

2020 **Valor & Community Service Awards**



Photo by Jillian Stewart

Firehouse is pleased to announce the honorees in the 2020 *Firehouse Magazine* Valor Awards. The honorees displayed great bravery in the face of dangerous conditions.

The Michael O. McNamee Award of Valor reflects a larger mission about what it means to be brave in the face of danger, as the award is named after Worcester, MA, Fire Department District Chief (ret.) Mike McNamee, who displayed great courage at the Worcester Cold Storage Warehouse Fire in December 1999, when he made the bold decision to stop additional Worcester firefighters from entering the building when there already were six lost inside.

We would like to thank the following people for their assistance in selecting this year's recipients:

- Frank Becerra, firefighter, Fort Worth, TX, Fire Department
- Anne Carr, widow of Fire Chief Thomas Carr
- Michael O. McNamee, district chief (ret.), Worcester, MA, Fire Department
- Russell Merrick, deputy chief (ret.), Rochester, NY, Fire Department
- Brian Schaeffer, fire chief, Spokane, WA, Fire Department
- John B. Tippet Jr., director of fire programs, National Fallen Firefighters Foundation

Grand Prize Winner

George O. Mueller, FDNY–Brooklyn

Multiple phone calls were being received by Brooklyn dispatchers as firefighters raced to a reported apartment fire in the East New York neighborhood on July 25, 2020. Ladder 107 arrived first to find heavy smoke coming from multiple windows on the top floor of an eight-story building that wasn't equipped with standpipes. Lt. George O. Mueller led the inside team up the stairs to the sixth floor, where they stopped to size up the floor layout before they moved to the fire floor. Pressurized smoke was pushing from around the doorframe of apartment 8H as they forced entry, with Mueller employing a right-hand search and the can firefighter using a left-hand search while the irons firefighter stayed at the door to orient the team. Mueller crawled down a hallway, passing the seat of the fire in the living room area, where he found an unconscious woman. He spun the victim around and used his body to shield her from the blistering heat as he removed her from the apartment. Meanwhile, the can firefighter found an unconscious victim, and the outside vent firefighter found another occupant in need of rescue, all while the first hoseline still was being stretched to the top floor. With Engine 225 getting water on the fire, Mueller, near exhaustion, pushed past the fire area to the rear of the apartment where he found a young girl who was wrapped in bedding; again, Mueller used his body to shield her from fire conditions before being rejoined by his crew to bring her into the safety of the hallway.



George O. Mueller

Darryl Jones & Ryan Quinn, Chicago Fire Department

On Aug. 25, 2020, Firefighter/EMT Darryl Jones and Firefighter/EMT Ryan Quinn arrived with Truck 22 and were ordered to conduct a primary search of a four-story multifamily building where burning porches on each floor had extended into the structure. As the two entered the structure, they encountered high heat and smoke down to the floor; then, it was radioed that a person was missing. Jones and Quinn climbed the stairs to the fourth floor through intense conditions to find hoarding conditions outside of the unit, which created entry challenges. After they forced their way inside, they conducted a left-hand search over the piled-up clutter inside of the unit and found the victim between the sink and toilet. They had to remove the bathroom door then rotate the victim before carrying him back over the debris until they reached the public hallway. Quinn created a girth hitch around the victim, then began carrying him down four stories through punishing conditions until they reached the street and turned him over to Ambulance 40's crew to begin treatment.



Darryl Jones



Ryan Quinn



Abraham Miller

Abraham G. Miller, FDNY–Manhattan

Ladder 23 arrived to find fire shooting from two windows on the fifth floor of a six-story multiple dwelling, which cut off any path of egress for top-floor residents in the Harlem building on Sept. 29, 2020. Abraham Miller was assigned as the roof man and used the exposure building to access the roof of the fire building, where he found a 5-year-old girl leaning out of a sixth-floor window. Miller and Firefighter Jairo M. Sosa from Ladder 34 prepared for a rescue. Miller yelled down to reassure the residents that help was on the way. With only Sosa available to hold down the rope and no substantial object available, Miller was lowered to the sixth floor, where he found the girl behind child-window bars; he had to break out the glass before the girl was passed through the window bars to him. Once the child was safely in his arms, Miller was lowered six stories to the ground by Sosa and a second firefighter who was able to access the roof and assist with the rescue.

2020 MICHAEL O. MCNAMEE AWARD OF VALOR

Thomas R. Sussman, FDNY–Queens

Engine 316 arrived to find fire showing from the second floor of a 2½-story dwelling on the afternoon of May 20, 2020. Capt. Thomas R. Sussman was met by a first-floor resident, who said a woman and her son were trapped on the second floor, where he found the door open, which allowed toxic gases directly into the apartment. Once inside of the unit, Sussman encountered heavy clutter conditions and deployed his thermal imaging camera, which allowed him to quickly locate an unconscious woman on the kitchen floor. He moved toward the woman and dragged her back through the debris and down to the first floor, where he passed her off to a member of his crew. While the crew still was stretching the attack line, Sussman returned to the second floor where his camera whited out, which forced him to use a left-hand search that took him to the rear bedroom, where the main body of fire was. He located a large man and tried to pull him back to the door, but they stumbled on the clutter. The man landed on Sussman, which briefly dislodged his facepiece. Sussman used his feet against a wall to begin removing the man until two members of his crew arrived, and the three of them carried the man down to the first floor.



Thomas R. Sussman

Antonio F. Tarabocchia, FDNY–Queens (tie)

Rescue 4 arrived just after midnight on July 24, 2020, to find heavy fire involving a first-floor apartment in a two-story Woodside home. Antonio F. Tarabocchia, who was assigned as the irons firefighter, received reports of people trapped on the second floor. He passed fire conditions to ascend to the second floor before a hoseline was stretched into the building. Inside of the second-floor apartment, he searched a bathroom and then moved to a bedroom, where he had to force entry, because a deadbolt lock was in place. He shut the door after gaining entry and encountered a lot of clutter, when he heard a faint cry. In choking smoke, he found a mother and a young girl on the bed. As he began to pull the woman from the bed, the outside vent firefighter gained access through a rear window. Tarabocchia handed her over and returned to find the child. He then carried the child out of the apartment, where firefighters were beginning to get a knockdown on fire conditions, which allowed him to use the interior stairs to remove her.



Antonio F. Tarabocchia

David Jordan & David Sweder-Gold, Montgomery County, MD, Fire & Rescue



David Jordan



David Sweder-Gold

Tower 708 arrived to find thick, turbulent black smoke pushing from the basement and first-floor windows of a two-story, middle-of-the-row townhome around 11 p.m. on Dec. 2, 2020, in Gaithersburg, MD. As the crew exited the rig, people were screaming that a person was trapped in the basement. Firefighters David Jordan and David Sweder-Gold entered the home before a hoseline was on the ground. As they searched in high heat conditions that were deteriorating, Jordan found the victim in a hallway, and Sweder-Gold crawled toward them. As they were carrying the victim out, pre-flashover conditions were apparent, as flames were visible through the smoke overhead, which forced the firefighters to push through the intense environment and get back to the first floor, where flames already burned holes through the floor and created a partial collapse. As they got the victim to the doorway, fire was shooting out over their heads.



Thomas L. Varner

Thomas L. Varner, Chesterfield County, VA, Fire and EMS Department (tie)

On Nov. 12, 2020, four kayakers entered the Appomattox River in Farmville, VA, which was more than 7 feet over flood stage and moving rapidly because of the remnants of Hurricane Etta. The kayakers became entangled in flooded vegetation and ejected the four into the 60-degree F water. Two of them were able to swim toward safety but still were trapped in the water when off-duty Farmville Fire Department Volunteer Firefighter Thomas L. Varner, who also is a career member of the Chesterfield County Fire and EMS Department, heard cries for help. He called 9-1-1 before assessing the scene. He helped two of the kayakers exit the water and turned his attention to a third kayaker, who was clinging to a tree in the fast-moving water. Varner determined that he needed immediate assistance and called in his rescue plan to dispatch, which then called off a helicopter whose rotor wash worsened the situation. Varner used a kayak to make his way to the victim. When he got the victim into the kayak, it caused the watercraft to become unstable. Varner stabilized the situation and was forced to paddle away from dangerous current. He found a calmer area, where rescuers arrived and helped to remove them from the water.



Jordan Edgerton



William Krupa

Jordan Edgerton & William Krupa, Hockessin, DE, Fire Company

With heavy rains were expected to hit the area on Aug. 4, 2020, Firefighter/EMT Jordan Edgerton and Firefighter/EMT William Krupa—both of whom are swift-water rescue technicians—staffed the Hockessin water rescue resources using Utility 19. They were dispatched to a report of a sinking automobile with two occupants. Edgerton and Krupa arrived and found a vehicle listing at a 45-degree angle, with four bystanders attempting rescue efforts, including breaking the rear window. It was confirmed that at least one person was trapped in the front seat of the vehicle, which was in an area of fast-

moving water from a nearby culvert. Already dressed in water rescue PPE, the two used their boat to bring the bystanders to safety and then access the interior of the vehicle. As Edgerton and Krupa removed the man from the sinking vehicle, it was pulled underwater and into the culvert, and they brought the man to land. They returned to the water to check for the second occupant, who initially was reported, but determined that the rescued victim was the sole occupant.



Victor Aguirre

Victor Aguirre, Los Angeles City Fire Department

Capt. Victor Aguirre and crews from Station 9 were first on scene of a commercial building fire in downtown Los Angeles on May 16, 2020. They found moderate smoke issuing from a one-story building, and aerials were set to the roof. Aguirre and several firefighters went to the roof to assess ventilation needs when he spotted unusual conditions. Heavy fire was coming from the roof vents despite only smoke being visible below. Aguirre ordered crews to exit the roof. As crews began to descend, a massive explosion occurred and engulfed multiple firefighters and the aerials that they were using for egress. Aguirre, whose PPE caught fire, remained on the roof until all of the firefighters were off. Aguirre and 10 other firefighters suffered burns in the explosion, and Aguirre underwent extensive treatment; one year later, he has minimal use of one hand from the injuries that he sustained.

Thomas Montemarano & Evan Lynch, Rockville Centre, NY, Fire Department

Ex-Capt. Thomas Montemarano was dropping off Junior Firefighter Evan Lynch at his home on Nov. 19, 2020, when the tones dropped, reporting a house fire. The two spotted the smoke down the block and were on scene within a minute, where smoke was showing from a garage that was attached to a two-story home. In the rear of the home, they spotted a garden hose going into an open door, and Montemarano—without the protection of PPE or a hoseline—crawled in and located a semi-conscious man, who was entangled. Lynch then crawled into the garage and helped free the man, and the two brought him to safety. Lynch spotted multiple propane tanks that were in the vicinity of the fire; with a police officer tending to the victim, the duo made two trips into the garage to remove the propane tanks, before the fire grew in intensity and forced them to retreat. The victim suffered life-threatening inhalation injuries but eventually recovered.



Thomas Montemarano



Evan Lynch

Valor Award Honorable Mentions

Tyler K. Bledsoe
Debusk Volunteer Fire Department
Greenville, TN

**Austin Challenger
& Frank Malinconico**
Palm Beach County Fire Rescue
West Palm Beach, FL

Jason Fricker & Michael Tracy
Rockland, MA, Fire Department

Jason Goodwin
Baltimore City Fire Department

Shawn Hayes
Wichita, KS, Fire Department

William Helenski
Swedeland Fire Company
King of Prussia, PA

Michael Hewartson & Daniel Oleniczak
City of Muskegon, MI,
Fire Department

Christian Jeffreys & Travis Payne
San Francisco Fire Department

Tyler Kelly & Ryan O'Donnell
San Francisco Fire Department

Kyle Lisefski & Jeff Robinson
Bath, NY, Fire Department

Mark Mielnicki
Chicago Fire Department

Gerardo A. Urena
FDNY

Paul Verren
Kansas City, MO, Fire Department

UNIT CITATIONS

Engine Co. 45, Engine Co. 29, Engine Co. 46, Squad 40, Truck 12, Truck Co. 27, BC5, Logistics Baltimore City Fire Department

On Aug. 10, 2020, a natural gas explosion at multiple two-story row homes caused the total collapse of three dwellings and massive damage to several others. The debris field covered three city blocks. Engine 45 extinguished most of the fire while the other units conducted search and rescue operations. With ambient temperatures reaching more than 100 degrees F, the units combined to rescue six victims from the collapsed dwellings, including one victim that Engine 45 kept protected from the gas-fed fire until she was able to be rescued several hours later. Rescue operations lasted more than 12 hours.

New Haven Fire Department Village of New Haven, CT, Fire Department

On the morning of June 25, 2020, the New Haven Fire Department received a call for a structure fire in a two-story apartment building with people trapped upstairs. Upon arrival, Capt. William Musilli, Lt. William Goward, Firefighter/Medic Chris McGuffin and EMT Mark Colley made immediate entry to remove the patients. Through heavy black smoke, an adult female was found in an upstairs bedroom. The female became combative and ripped off the mask of Goward, which temporarily incapacitated him in the smoke-filled room. Goward regained his composure and got the female out of the front window of the second floor. Musilli and McGuffin located a child on the first

floor and removed the child through the front door. Goward then found another child and passed the victim out of the second-story window, where Colley started an EMS assessment and lifesaving measures. Three civilians and one police officer were transported by ambulance to the hospital. All of them made a full recovery.

Squad 15 and Truck 3 Wichita, KS, Fire Department

On June 20, 2020, the Wichita Fire Department received an alarm for an apartment fire. As Lt. Dustin Winter and Firefighter Juan Hernandez of Squad 15 approached the apartment, they immediately advised that smoke was showing from a four-plex. Neighbors outside yelled that no one was inside. As the door was forced open, the crew encountered floor-to-ceiling black smoke. Winter and Hernandez entered ahead of the attack line and began an aggressive search. The thermal imaging camera didn't work properly, so a hands-on approach was utilized. A search of the bedrooms didn't reveal any victims, so Hernandez entered the bathroom. Crawling on his hands and knees over broken glass, Hernandez swept the entire room and located an unconscious victim in the large, cast-iron bathtub. Winter called for assistance, and Truck 3 Firefighter Brandon Barnes responded. During resuscitation efforts, the young male patient regained a pulse and was transported to the hospital in critical condition. Although this crew was informed that no one was inside of the building, their years of training and experience enabled them to locate and save the life of the young man.

Unit Citations Honorable Mentions

Truck Co. 1, Truck Co. 6, Truck Co. 23, Rescue Co. 1
Baltimore City Fire Department

Engine Co. 13, Truck Co. 16, Rescue Co. 1, Squad Co. 26
Baltimore City Fire Department

Engine Co. 31, Truck Co. 5
Baltimore City Fire Department

Group 1
Charlton, MA, Fire Department

Truck 1
City of Utica, NY, Fire Department

North Muskegon Fire Department, Norton Shores Fire Department, U.S. Coast Guard
City of Muskegon, MI, Fire Department

Members of the Maynard, Westmoreland and North Bay fire departments
Marcy, NY

Engine 7, Engine 9
New Bedford, MA, Fire Department

Pittsford Fire Company
Pittsford, NY, Fire Department

Engine 14, Truck 14, Engine 23
San Francisco Fire Department

Fireboat 3
San Francisco Fire Department

Hillcrest Fire Company #1
Spring Valley, NY

Platoon B
Village of Ridgewood, NJ, Fire Department

Rescue 1, Engine 4, Engine 12
Wichita, KS, Fire Department



Announcing the newest honorees in Firehouse's Community Service Awards program

1. Wes Garrett & Nick Pinnow, Cobb County, GA, Fire and Emergency Services

With a goal to reduce non-emergency 9-1-1 calls to the department, Lt. Wes Garrett and Engineer Nick Pinnow developed the Cobb Cares project, which connects repeated 9-1-1 callers with resources that better suit their needs. These services include, but aren't limited to, providing seniors with more appropriate care, connecting mental health patients with therapists and finding treatment centers for addicts. Cobb Cares now has a full-time social worker on staff who not only follows up on patients but also responds in real time to emergency mental health calls. The department already has seen a 75 percent call reduction to citizens who receive services from Cobb Cares, which saves the department about 50 calls per month.



Wes Garrett



Nick Pinnow

2. Christopher Hickman, Ocala, FL, Fire Rescue, & Drew Rogers, Marion County, FL, Fire Rescue

The Ocala-Marion Mentorship program, which is spearheaded by Ocala Firefighter/Paramedic Chris Hickman and Marion County Division Chief Drew Rogers, prepares members for both the CPAT and the standards that are required by Florida's rigorous fire academies. Additionally, mentees learn a variety of life skills and emergency medical techniques. In 2020 alone, 22 cadets were awarded scholarships to firefighting/emergency medical technical certificate programs; 52 cadets were employed as first responders; 54 cadets obtained secondary education certificates; 2 cadets obtained their bachelor's degree; 8 cadets returned to the program as mentoring leaders; and the cadets obtained \$185,000 in scholarship funds.



Christopher Hickman



Drew Rogers

3. Derrick Manning, Baltimore City Fire Department

In 2014, Lt. Derrick Manning started his own clothing/printing business. Inspired by his older brother's work in homeless shelters, Manning promised that if the business was a success, he would invest that money back into Baltimore. He uses the funds from the business to host two "Feed Ups" each month, where he, along with family and friends, feed the less fortunate. Manning also holds food drives to deliver Thanksgiving and Christmas meals and sponsors Book Bag drives to assist underprivileged children to get much needed school supplies. It isn't uncommon for him to show up at any station around the city with a bag of groceries, just as a thank you.



Derrick Manning

Community Service Honorable Mentions

Joseph Bowers
The City of Hanahan, SC,
Fire and EMS

Marian Kelly
Crystal Lakes Volunteer
Fire Department
Red Feather Lakes, CO

Daniel M. Crossway
Maynard Fire Department
Marcy, NY

**Jermy Cullison &
Matthew Penno**
Cobb County Fire
& Emergency Services
Marietta, GA

James Dulcich
Mariposa, CA, Public Utility
District Fire Department

**Community Emergency
Response Team**
North Collier Fire Rescue
Naples, FL

The "Kindness Crew"
Palm Beach County, FL,
Fire Rescue Dispatch

Jamie Meece
North McCreary Fire Department
Nancy, KY

Chad Miller
Littleton, NH, Fire Rescue

Aidan Miller-Arnold
North Washington, IA,
Fire Department

Robert Clyde Robertson
Epes, AL, Volunteer
Fire Department

Frederick V. Sandas
Hempstead, NY, Fire Department

Felix Shanahan
City of Springfield, OH, Fire Rescue

Dale Smith
Downers Grove, IL,
Fire Department

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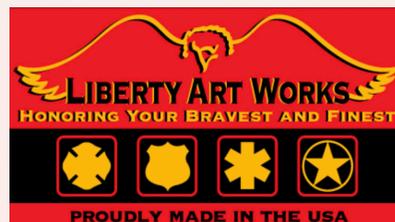
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We thank our corporate sponsors, whose support and generosity help us to honor America's Bravest.

The honorees reflect the selfless spirit and commitment to serve that makes firefighters so special.



Photo by Glen E. Ellman