

25th Annual Firefighter of the Year Heroic Awards

October 28, 2014

2014 “Firefighter of the Year” Award Recipients

The Governor and the Secretary will present 22 awards: 2 Norman Knight Awards for Excellence in Community Service, 1 Excellence in Leadership Award, 10 Individual Awards for Meritorious Conduct; 2 Group Awards for Meritorious Conduct to teams of firefighters; 5 Medals of Valor to individual firefighters and 2 Medals of Honor. Past Medal of Honor recipients and their survivors will receive special recognition from State Fire Marshal Stephen Coan during this milestone anniversary ceremony for their service and sacrifice.

2 Norman Knight Awards for Excellence in Community Service

Amherst Regional S.A.F.E. Program

**Chief Walter “Tim” O. Nelson Jr., Captain John Ingram, Amherst Fire Department,
Chief John Moruzzi, Leverett Fire Department,
Chief Raymond Murphy, Pelham Fire Department,
Chief Walter R. Tibbetts, Shutesbury Fire Department**

Over the last twenty years, the Amherst Fire Department S.A.F.E. Program has showed significant success in reaching its growing number of students and keeping the fire safety lessons fresh and age-appropriate.

What began as an independent endeavor has expanded into a regional team, reaching over 4,000 children from not only Amherst, but also the surrounding communities of Leverett, Pelham, and Shutesbury. The program has stood the test of time, as prior students have gone on to become teachers as well as members of the Amherst Call Force, and retiring teachers have become members of the S.A.F.E. Team.

Each fall, the team focuses on topics such as Smoke Alarms, Home Escape Plans, Reporting Emergencies, and every student conducts a Home Fire Safety inspection. Students were certainly paying attention, as two students have received Young Hero Awards from the Department of Fire Services for using what they learned in school in a real emergency.

The program’s efforts, however, are not limited to children. The S.A.F.E. educators collaborate with the Amherst Senior Center, Health and Police Departments to reach out to older adults. They conduct home safety visits checking for working smoke and CO alarms and providing fall and fire prevention tips directly inside the senior’s home.

The Amherst regional S.A.F.E. Program has been a successful model of fire education, due to the series of dedicated personnel who have worked hard for two decades to provide the community with the tools to keep them safe.

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Lunenburg Fire Department
Captain James E. Ricci

Senior SAFE Program

Captain Ricci has shown persistent drive and dedication in protecting the senior citizens of his community. Last year, he was instrumental in attaining the department's first "Senior SAFE" grant and developing a program known as "Sand for Seniors".

He delivers buckets of sand to the homes of seniors for icy walkways and asks to check smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors to ensure they are in good working order. He soon realized that not all of the senior's homes were properly protected and began purchasing and installing new alarms where needed. The program has continued to grow with Captain Ricci now providing house numbers for seniors who do not have their homes clearly marked for first responders.

These tremendous efforts were all in addition to his regular duties as a Lunenburg firefighter and the department's fire prevention officer.

1 Excellence in Leadership Award

Boston Fire Department

Deputy Chief Joseph "Jay" Fleming

Throughout his long career, Deputy Chief Joseph "Jay" Fleming has been instrumental in leading the way to improved fire safety and prevention. He has done significant work and made exceptional strides in fire prevention particularly with sprinklers, smoke alarms, and performance-based codes.

Deputy Fleming has spent the last 23 years pushing for increased use of residential sprinklers and smoke alarm technology and is responsible for many of the life safety requirements in State Building and Fire Codes. The innovations he pioneered have contributed to the significant drop in fire deaths in Massachusetts.

In order to expand these efforts, Chief Fleming has spent a great amount of time educating fire officials and the public all over the United States. Code changes based upon his research, have been proposed in Vermont, Maine, Ohio, California and even Australia.

As the Boston City Fire Marshal, Chief Fleming implemented new investigative protocols to determine the "cause of death" in addition to the "cause of fire." He also reorganized and reinstated important programs that involved the community's youth and senior citizens.

Many of these accomplishments were done on his own time and by his own initiative. His self-motivation and persistence have made him a leader in advancing fire safety.

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10 Meritorious Conduct Awards

Abington Fire Department
Captain David M. Farrell
Firefighter Michael L. Driscoll

House Fire w/ Propane Tank
FF/Paramedic Jarrod M. Driscoll
Firefighter Richard M. Smith

On the afternoon of December 4, 2013, a house fire involving a propane tank was reported at 160 Shaw Avenue in Abington with the propane delivery truck still parked in the driveway. With the on-duty crew already involved in another call, the request for off-duty members was initiated.

The first off-duty member to arrive was Firefighter Jarrod Driscoll. He entered the burning home without the availability of his protective clothing to make sure everyone was out safely. Confirming that the home was unoccupied saved valuable time and allowed the responding crews to focus on suppression efforts.

Shortly after, Captain David Farrell arrived in Engine One, ordered a second alarm, and began cooling the tank with a hand line. With Engine One as the only water source available, he relied on pump operator Firefighter Michael Driscoll (son of FF Jarrod Driscoll) to connect the engine to a nearby hydrant in time. As soon as Firefighter Richard Smith arrived on scene, he confirmed the flow of propane from the delivery truck was shut off to avoid the possibility of danger to the nearby elderly housing complex and fully occupied high school. Their efforts prevented the propane tank from exploding.

Chelsea Fire Department
Lieutenant Arthur J. Caissie

Fire w/ rescues, off duty

On June 26, 2014, while en route to his day shift, Lieutenant Arthur Caissie noticed thick fire and smoke flowing from the first floor of a 2½ story occupied home. He immediately reported a working fire and bravely entered the home, without the availability of protective gear. Under heavy smoke conditions, he removed a man who was inside searching for his mother.

Lieutenant Caissie then re-entered the burning home, located and rescued the woman, who had become disoriented by breathing the thick, black smoke.

Lieutenant Caissie directed responding companies to the exact location of the fire, helping to rapidly diffuse the situation. The quick and heroic actions of Lt. Caissie saved the lives of two residents.

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Everett Fire Department
Firefighters Rocco C. Andreotti

Preventing Jumper from 11 Story Building
Firefighter Joseph M. Quinn

On the night of January 10, 2014, the Everett Fire Department responded to the report of a woman who was threatening to jump from the roof of 147 School Street. Upon arrival, Firefighters Rocco Andreotti and Joseph Quinn immediately climbed to the roof where they found a distraught woman sitting on the edge, 11 stories above street level, threatening suicide. Firefighter Quinn carefully approached her and placed his arms securely around her. Together, Firefighters Andreotti and Quinn pacified the victim, moved her away from the edge and back to safety.

Lunenburg Fire Department
Firefighter Austin T. Flagg

Fatal fire, rescue attempt

On January 9, 2014, Firefighter Austin Flagg was the first to arrive at a house fire at 9 Rennie Street. Firefighter Flagg radioed in an initial report to Fire Alarm, then put on his gear and proceeded to the rear door. He entered through dense, black smoke and spotted a man's leg several feet away. Without the benefit of a hose line, search rope or any backup personnel, he entered the toxic atmosphere and carried the victim out.

Firefighter Flagg immediately began CPR on the man who was in cardiac arrest, and continued care until relieved by EMS. (Unfortunately the victim later succumbed to his injuries).

New Bedford Fire Department
Lieutenant Thomas D. Perry

Water rescue
Firefighter John P. Torchetti

On June 25, 2014, a call was received of an emotionally disturbed male attempting to drown himself in Clark's Cove. In less than 11 minutes, Lieutenant Thomas Perry and Firefighter John Torchetti were underway in their rapid response vessel.

With radio communication from the shore, they were able to locate the victim swimming out to sea. Once the man was spotted, the firefighters were able to subdue him, pull him into the boat, and return him to shore unharmed.

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2 Group Presentations

Boston Fire Department March 26, 2014, Beacon Hill Fire, Firefighter Deaths
Commissioner Joseph E. Finn
Firefighter Richard F. Paris, President, Boston Local 718

On March 26, 2014, the Boston Fire Department responded to a 9-alarm fire at 286 Beacon Street. Welding on the building next door is believed to have started a basement apartment fire that traveled quickly through the 3-story brownstone. Two firefighters trying to get to the seat of the fire became trapped and called for help while continuing to seek an exit. Firefighters faced zero visibility and tremendous heat in a rapidly advancing fire that was accelerated by excessive winds coming off the Charles River. They entered the raging inferno in an attempt to rescue the two Boston firefighters trapped in the basement.

Tewksbury Fire Department
Deputy Chief Albert J. Vasas Jr.
Lieutenant William P. Brothers
Lieutenant Scott A. Keddie
Firefighter Joseph S. Dogherty
Firefighter Joseph C. Fortunato
Firefighter Daniel R. Morneault
Firefighter Daniel D. Sawicki

Apartment fire, multiple victims
Captain Michael P. Callahan
Lieutenant James A. Giasullo Jr.
Firefighter Patrick S. Doherty
Firefighter James E. Fitzpatrick
Firefighter David W. Levy Jr.
Firefighter Thomas J. Murphy IV

On March 25, 2014, the Tewksbury Fire Department responded to a call for a fire explosion at a multi-family residence. Upon arrival, the crew was faced with three individuals who were severely burned by the blast. They immediately began treatment and arranged for the victims to be transported to the appropriate facilities, leading to the community's first use of medical helicopters.

With the victims being cared for, the remaining fire officers and firefighters attacked the fire, which had traveled into an unoccupied attic space with very little accessibility.

Once the body of the fire was under control, the fire crews discovered numerous butane gas canisters in the kitchen area, where the explosion occurred. The butane was being used to extract THC from marijuana which caused the fire. This was Massachusetts' first 'honey oil' fire, a process that is extremely dangerous to occupants and responding firefighters.

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5 Medal of Valor Presentations

Billerica Fire Department
Firefighter Patrick R. Corbett

House Fire w/ Firefighter Rescue
Firefighter James S. Harries

On October 7, 2013, a fast-moving house fire on Pinehurst Street quickly reached 3-alarms bringing mutual aid from surrounding towns to assist with fire suppression and to staff Billerica's fire stations.

The first fire company to arrive found heavy smoke and heat on the upper floors and the basement totally destroyed. The fire had spread through two floors on one side of the duplex.

Inside the burning home, Lieutenant James Miner's mask had become dislodged and he called a Mayday before completely running out of air. Without hesitation, Firefighters Corbett and Harries entered the structure to conduct a search and found Lt. Miner on the floor with no mask or helmet. They quickly removed him from the intense heat and smoke and into the care of EMS, saving his life.

Lynn Fire Department
Firefighter Ryan Newhall

House fire, firefighter rescue

On March 13, 2014, the Lynn Fire Department responded to a house fire, already heavily involved, with flames observed from the exterior walls into the second floor attic.

Firefighter Ryan Newhall and Lieutenant Sean Martin had responded to the call together that day and were working to position a hose line when Lieutenant Martin stepped through a doorway and fell straight down where a staircase used to be. The home was undergoing renovation. Firefighter Newhall heard the lieutenant's mayday call and quickly responded, alerting the Incident Commander and calling for a portable ladder.

While additional engine crews continued to fight the fire, Firefighter Newhall descended into the basement. In minimal visibility, he assessed the lieutenant's injuries, disentangled him from the debris, and helped him to his feet. Firefighter Newhall decided the quickest and safest course of action was for them to go up the ladder and out of the house to waiting medical attention.

New Bedford Fire Department
Lieutenant Mark C. Raposa

House fire w/rescues
Firefighter Matthew W. Forand

On March 8, 2014, the New Bedford Fire Department responded to a structure fire with people trapped on the second floor. The occupied 2-story wood frame house was set back 80 to 100 feet making access difficult. A resident removed from the home reported another victim was trapped on the second floor.

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Lieutenant Mark Raposa and Firefighter Matthew Forand ascended to the second floor of the burning building in order to rescue a man they found laying unconscious amongst the flames. Without cover of a hose line, Firefighter Forand proceeded through the burning doorway and pulled the man to the top of the stairs.

Together, Lieutenant Raposa and Firefighter Forand safely carried the victim down the stairs and into the arms of police. They then returned to the blazing room and extinguished the fire before it could extend into the rest of the building.

2 Medal of Honor Presentations

Boston Fire Department
Lieutenant Edward J. Walsh Jr.

Posthumous Awards
Firefighter Michael R. Kennedy

On March 26, 2014, Engine 33 and Ladder 15 responded to a Back Bay fire at 286 Beacon Street. Lieutenant Edward Walsh was the first incident commander on scene and upon arrival reported smoke showing. Without hesitation, Lt. Walsh and Firefighter Michael Kennedy entered the building with a hose line to locate and extinguish the fire at the point of origin.

They found the fire in a rear basement apartment. As they started fire suppression efforts, conditions in the building began to deteriorate rapidly. The atmosphere in the basement apartment became untenable, at which point they chose to relocate their hose line to a position more advantageous to fire ground safety.

After several unsuccessful attempts to relocate their position, Firefighter Kennedy and Lt. Walsh calmly radioed a Mayday message over their department radio. Before and after their Mayday distress calls Lt. Walsh and FF Kennedy continued to attack the fire and to request more resources.

They gave their position over the radio and made every possible attempt to secure a safe exit. Because of several factors out of their control including excessive wind conditions coming from the adjacent Charles River basin, building hazards such as bars on the windows, blocked exits and the rapidly advancing fire, Lieutenant Walsh and Firefighter Kennedy lost their lives at this incident.