

# TOWN OF VERNON

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## Vernon Firefighters, EMTs, Residents Honored for Lifesaving, Heroism at Annual Awards Ceremony

### *Vernon 8-year-old Honored for Saving Classmate Who was Choking on a Piece of Candy*

**(VERNON, Connecticut)** – The Town of Vernon Fire Department on Monday night honored firefighters, EMTs and an 8-year-old Vernon boy for heroic and lifesaving acts during the past year.

Among those honored at the department's annual awards program were firefighters and EMTs who responded to Vernon's biggest fire in years, firefighters and EMTs who aided a truck driver injured in a serious crash on I-84, police and firefighters who saved a choking infant, and an 8-year-old Vernon boy who saved a classmate who was choking.

Vernon Mayor Dan Champagne thanked the volunteers for all they do each day to serve the community.

"I want to thank you for protecting the people of Vernon," Mayor Champagne said. Volunteers go into schools to teach children about fire safety, help to raise money for department programs and of course answer fire and accident calls with compassion and professionalism, the Mayor said.

Town Administrator and Emergency and Risk Management Director Michael Purcaro outlined the investments town officials and taxpayers have made in the fire department over the past year and thanked firefighters and EMTs for the important work they do.

"Many of us know that extinguishing fires and handling car wrecks is just part of what you do," Purcaro said. "When someone calls 911 they are experiencing a crisis and need help. When you respond, you mitigate the immediate danger, treat the injured and bring order to disorder. You provide comfort to people who are scared and perhaps experiencing the worst day of their life. You help. You make things better. You save lives and property. And for that, we are truly grateful for your service."

Fire Chief Stephen Eppler urged department members to watch out for each other and to be sensitive to the emotional strain that can come with responding to stressful and tragic incidents.

“Not every fire, vehicle accident or medical call has a happy ending,” Chief Eppler said. “And the burden that we often carry from this can weigh on us.”

Just as firefighters selflessly go to the aid of a firefighter who is injured in a fire, “we need to do the same for our brothers and sisters who may be struggling emotionally,” the Chief said. “There’s no shame in asking for help if you need it.” In the past year department leadership has shared with members information about the signs someone may be struggling, along with resources available to help.

“Learn those signs just like you learn to wrap a hydrant, force a door or operate a stretcher so that at a moment’s notice, day or night, you will recognize them and ask the question, ‘Hey, is everything OK,’” Chief Eppler said.

Master of Ceremonies Robert Turkington told firefighters and EMTs that 2022 was busiest year ever for the department. Members responded to more than 6,200 calls, 5,100 of which were medical calls. The acts for which members were honored Monday night represented only a portion of the acts of heroism, compassion and kindness of department members over the past year.

One of the first people to be honored was Mayson Mendez, an 8-year-old Vernon boy, who on Sept. 28, 2022, while riding the school bus home noticed a classmate was choking on a piece of candy. Mayson, who is now 9, immediately went to his classmate’s aid.



Mayson Mendez, 9, was honored by the Vernon Fire Department for lifesaving. Here he stands with his mother, Jovanni Texidor, and left to right, Deputy Fire Chief Chris Hammick, Assistant Fire Chief Robert Babcock and Chief Stephen Eppler. Photo by Duncan

“Without hesitation you jumped into action ... performed abdominal thrusts ... successfully expelling the candy and allowing him to breathe normally,” Mayson’s Citizens Life Saving Award certificate reads.

Engineer Stan Landry, Firefighter Dennis LeClair and Firefighter Dennis McMahon were honored for their response to a June 1, 2022 crash on I-84 involving a tractor trailer and a car that was under the truck. The firefighters worked quickly to remove the patient from the wreckage and get them on their way to the hospital.

Assistant Chief Robert Babcock, Captain Peter Orlowski and Jeff Schambach, Lieutenants Sean Hadden and Bert Lessard, Engineers Anthony Napolitan, Dana Robertson and Ray Tautic, and Firefighters Nicholas Bush, Joycelyn Gionfriddo, Matthew Kenzior, Dennis LeClair, Ian McMahon, Justin Taverna, Kelley Tischbein and

Reilly Tuttle were honored their response to a crash involving two tractor trailers on Aug. 22, 2022 on I-84. They worked to extricate one driver from the wreckage of his truck, then transferred him to a helicopter that had landed on the closed highway for transport to a hospital.

Babcock, Bush and McMahon crawled into the mangled truck to remove the driver and LeClair and Schambach used extrication tools to make it possible for their fellow firefighters to access the driver.

Vernon Police Officers David Provencher and Jeffrey Condon were honored for their actions on December 3, 2022, when a vehicle crashed into Risley Reservoir off Lake Street. The officers pulled the driver from the vehicle and the water.

Chief Stephen Eppler, Assistant Chiefs Robert Babcock and Alan Arel, Captains Jonathan Andresen and Peter Orlowski, Lieutenants Brian Johnston, Timothy Moore and Todd Cascario, Engineers Connor Raymond, Ray Tautic, Anthony Napolitan, Dana Robertson, Scott Shepard and Robert Turkington, and Firefighters James Robinson, Nicholas Bush, Jesse Messier, Neil Novak, Tyler Poulin, Kelly Tischbein, Jusin Svensk, Matthew Kenzior, James Barrows, Tyler Branon, Raheem Vann-Davidson, Zachary Lopez, Luis Enriquez, Reilly Tuttle and Zachary Antil were honored for their response to the Dec. 12, 2022 fire in an old mill at 114 Brooklyn Street. It was the largest fire the department has experienced in years.

As firefighters arrived, the mill was already involved in heavy fire. They prevented it from spreading to nearby structures and remained on the scene about 24 hours.

EMTs Amy Bassett and Scott Scorso, Vernon Police Sergeant Andrew Hannaford and Vernon Police Officers Andre Lisee, Jeffrey Condon and Dominic Marandino, and American Medical Response Paramedic Michael Carl were honored for their work on April 30, 2022 when they responded to Motel 6 on Hartford Turnpike for a report of a choking infant. Police and firefighters began CPR on the infant, who was not breathing and had no pulse. EMTs and the paramedic continued care in the ambulance en route to the hospital when the infant began to breathe on its own.

Rita Motyka, April Little Lavoie and Jon and Beth Andresen were honored for their assistance with the Fire Departments annual Toys for Tikes program. The program provides toys for needy children in Vernon.



Junior Firefighter of the Year Annalisa Girard.



Firefighter of the Year Engineer Connor Raymond.



Fire Officer of the Year Lt. Spencer Padgett.

Annalisa Girard was honored as Junior Firefighter of the Year for her leadership, dedication and eagerness to learn.

Engineer Connor Raymond was honored as Firefighter of the Year for his devotion to duty, thirst for learning and positive impact on his company and the fire department as a whole. During 2022, he responded to 279 calls and devoted hundreds of volunteer hours to serving the people of Vernon.

Lieutenant Spencer Padget was honored as Fire Officer of the Year for his devotion to duty, willingness to help colleagues and solid work ethic. "He is the man that quietly and competently serves without expectations," Chief Eppler said, reading from Padget's nomination for the distinction. "He does not seek glory or bragging rights, but rather spends time finding ways to best serve the community and his fellow firefighters by consistently showing up and doing the work."

The Fire Department remembered and honored Fire Police Lieutenant Peter Blume, who passed away on March 1, 2022. Chief Eppler presented his wife Wendy and daughter Allison with his uniform hat in a display case and his badge.

The department also honored members for their years of service, including William Graugard for reaching the major milestone of 50 years of dedicated service to the Vernon community.

The department also honored retired members Michael Colt, a captain and the junior firefighter advisor who had 46 years of service; David Dube, an engineer with 37 years of service; Dana Robertson, an engineer with 40 years of service; and Jeff Bifolck, an engineer with 23 years of service.

**The following volunteers were honored for the length of their service to the department and town:**

**50 Years**

William Graugard

**45 Years**

Fleet Manager Steve Scanlon

**40 Years**

Captain David Galley and Engineer Dana Robertson

**30 Years**

Engineer Kevin Bowman, Captain William Kerr and EMT Clint Marth

**25 Years**

Lieutenant Luis Muniz

**20 Years**

Firefighter Kathy Call, Captain Jon-Paul Lucas and Lieutenant Timothy Moore.

**15 Years**

Lieutenant Michelle Kerr

**10 Years**

Lieutenant Nicholas Bartos, Support Services Member Freemont Gauthier, Fire Police Member Cheryl Kinckman, Engineer Randy Magnotta, Firefighter Julie MacDonald and Fire Police Member William Trimmer

**5 Years**

Firefighter Nicholas Bush, EMT Justin Czarnota, Lieutenant Esteban Enriquez, Firefighter Luis Enriquez,

Firefighter Anatol Gogoj, Fire Police Member Gary Marquis, Firefighter Daniel Moura, Auxiliary Member Shannon Oliver and Firefighter Justin Svensk

### **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](http://www.vernon-ct.gov).

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