

COMMUNITY OFFERS A PROUD SALUTE TO OUR HOMETOWN HEROES

By Vince Horrigan

The Mission of the American Red Cross is to help people prevent, prepare for, and respond to emergencies and disasters. When crisis and disasters do strike, members of the American Red Cross join with those, paid and volunteer, who respond. This year, the Chautauqua County Chapter of the American Red Cross, together with our major corporate sponsor NRG Dunkirk Power, LLC conducted our SIXTH annual "Salute to Hometown Heroes" to recognize and celebrate that spirit of willingness to help our neighbors in times of need. The breakfast event celebration recognizes and thanks the knowledge, skill and quick thinking of seven exceptional individuals.

Dale Van Valkenburg of Fredonia, NY is the recipient of the NRG Dunkirk Power, LLC Humanitarian Award. Dale has spent the majority of his adult life committed to fire prevention in Chautauqua County. From teaching children in our schools using "Sparky's House of Safety" to installing smoke detectors in the homes of our senior citizens, Dale has made a difference in fire prevention and safety across Chautauqua.

This year the Nestle Purina Pet Care Award was presented to Dawn Thompson of Falconer who runs an animal rescue. She makes sure that abandon and unwanted animals and pets have temporary care while she tries to find good homes for pet adoption.

Officer Michael Pakulski of the Dunkirk Police Department is the recipient of this year's Law Enforcement Award sponsored by Farm Fresh Foods in Jamestown. Officer Pakulski went well beyond the call of duty and responded to a house fire last December to rescue a victim who was unconscious in a structure filled with smoke and flames.

This year's Youth Award sponsored by Allstate and Encompass Insurance is awarded to 3 Civil Air Patrol cadets. Cadet 2Lt Rachel Campbell of Russell, Cadet CMSgt Corey Paden of Kennedy, and Cadet TSgt Teila Arnold of Ellington all came together to collect personal care items, supplies, and reading material for our troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Vanessa Kosthorst of Jamestown is recognized for this year's Workplace Award, sponsored by Cummins Inc. As a critical care EMT Vanessa routinely responds with skill and determination to life threatening injuries. On multiple occasions and while on the job she has responded to both conscious and unconscious choking victims in area restaurants to successfully clear obstructed airways.

This year's Allied Alarm Services Fire Fighter Award was presented to Jeremy Catanese and David Corcoran of Stockton Fire Department. On a cold and rainy evening they responded to a motor vehicle accident where the car was submerged in a pond with a victim trapped inside. After breaking out the window, the victim was successfully rescued with only 6 inches of vehicle remaining above water.

Greg Scott and Steve Crone of the Kennedy Fire Department were awarded the Allied Fire Protection Systems Rescue Squad Award. These two firefighters responded to a victim in full cardiac arrest. Performing CPR and inserting an oral airway their quick actions resulted in the successful recovery of the victim who was eventually released from the hospital.

The Chautauqua Fallen Heroes Fund, which was created in 2001 to benefit the families of the firefighters, police officers, EMS personnel and other local "uniformed heroes" who have been killed in the line of duty. Unfortunately, this past year the Chautauqua Fallen Heroes Fund had the occasion to make donations to the families of the two NYS troopers involved in the line of duty in Chautauqua County. This year the CFHF recognized Kurt Maytum of DFT Communications and Chief David Ortalano of the Dunkirk Police Department for their strong leadership and support as founding members of the Fallen Heroes Fund, Northern Chautauqua Community Foundation.

These heroes and those sponsoring their awards are being recognized by the American Red Cross in what has become an annual tradition. This year's winners received their awards at the Hometown Heroes Breakfast held at Olives Restaurant, Chautauqua Inn and Suites Meeting and Expo Center in Mayville on Friday, May 16th. The Hometown Heroes Special Events Committee extends special thanks to those who made the awards possible, to Olives Restaurant staff, to the USAF Recruiting Office and MSgt Chris Warsitz, Kristin Kammer of CLCS who sang our National Anthem, and to our many corporate award sponsors. In addition to our Award Sponsors, the following local companies were table sponsors helping us to defray the cost of the breakfast event: DFT Communications Inc, Key Bank and Lake Shore Savings. According to Chapter Chair, Lew Meckley, "This year's celebration of our hometown heroes is a great tribute to those who help make this county such a wonderful place to live and work in where neighbors help neighbors." Executive Director, Vince Horrigan, said it this way: "Our Hometown Heroes Event is a wonderful way to recognize ordinary people doing extraordinary things." Funds raised through the event will go to support local Chapter programs- Across Chautauqua.



Photo Caption L to R: Dale VanValkenburg, Cadet Teila Arnold, Greg Scott, Steve Crone, Cadet Rachel Campbell, Jeremy Catanese, David Corcoran, Vanessa Kosthorst, Dawn Thompson, Officer Michael Pakulski, and Cadet Corey Paden. Photo by Caroline Phillips.