

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



MEDIA ADVISORY

March 2, 2022

Press Contact:

David Owens, Communications Specialist

Desk (860) 870-3574

Cell (860) 494-5973



Daniel A. Champagne
Mayor

Michael J. Purcaro
Town Administrator

Dawn R. Maselek
Assistant Town Administrator

Vernon Firefighters, EMTs and Civilians Honored for Lifesaving and Heroism at Annual Awards Ceremony

Two Firefighters Receive Medal of Valor for Saving People from Burning Building

(VERNON, Connecticut) – Volunteers with the Town of Vernon Fire Department on Monday honored their own for heroic and life-saving acts, and honored good Samaritans who stepped up to help when lives were at risk.

Among those honored at the department's annual awards program at Rockville High School were a woman who saved a toddler choking on a grape, passersby who helped firefighters and police rescue people from a burning Union Street building and teams of rescuers who responded to serious crashes.

Vernon Mayor Dan Champagne thanked the volunteers for all they do.

"I can't be any prouder of you and the work you do," Mayor Champagne said. "Your dedication and commitment to serving our community is appreciated. The people of Vernon are truly fortunate to have you."

Town Administrator and Emergency Management Director Michael Purcaro told the department that its performance during an unprecedented year with a record call volume was inspiring.

"You define courage through your daily unselfish and noble acts," Purcaro said. "Your dedication to serving others and the sacrifices you make to serve are recognized. We are grateful to and your families for all that you do, and all that you are willing to do, in service to Vernon."

Fire Chief Stephen Eppler reminded his colleagues of the special status they hold in the community, and the responsibilities that come with that. Being a firefighter, he said, is the greatest job in the world.

"We are the last chance for the public when they call us," Eppler said. "When they need us, they really need us. They love us. They trust us. They count on us."

It is crucial to respect those with whom they serve and to respect the community, and to avoid the pitfalls of social media, Eppler said. He urged firefighters to use social media wisely and to share the good work they do,

but to avoid the negativity that exists on social media networks A poorly thought out comment can reflect on the whole organization and undermine all the good work they do, he said.

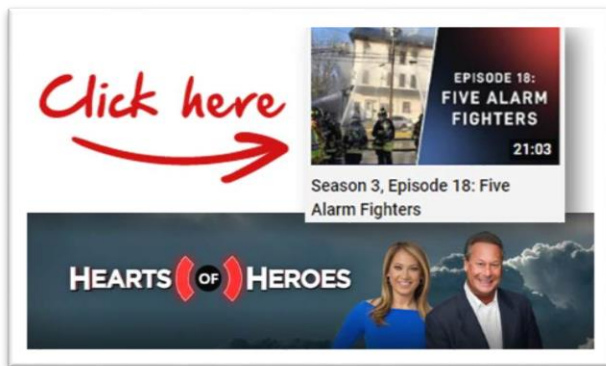


Engineer Stan Landry, left, and Lt. Blake St. John were honored with the Medal of Valor for saving the lives of two people trapped in a burning Union Street building. Photo by Duncan Stewart.



Firefighters and good Samaritans who worked together to save the lives of two people in a burning Union Street building are: Engineer Kevin Bowman (second from left), Engineer Stan Landry, Lt. Blake St. John, Vernon Police Officer Allison Lawrence, Vernon Town Administrator and Emergency Management Director Michael Purcaro, Sam Flint and Brett Rhinehart. They are joined on stage by Assistant Fire Chiefs Alan Arel and Robert Babcock and Chief Stephen Eppler. Photo by Duncan Stewart.

Firefighter Robert Turkington, the evening's master of ceremonies, reminded his colleagues that the awards distributed Monday night represented only a small portion of the good work the volunteers performed over the past year.



[A video of the television program "Hearts of Heroes"](#), that highlighted the work of firefighters, police and good Samaritans at the March 29, 2021 fire at 80-82 Union Street fire was also shown at Monday's awards program at Rockville High School.

Two firefighters, Lt. Blake St. John and Engineer Stan Landry, were awarded the Medal of Valor for their efforts at the Union Street fire. With fire blasting out the windows from the third floor of the building, both men climbed ladders and rescued people hanging from the windows. St. John then climbed back up the ladder and into a second floor apartment to search for a third person. No one was on the second floor.

Engineer Kevin Bowman received a phone call about the fire from his barber, Sam Flint, and headed to the scene before being formally dispatched. On board his pumper was the 24-foot ladder that made the rescues possible.

Other members of the team that assisted St. John, Landry and Bowman that day were honored, including Town Administrator and Emergency Management Director Michael Purcaro, Vernon Police Officer Allison Lawrence, and civilians Sam Flint, Brett Rhinehart and Nathan Pisani.

"Lives were indeed saved that day," Lt. Michelle Kerr said. "You all played crucial roles in this incident."

Lieutenants Jeff Schambach and Brian Johnston, Firefighters Zachary Lopez, Tyler Branon and Danielle Solito, Emergency Medical Technicians Octavio Muniz and Robert Doton, American Medical Response Paramedic Jane Gordon, Rockville Medic Michael Carl, Tolland Firefighters Tim Seitz and Trevor Gantic, Crystal Lake Fire Officer Rob Edwards and Vernon Public Works Mechanic Rick Toper were honored for their response to a serious crash on August 19, 2021. A young man from Tolland, Jonathan Prouty, was seriously injured in the crash. Firefighters removed Prouty from the wreckage and the paramedics and EMTs provided a high level of care that saved his life.

Prouty presented the team with their awards and he and his father, Paul Prouty, attended the ceremony to thank the rescuers.

Assistant Fire Chief Robert Babcock, Lt. Jeff Schambach, Lt. Bert Lessard, Engineer Stan Landry, and Firefighters Dennis LeClair, Kelly Tischbein, Connor Raymond, Ashley Shepard and Ian McMahon were honored for their work at a crash on October 21, 2021 on Route 83 at Merline Road that involved serious injuries.

Lt. Jeff Schambach, Lt. Bert Lessard, Lt. Nick Bartos, Engineer Stan Landry, and Firefighters Kelly Tischbein, Dennis LeClair and Ian McMahon were honored for their efforts at a serious crash on December 2, 2021 on I-84 where they stabilized a truck and rescued the driver.

Zaida Rodriguez Adorno received the Citizen's Life Saving Award for her acts on November 19, 2021 saving a toddler. Zaida, a guest at Cornerstone's New Hope House in Vernon, went to the aid of a fellow guest who was choking on a grape. She leaped into action and performed abdominal thrusts on the near lifeless child before EMTs arrived. Her quick thinking and prompt action saved the child's life.



Zaida Rodriguez Adorno received the Citizen's Life Saving Award for saving a toddler who was choking on a grape. She is joined by Assistant Chief Alan Arel, left, Assistant Chief Robert Babcock and Fire Chief Stephen Eppler. Photo by Duncan Stewart.

EMTs Justin Czarnota and Robert Doton were honored for their response on March 2, 2021 to a person experiencing cardiac arrest. The EMTs performed CPR and used a defibrillator to revive a patient, then quickly transported the patient to a hospital. The result was a positive outcome for the patient. Czarnota and Doton received the Pre-Hospital Code Save Award.

Engineer Stan Landry, Lt. Brian Johnston, Engineer Scott McDonald, Lt. Nick Bartos and Lt. Spencer Padget were recognized for their work planning, organizing and constructing a training facility at Fire Station 1 on Hartford Turnpike. They received an Achievement Award.

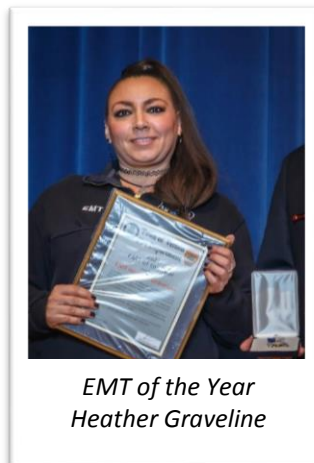
Jack Yang of Artisan Development received a Citizen's Award for his contributions to the department for use in the training facility at Fire Station 1 and a structure he donated for training.



*Firefighter of the Year
Kelly Tischbein*



*Junior Firefighter of the Year
Ryan McKinney*



*EMT of the Year
Heather Graveline*



*Fire Officer of the Year
Nick Bartos*

Ryan McKinney was recognized as Junior Firefighter of the Year for his initiative, eagerness to learn and drive and dedication to the department.

Kelly Tischbein was honored as Firefighter of the Year. She joined in the fire department in 2020 and embraced training and devoted hundreds of hours to volunteering. She responded to 340 calls in 2021 has gained the respect of fellow firefighters and department leaders.

Heather Graveline was recognized as EMT of the year for regularly going above and beyond, her work training colleagues and the professional and courteous care she provides to patients.

Lt. Nick Bartos was recognized as Fire Officer of the Year for his devotion of hundreds of hours, response to many calls and leadership by example. He also devoted many hours to developing training programs for his company and played a key role in the fire department's drone program.

Lt. Ashley Shepard and Lt. Andre Lisee were recognized for being newly elected company officers.

Retired Captain David Maguda and retired Engineer Craig Bowman were recognized for their service to the department. Magda served 42 years and Bowman 28 years.

The following volunteers receive length of service awards:

45 Years

Engineer Bart Blonstein, Capt. Michael Colt and Auxiliary member Dorothy Konarski

35 Years

Engineer Warren Boulette, Department Secretary Diane Carpenter, Engineer David Dube, Engineer Ronald Fischer, Capt. Jack Fisher, Deputy Chief Christopher Hammick, Engineer Larry King, Engineer Stan Landry and EMT Mary Males

30 Years

Engineer Mitchell Dlubac, Fire Chief Stephen Eppler and EMT Jason Hahn

25 Years

Capt. Daniel Robertson

20 Years

Assistant Chief Robert Babcock

15 Years

Engineer Austin Coppinger, Firefighter James Robinson, Lt. Ashley Shepard and Lt. Blake St. John

10 Years

Capt. Chris Prue and Firefighter Reilly Tuttle

5 Years

Auxiliary member Nyla Hadden, Lt. Bert Lessard and EMT Jonathan Towler

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.

Designated 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.

###