



## VALOR & COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARDS



# FIREHOUSE

is pleased to announce the honorees in the 2025 *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.

**Thank You To Our Judges**  
Frank Becerra, firefighter (Ret.), Fort Worth, TX, Fire Department; Timothy S. Cowan, deputy chief, DeWitt, NY, Fire District; Jesiah Newsome, firefighter, Reading, PA, Fire Department; Ryan Pennington, battalion chief, Charleston, WV, Fire Department; and Jared Renshaw, fire commissioner, Western Berks, PA, Fire Department.

Photo by Thomas Kohler



# Grand Prize Winners

## Cameron Sunderland & Nicholas Wuckovich III Altoona, PA, Fire Department

**A**ltoona Fire Department firefighters were dispatched to a residential fire with reports of multiple children trapped at 10:37 p.m. on April 26, 2025. EMS and police arrived ahead of firefighters and confirmed that three children could be seen in an attic window and reported that a disabled adult was trapped on the second floor.

Engine 313, with Capt. Nicholas Wuckovich III and Engineer Shawn Daughenbaugh, arrived to find heavy fire and smoke from the second floor of the 2½-story house. Truck 351, which was commanded by Capt. Cameron Sunderland with Engineer Kevin Kuhn, arrived shortly after.

Sunderland climbed a ground ladder to the attic and rescued two toddlers from the heavy smoke conditions. The third child suffered smoke inhalation and was unable to exit the window on her own, which led Sunderland to give his SCBA facepiece to the girl while he worked in choking, heavy smoke to keep the girl calm. An aerial ladder was placed to the window to remove the girl from the attic.

Simultaneously, Wuckovich entered the structure before a handline could be stretched to begin a search for the disabled adult. He worked through extreme heat and intense smoke conditions, searching for life along the way.

As he arrived at the second floor's access point to the attic, a flashover occurred and engulfed the area where Wuckovich was searching in searing heat. He quickly found a second-floor closet, where he took shelter from the intense heat and called a mayday.

Additional firefighters stretched a hoseline to the second floor to knock down heavy fire conditions. They rescued Wuckovich, who sustained burns during the flashover.

Wuckovich was transported to UPMC Altoona for treatment and later transferred to UPMC Mercy in Pittsburgh. He sustained deep, second-degree burns to his hands and shoulders. He was hospitalized for an extended period and faced an extensive recovery.

Sunderland also was transported to UPMC Altoona, having suffered serious smoke inhalation, before being flown to UPMC Mercy for intense treatment.

The adult who Wuckovich was working to rescue perished in the fire.



**Cameron Sunderland**



**Nicholas Wuckovich III**



## VALOR & COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARDS

### Dennis Solares, Central Islip, NY, Fire Department

When the Central Islip Fire Department dispatched a house fire with entrapment on Oct. 23, 2025, Capt. Dennis Solares was just a few blocks away. On arrival, he found a working basement fire.

He entered the house without turnout gear but was driven out by high heat. He retrieved an SCBA from an arriving chief's vehicle and donned it. He kicked in a door on Side 2 of the house and had others wait at the entryway as he crawled under heavy smoke and heat conditions. He located a victim, dragged her down

the hallway and handed her over at the door to other responders, who initiated CPR efforts.

Solares returned to the interior and crawled to Side 4 of the house. As he neared the door to the fire room, the door began to fail and allowed flames to enter the hallway. Solares was able to locate the second victim. Under high heat, he pulled the victim close and dragged the individual back to the Side 2 door, where crews began medical care.

Both victims recovered after two months of treatment in the hospital.



Dennis Solares



Michael "Joe" Van Haalen

### Michael "Joe" Van Haalen, Des Moines, IA, Fire Department

On June 28, 2025, units were called to the Des Moines River for a water rescue. The river was swollen by extreme flooding, leading to fast currents and large debris piles flowing downstream.

Engine 1 found a seven-year-old boy who was visibly exhausted gripping a safety wire while battling the swift current. The boy's grandfather drowned while he attempted to rescue the child, police reported. Police made multiple rescue attempts but were unsuccessful because of the rapid current and limited equipment.

Capt. Michael "Joe" Van Haalen donned a personal flotation device over his duty uniform to enter the water in rescue mode. Van Haalen tied

a throw rope to his arm and entered the river but had to stop when he ran out of rope. He swam back to shore for additional rope before reentering the river and swimming to the boy.

Van Haalen battled swift currents and floating hazards to access the child. Upon making contact, he found the boy mentally and physically exhausted. Van Haalen worked to secure the boy in the rising and moving waters.

Firefighters Marco Matias and Ben Wafful, who remained on the shoreline, pulled Van Haalen and the boy to safety. The effort by Van Haalen and other firefighters took less than 10 minutes from the department's arrival. The department's arrival.

### Gino Casciola, Addison, IL, Fire Protection District

On May 21, 2025, Addison Fire Protection District firefighters found heavy smoke showing from a smoke shop that was filled with cigarettes, loose tobacco, lighters and butane canisters. There was a walk-in humidifier in one corner of the building (which formerly was a fast-food restaurant) as well as cases around the interior and a smoking lounge in the middle of the shop.

Firefighter/Paramedic Gino Casciola was directed to stay at the front door to advance the hoseline as firefighters entered the building.

Firefighters reported moderate heat and visibility as they attacked the fire. They pulled ceilings and requested ventilation. Exterior crews reported an initial push of smoke from the rear door then smoke being drawn back into the structure followed by heavy fire and smoke

conditions just as interior crews reported that their environment deteriorated rapidly with smoke pushing down to the floor. Interior crews dropped to the floor and radioed the changes as command ordered companies to evacuate.

The interior crewmembers became disoriented and were unaware of the location of the front door. Escape was challenged further by the layout and furniture in the center of the shop.

Casciola hooked his foot on the door frame and slammed the hoseline against the ground to help members to get oriented. One by one, the interior crewmembers found their way to Casciola, and he led each of them to the exterior, until Holdridge was the last one out.

With all crewmembers accounted for, firefighters switched to a defensive attack.



Gino Casciola



## Garrett Videon & Boomer Davis, Putnam County, FL, Fire Rescue

Responding to a house fire on June 22, 2025, Putnam County Fire Rescue firefighters were advised that the primary escape route for an occupant was cut off by fire conditions.

Lead Firefighter Garret Videon and Firefighter Boomer Davis from Engine 7 determined where the master bedroom window was to initiate entry but found that the window was blocked by a window-mounted air conditioner. The pair removed the air conditioner and entered the house under rapidly deteriorating conditions, including heavy smoke and high heat.

The pair began to search in near-zero visibility conditions and communicated their moves during the search. They were able to find three victims inside of the house and removed each of them to safety. One of the victims was in critical condition, having suffered severe smoke inhalation.

While Videon and Davis searched, crews were able to get water on the fire, improving conditions for the search efforts.

Once the three victims were outside, additional crews began life-saving measures on the individuals victims, who had successful recoveries.



Kevin Danielson

## Kevin Danielson, Mansfield, CT, Fire Department

Deputy Chief Kevin Danielson was off duty on Oct. 21, 2025, when Mansfield Fire Department firefighters were dispatched to a house fire just after 6 p.m. Reports indicated that a person was trapped inside of the three-story farmhouse.

Danielson was at home and responded directly to the scene in his department vehicle. As he arrived, he heard screams for help from inside of the house. He entered the home without SCBA to begin to search for the victim.

With heavy fire conditions on the second floor, Danielson searched and found two occupants,

who he removed to safety outside of the house. He returned to find a third person, who was unconscious on the second floor. He removed the individual as flames consumed the second story of the house

He used his radio to give instructions to incoming firefighters and then initiated CPR measures on the unconscious victim. Unfortunately, the person succumbed to their injuries.

Danielson suffered smoke inhalation and was transported to the hospital, where he was intubated and monitored for three days. After he was released, he returned to work shortly after.

## Lawson C. Stuart, Dyess Fire & Emergency Services, Abilene, TX

Dyess Fire & Emergency Services crews were dispatched to a medical emergency at a construction site on the airfield at Dyess Air Force Base but quickly learned that the incident was more serious than the initial dispatch.

Thirty feet below grade, a construction worker was trapped beneath a large-diameter pipe, which crushed the victim against the trench's out structure. The pipe's movement created an unstable trench around the victim.

The size-up showed that the trench lacked protective shoring. Responders found that the suspended pipe could shift or collapse without warning and that the soil was unstable.

Upon assessing the incident scene, Capt. Lawson C. Stuart made the decision to enter the trench without protective shoring or

safety lines to reach the victim for an assessment. Working through deep mud that was situated below the suspended load, Stuart found that the man was suffering signs of imminent respiratory failure because of severe chest compression. The man also had labored breathing.

Stuart directed efforts for firefighters to stabilize the pipe and coordinated extrication efforts as he remained in the collapse zone. Because of the unstable terrain in the trench and lack of anchor points, Stuart worked on an improvised hauling system to rescue the victim.

The victim was removed from the trench and received immediate treatment for multiple injuries before he was transported to a trauma center.



Lawson C. Stuart



## VALOR & COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARDS

### Chase Carson & Gavin Gray, Glenwood, IA, Fire Department

During a community event on Aug. 6, 2025, Firefighter/Medics Chase Carson and Gavin Gray were off duty but at the fire station with their families when an active-shooter event was dispatched.

Carson and Gray responded in Medic 2 and reported to a staging area, where they saw smoke coming from the home where the shooter was reported. (It later was determined that the shooter set the home on fire.)

When police found two shooting victims who were unresponsive in the alley at the rear of the home, they called for medical crews. Carson and Gray, under the cover of law enforcement, moved down the alley to assess the victims. They determined that one victim, a female, was critical and the other was deceased.

Under fire, Carson and Gray evacuated the female victim into the ambulance, where they began to treat her and then transported her to the hospital. Unfortunately, she succumbed to her injuries at the hospital.



Chase Carson



Gavin Gray

### William Barnett, Nashville, TN, Fire Department

Nashville fire, EMS and police crews were dispatched on Oct. 4, 2025, for a parachuter who was caught in a tree in a wooded area. Using the what3words geocoding system, crews from the ground and air found the man but encountered multiple challenges, including limited access and difficult terrain.

The man was suspended from tree canopy nearly 45 feet in the air by his parachute. He reported that he wasn't injured. Early on in the incident, the man's parachute began to move, and he dropped nearly one foot.

Crews sought to conduct a helicopter-assisted rescue but deemed it too dangerous, with rotor wash threatening the stability of the parachute.

Crews established an artificial high point by lashing together a 35-foot and a 28-foot ground ladder using an auditorium raise. Four nearby trees were used as rope anchors, and other firefighters heeled the ladders.

Firefighter William Barnett ascended the ladder into the tree canopy and secured himself to the ladder to perform a pickoff rescue. He attached a rescue harness to the patient and transferred the patient's weight to another rope system with an artificial high point using a mechanical clutch.

Barnett then helped to remove the parachute from the patient before he guided him down the ladder to safety. Neither Barnett nor the victim were injured in the extensive rescue effort.



Chad Sterrett

### Chad Sterrett, Derby, KS, Fire Department

Lt. Chad Sterrett was among several members who responded to a multivehicle crash on Interstate 35 on Jan. 2, 2025.

Sterrett found a woman who was seriously injured inside of a van that was leaking gasoline. He broke the windshield and crawled inside of the vehicle to assess the woman

before extricating her. Sterrett treated the woman's compromised airway and remained with her during extrication efforts despite dangers, including the threat of the pooling gasoline igniting.

Sterrett reentered the damaged van to find a second person, who was entrapped but deceased.

### Valor Award Honorable Mentions

**Chad Baughman**  
Morris Township, PA,  
Volunteer Fire Company

**Bret Chancey & Rebecca French**  
Putnam County, FL, Fire Rescue

**Roderick Frye Sr.**  
Stamper Fire Department,  
Fayette, MS

**Tyler Gee**  
Washington, IL, Fire Department

**Edward Linehan**  
East Longmeadow, MA, Fire Department

**Stephen Melton**  
Rincon, GA, Fire Department

**Steven Power**  
Dayton, OH, Fire Department



## Lake View Fire District, Lake Shore Volunteer Fire Company & Hamburg Police, New York

Just before 9 p.m. on May 12, 2025, the Lake View Fire District was alerted to a house explosion. Hamburg Police Department Officer Garrett Hileman was in the area on patrol and arrived first and confirmed the explosion and began to search for victims.

On arrival, firefighters found fire extending into an adjacent house. Hileman heard someone calling out and in a debris pile. He grabbed two fire extinguishers and began to knock down fire around the victim while he encouraged them to crawl out.

Lake Shore Volunteer Fire Company Assistant Chief Chad Witkowski arrived and jumped into the basement to help a victim to get to the front of the basement. Hileman moved a roofjoist from

the debris as Witkowski pulled the victim through a hole in the debris pile. Witkowski guided the victim to the front basement wall.

Lake View Fire District Lt. Bruce Oliver and Firefighter Jeff Lewis, who were operating a handline, moved to the rescue area. When the victim wasn't able to get up, Witkowski put himself between the fire and victim. He used a bear hug to lift the victim toward Oliver and Lewis. Hileman and Retired Buffalo Fire Department Lt. David George picked up the hoseline and battled back the flames as they advanced toward the rescue effort. Oliver and Lewis grabbed the victim's arms to pull up while Witkowski pushed from below.

The entire rescue was completed within 10 minutes.

## Engine 405, Colonie, NY, Fire Company

Police arrived at 12:30 a.m. on March 26, 2025, to find heavy fire from a house and confirmed two occupants were trapped inside.

On arrival, Chief Jeffrey Kayser found a single-story, wood-frame ranch house with fire showing on the A, B and C sides and both exterior doorways engulfed in fire.

Engine 405, with Capt. Kyle Beaubien, Capt. Keith Fogg and Firefighter David Truax, arrived and deployed a 1¾-inch hoseline through the Side A door and into the living room, which was heavily involved in fire. Under intense fire conditions, the three pushed into the hallway to attempt search efforts in the bedrooms. They located a 56-year-old man in the hallway, where fire was beginning to grow. Beaubien and Fogg dragged the victim to a rear bedroom

while Truax protected them with the handline. Beaubien and Fogg passed the man through a rear bedroom window to police and EMS personnel, who began resuscitation efforts.

Baubien and Fogg returned to the hallway to continue primary search while Truax applied water on heavy fire from the living room.

Baubien located a 76-year-old woman, who was unconscious, in the bathroom. He and Fogg dragged her back down the hallway to the same bedroom, where they handed her out of a window.

While his crew was operating inside, chauffer Lt. Brent Lecuyer established a water supply after hand stretching to a hydrant to keep water flowing on the interior of the house.

Despite their efforts, both victims succumbed to their injuries.

## Pine Hill Fire Department Battalion 6, Lambs Terrace Fire Company Quint 85 & Gloucester Township Squad 88, New Jersey

Lambs Terrace Fire Company Quint 85 and Chief 85 were dispatched on May 13, 2025, for a single-vehicle accident with airbag deployment. Capt. Steve Schwegel sized up the scene and notified Camden County Dispatch that the vehicle struck a natural gas main that was leaking gas. One person was unconscious and trapped in the vehicle, which led Schwegel to request a full box assignment.

Schwegel assigned Quint 85 to deploy an attack hoseline to apply water to cool the gas leak and divert fumes away from the victim. While water was flowing, a vehicle ran over the supply line, which delayed the water supply as the threat of an explosion increased.

Pine Hill Fire Department Battalion Chief Salvatore Pizzo assumed operations and ordered a rapid extrication, despite the extreme hazard of working in a volatile gas environment. Pizzo, Schwegel, Capt. Nicholas Giambri and Firefighter Paul Wolf entered the danger zone to coordinate victim removal efforts. Within minutes, they successfully extricated the victim from the vehicle using spreaders.

The victim was removed from the hot zone and delivered to EMS personnel, who began life-saving efforts. The victim was transported to a trauma center in critical condition. The victim recovered from their injuries.

### Unit Citations Honorable Mentions

**Engine 71**  
Addison, IL, Fire Protection District

**Assistant Chief, Engine 1 & Squad 1**  
Bemidji, MN, Fire Department

**First Shift**  
Columbia-Richland Fire Department, Columbia, SC

**Engine 5 & Truck 5**  
Hillsboro, OR, Fire & Rescue

**Engine 9 & Rescue 9**  
Long Beach, CA, Fire Department

**ATV 19, ATV 22, District 15, District Special Operations 3, District Special Operations 19, EMS Special Operations, Engines 11, 13, 19, 22, 23, 24, FAAST Medic 17, Medics 19, 23, 24, Rescues 2, 13, SAF19, Squads 11, 19, 21, Truck 21, Tower 2**  
Nashville, TN, Fire Department

**Lt. Kevin Falvey, Firefighter Gary Reed & Firefighter Matt Watson**  
Painesville Township, OH, Fire Department

**Engine 17, Rescue 11, Truck 10, Truck 6, Water Rescue 1, Battalion 2, Battalion 66 & Car 99**  
Rochester, NY, Fire Department

**Vienna, NY, Fire Department**



## COMMUNITY SERVICE

### James Franklin, Newton County, GA, Fire Service



James Franklin

Fire Safety Specialist James Franklin has connected with all ages in Newton County to educate his citizens on fire and life-safety measures. In 2025, he led efforts to raise awareness of more than 14,000 children at elementary schools and daycare facilities. He provided fire extinguisher training to 200 students at a camp, 250 construction workers at one site and more than 100 staff members at a local university. During fire station tours, Franklin increased the department's trust and visibility with more than 500 residents.

To complete a FEMA Fire Prevention and Safety Grant program, he visited 244 homes, connecting with 678 residents while hundreds of smoke alarms and CO alarms were installed. Partnering with the American Red Cross, the Newton County Fire Service installed an additional 344 smoke alarms in 94 homes while providing life-safety messages to 234 residents.

Franklin also embraced digital outreach efforts to connect with citizens who weren't reached in person. He used apps to reach at least 82,000 residents.

### Steve Himes, Randy James, Jim Oldaker, Brian Grieco, Matt Reed, Cathy McCray & Ross Martin Working with the West Virginia University Junior Firefighter Camp

These seven people comprise the senior instructors of the West Virginia University National Junior Firefighter Camp youth fire service program. The program aims to improve public safety education for youth and to strengthen future recruitment.



The senior instructors design, deliver and supervise a weeklong residential training experience for junior firefighters, combining hands-on

skills with leadership development. Located at the West Virginia State Fire Academy, the program brings more than 150 participants ages 14–17 annually from West Virginia and numerous other states.

Many participants come from rural or underserved communities that have limited access to formal training or professional mentorship. Campers receive instruction in firefighting fundamentals, emergency medical awareness, teamwork and risk reduction.

The results of are both measurable and sustained. A significant percentage of graduates go on to become volunteer or career firefighters, EMS providers or other public safety professionals.

Collectively, these instructors have donated more than 2,500 hours of service to this program over the past 15 years.

### Troy Lowe, West Licking Joint Fire District, Pataskala, OH

Capt. Troy Lowe has been a champion of mass protection techniques for active-shooter events and mass-casualty incidents.

In addition to his full-time firefighter/paramedic and captain roles at the West Licking Joint Fire District, Lowe has a background in the military and law enforcement. This background spurred him to develop one of the first door barricade systems for shelter-in-place for active-shooter events and mass-casualty incidents. The development of the Barracuda led Lowe to develop several other tools, including mass-casualty kits.

Lowe started the fire district's first rescue task force that led to training with the county sheriff's office and other law enforcement

agencies. He also developed the department's standard operating guidelines, equipment inventory system and in-depth training.

The department used his training at an active-shooter event in a nursing home within the response district.

Lowe also has taught students and staff at all four school districts in the department's district, including lock-down procedures, emergency wound care and dealing with active assailants.



Troy Lowe

### Community Service Honorable Mentions

**Brian Barron**  
Washington, IL, Fire Department

**Chad Branford**  
Palatka, FL, Fire Department

**Jennifer Lindsey**  
Amargosa Valley, NV, Volunteer Fire Department

**Stephen McDaniels**  
Mocanaqua Volunteer Fire Company, Shickshinny, PA

**Dan Berger & Casey Villanueva**  
Travis County, TX, ESD 2/Pflugerville Fire Department

**John Donovan & Blair Murphy**  
Norwood, OH, Fire Department

**Jeff Marksberry**  
Houston, AL, Volunteer Fire Department

**Murphy, TX, Fire Rescue Department**

**Matthew Fauble**  
Cherry Grove Fire Department, Cadillac, MI