



TOWN OF VERNON

Office of the Mayor

14 Park Place • Vernon, CT 06066

Tel: (860) 870-3600 • Fax: (860) 870-3580

www.Vernon-CT.gov

Daniel A. Champagne
Mayor

Michael J. Purcaro
Town Administrator

Dawn R. Maselek
Assistant Town Administrator

MEDIA ADVISORY

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Press Contact:

David Owens, Communications Specialist

Desk (860) 870-3574 / Cell (860) 494-5973

Vernon Firefighters and Emergency Medical Personnel Honored at Annual Awards Ceremony *Three Receive Medal of Valor*

(VERNON, Connecticut) – Volunteers with the Town of Vernon Fire Department honored their own Monday and three firefighters received the Medal of Valor for their rescues of people trapped on the upper floors of the burning Fitch Block back on December 20th, 2020.

Firefighters Matthew Kenzior, Nicholas Bush and Assistant Fire Chief Robert Babcock each rescued a person who was trapped on the upper floor of the burning building.

“These trapped occupants are alive because of your actions that day,” Lieutenant Michelle Kerr said.

What made Monday night’s ceremony all the more special was that the two people who were rescued that cold winter morning presented the firefighters with their plaques and medals.



Left to right, Medal of Valor recipients Firefighters Matthew Kenzior and Nicholas Bush and Assistant Fire Chief Robert Babcock. Photos by Duncan Stewart and Patrick Dooley.

Mayor Dan Champagne told fire fighters and medical responders that he could not be prouder of them, especially in light of the pandemic. He also highlighted new equipment the department has received and will receive in coming months.

“The support that we can give you is small when compared to what you give to the Town,” Mayor Champagne said.

Fire Chief Stephen Eppler praised department members for their service during an especially difficult year. Although the world was dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, Vernon residents continued to count on their fire department.

“During all of this our calls for service did not stop,” Chief Eppler said. “We adapted and learned how to be our best.” And while the pandemic is beginning to ebb, Chief Eppler urged firefighters not to let their guard down. “Protocols will remain in place to protect members, their families and our community.”

Town Administrator and Emergency and Risk Management Director Michael Purcaro told fire department members that the town is grateful to them for their service.

“We see and appreciate what you do for our community each day, and, equally as important, we recognize what you are *willing to do* each and every day.” Purcaro said.

Several other firefighters were honored for their efforts on December 20th at the Fitch Block. Captain Jon-Paul Lucas and Firefighters Zachary Lopez and Walter “Joe” Hampton were honored for their quick work controlling the fire; Firefighter James Barrows and Emergency Medical Responder Luis Muniz and Emergency Medical Technician Jared Galica were honored for deploying and raising ground ladders their colleagues used to reach the trapped people.

Captains Thomas McKinney, William Solito, Lieutenants Peter Blume, Bertrand Lessard and Michelle Kerr, Engineers Robert Turkington and Warren Boulette and Firefighter William Kerr were honored for their actions on April 25, 2020 while rescuing a man who was stranded 60 feet in the air in the bucket of his disabled work truck on Sutton Drive.

Lieutenants David Dube, Timothy Moore and Michelle Kerr were honored for their performance on November 10, 2020 rescuing a person on the sixth floor of 21 Court Street who’d suffered a heart attack. The building’s elevators were not functioning so the firefighters used a ladder truck to retrieve the person from the sixth floor and lower them to a waiting ambulance.

Adam Bowman, the fourth generation of his family to serve in the Fire Department, was honored as the Junior Firefighter of the Year for his hard work at school and in the fire department, and for his eagerness to learn and volunteer.

Captain Jon-Paul Lucas was selected as the Officer of the Year for his dedication to serving the Fire Department and community. He responded to 190 incidents and volunteered more than 500 hours in 2020.

“You consistently lead by example on scene and in the fire station,” Fire Chief Stephen Eppler said of Lucas.

Firefighter Matthew Kenzior has only been a member of the department since 2019, but in that time has distinguished himself and shown a deep commitment to professionalism, positivity and integrity, Assistant Chief

Robert Babcock said. Kenzior has attended training and responded to calls to gain experience, Babcock said. In 2020 he responded to “an astounding 279 calls” and volunteered more than 350 hours.

“It’s truly been a pleasure to see Firefighter Kenzior grow within our organization and we hope to continue to see that for many years to come,” Babcock said.

Engineer Mitchell Dlubac and EMTs Octavio Muniz and Jonathan Towler were honored for live-saving efforts.

Captains Octavio Muniz and Cory Lafontaine and Lieutenant Bert Lessard were recognized for their selection as company officers.

The following volunteers were recognized for length of service:

45 Years

Firefighter Edgar Jackson

40 Years

EMT Laurie Galley, Engineer Scott McDonald, Captain Thomas McKinney and Fire Police Member Mark Pugliese.

25 Years

Captains Steven Landry, Octavio Muniz and William Solito.

20 Years

Lieutenant Steven Augustus, Engineer Jonathan Bush, Lieutenant Todd Cascario, Tami Hahn, Junior Advisor Linda Lukas and Engineer Donald Westcott.

15 Years

Assistant Chief Alan Arel.

10 Years

Photographer Patrick Dooley, Engineer Walter Hampton, Firefighter Zachary Lopez and Ladies Auxiliary member Carol Muniz.

5 Years

Fire Police Lieutenants Todd Black and Pete Blume, EMT Heather Graveline, Engineer Andre Lisee, Firefighters Josh Lisk and Danielle Solito and Lieutenant Spencer Padget.



Firefighter of the Year Matthew Kenzior, center, is recognized by Assistant Fire Chief Robert Babcock, left, Fire Chief Stephen Eppler, Assistant Chief Alan Arel and Assistant Chief Chris Hammick. Photo by Patrick Dooley.



Fire Officer of the Year Captain Jon-Paul Lucas, center, is recognized by Fire Chief Stephen Eppler, Assistant Chief Robert Babcock, Assistant Chief Alan Arel and Assistant Chief Chris Hammick. Photo by Patrick Dooley.



Junior Firefighter of the Year Adam Bowman, third from left, is a fourth generation Vernon firefighter. He is joined by Fire Chief Stephen Eppler, left, Firefighter Richard Bowman (his grandfather), Lt. Kevin Bowman (his father), Stacey Bowman (his mother) and Assistant Chiefs Robert Babcock, Alan Arel and Chris Hammick. Photo by Patrick Dooley.

About the Town of Vernon

The Town of Vernon is a celebrated place to live, work and visit. From its beautiful parks and lakes, to its vast trails and historic homes and buildings, Vernon is a resilient and thriving community that promotes the health and wellbeing of its residents and values the natural environment. With a resident population of approximately 30,000 and occupying 18.03 square miles, Vernon combines a balanced appreciation of history, and a strong economic base for growth, both residential and commercial. Located 15 minutes east of the Connecticut capital of Hartford, and 25 miles from the City of Springfield, Massachusetts, the Town of Vernon is strategically located in “New England's Knowledge Corridor” with close proximity to some of the top colleges and universities in the country.

Recently designated as a certified Sustainable Community, the Town of Vernon offers a wide range of benefits and services to its residents. The Town of Vernon is a full-service municipality that practices a management philosophy of continuous quality improvement. To learn more about the Town of Vernon, please call (860) 870- 3670 or visit www.vernon-ct.gov.

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