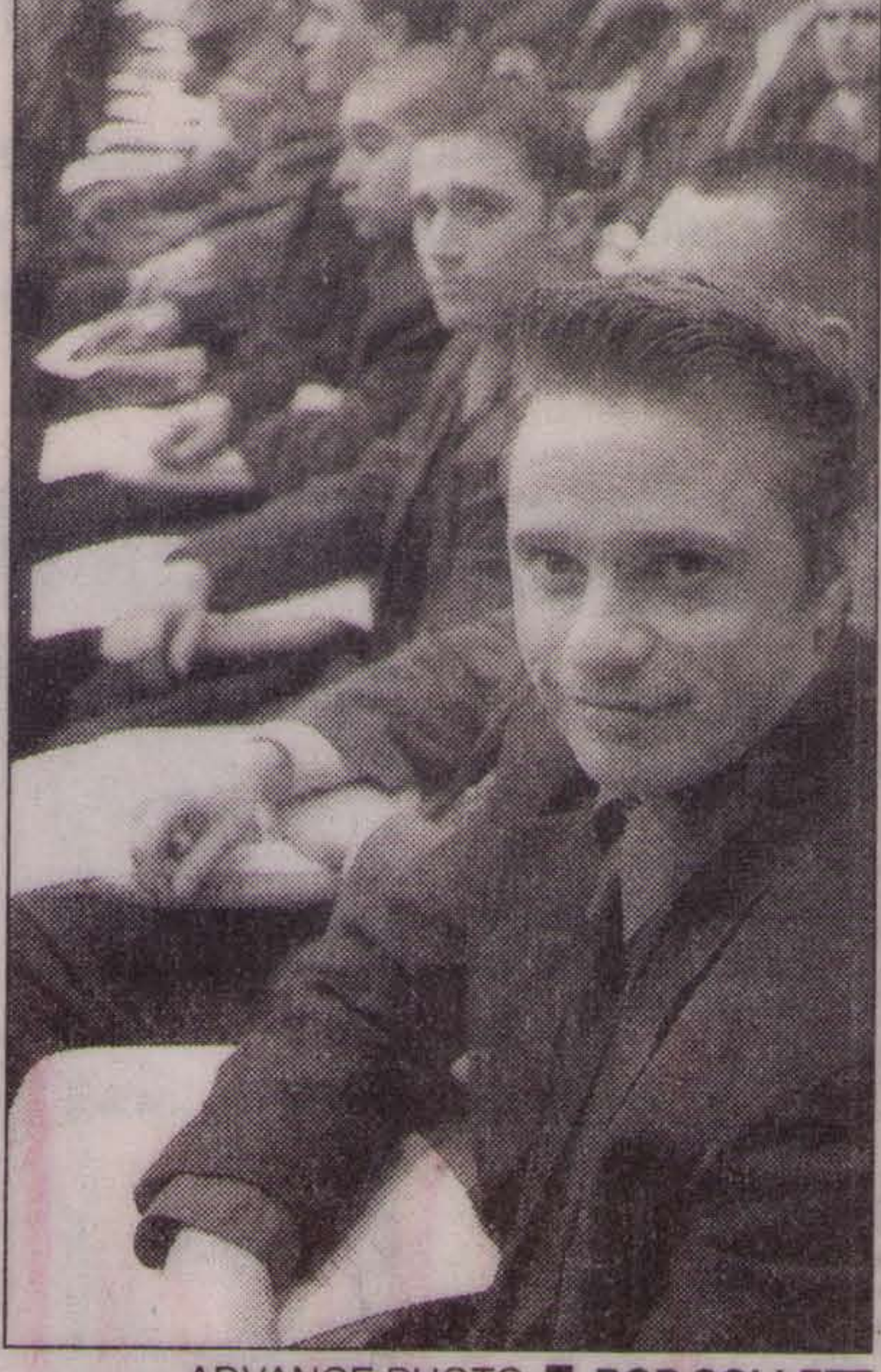
■ Among the new trainees are several who lost relatives in the World Trade Center disaster

By JILL GARDINER

ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Seventy-eight firefighters from Staten Island — the same number of borough firemen killed in the World Trade Center attack — were among 305 to join the department yesterday and begin training for a job considered one of the most dangerous and heroic in the city.

During a ceremony at the Fire Department Training Academy on Randall's Island, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and Fire Commissioner Nicholas Scoppetta told the class, the second to be



ADVANCE PHOTO ■ ROB SOLLETT

Vincent LaMantia of Great Kills, foreground, and Rizo Kraja of New Dorp, center, are among the Fire Department's newest probies.

sworn in and brought on for training since Sept. 11, they would back them with resources as the city rebuilds the department.

"You have all fundamentally accepted a dangerous job, but that does not mean that we can't do an awful lot to make sure you get home safe to your families every night," Bloomberg said.

In his first official appearance at the Fire Academy since being sworn in himself on Jan. 1, the mayor praised the group for accepting a job that involves such a high level of risk and thanked them on behalf of the city. Most people, he said, run when they see danger, but firefighters overcome that instinct and risk their lives to save civilians.

The incoming firefighters will spend 10 weeks on Randall's Island, a rigorous physical and mental challenge that, for the first time, will include two days of terrorism readiness training. They then spend a 14-week rotation in different firehouses before graduating.

"Today we take another step forward with the memory of those we lost on 9/11 with us . . . You are sworn in, in the shadow of giants," Scoppetta said.

Yesterday's class was twice the size of an average probationary class and will help fill the void in the department left by the 343 firefighters killed in the World Trade Center collapse. The victims, Scoppetta noted, had 4,400 years of collective FDNY experience.

Four of the newest probies lost relatives in the attack, including two from Staten Island who lost brothers.

Joseph Cammarata, 24, of Huguenot and Joseph Pansini, 28,