The Carnegie Hero Fund turned 120 on April 15.

At 3:30 p.m. on that date in 1904, Hero Fund President Charles L. Taylor called the inaugural meeting of the Hero Fund to order. The board met to discuss the Hero Fund’s Deed of Trust, penned by Andrew Carnegie the previous month, the “rules and regulations for the efficient operation of the Hero Fund,” and each member present accepted Carnegie’s appointment of them.

Nineteen of the 21 Hero Fund members attended the meeting, held in Room 1111 in Pittsburgh’s Carnegie Building, which was later torn down. Several resolutions were passed to organize the Hero Fund, but the first resolution, proposed by the Rev. Dr. W. J. Holland, thanked Carnegie for his trust in them.

“We, the trustees of the Hero Fund, desire at this, our first meeting … to express to Mr. Carnegie our appreciation of the high honor which he has conferred upon us in inviting us to administer the affairs of the trust which he has created, and thus in some measure to share with him in the pleasure of doing good,” read the Minutes of the first meeting.

Perhaps the most important business at the meeting including acceptance of the Hero Fund’s seed money, $5 million in U.S. Steel bonds from Carnegie, “upon which you can draw the interest regularly,” Carnegie wrote in a March 12 letter to Taylor.

Several more meetings were held in 1904, largely establishing the Hero Fund’s bylaws, the requirements for the Carnegie Medal, and the design of the medal itself.

By Oct. 19, 1904, the Commission had received 139 letters alleging the performance of heroic acts and seven of them had been investigated by asking those involved or who had witnessed the heroism to send in written accounts of what they saw or experienced.

“‘But in all cases, it is the feeling of the Executive Committee that before reaching a final decision it is desirable that the localities where the alleged acts of heroism were performed should be visited by a representative of the Commission, who may ascertain all the facts more clearly that we have been able to ascertain them through correspondence,’” said Holland, chairman of the executive committee, as reported in the Oct. 19 meeting minutes.

Archivist of the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission
Most of these articles focus on the Carnegie heroes themselves, on the risks they take, and on the price they often pay for their heroic acts. That shouldn’t surprise anyone.

Yet there is another group of people who stand close to the heroes and, in the aftermath of their rescues, often bear a considerable burden themselves. These are the spouses, children, and parents of the heroes. Let’s talk about them a bit. They are important as well.

A few years ago I met a Carnegie hero and his wife. As soon as he began to describe the rescue that earned him the Carnegie Medal, his wife began to cry. The rescue had occurred 25 years earlier, but it still had that strong an emotional impact on this woman.

At first I was startled by her tears, but not so surprised. Her husband had risked much in his rescue, but it also put much of her world at risk as well. Suppose he had died in the rescue, as about 20% of Carnegie Medal recipients do. He would have lost his life, but she would have lost him, her husband, for a lifetime.

The children of a fallen Carnegie hero lose a father or mother, the parents lose a son or daughter. Even when the Carnegie hero survives, his or her family knows all too well what they could have lost.

Certainly every parent, spouse, and child of a Carnegie hero is proud of their family member’s heroic act, and perhaps proud of the recognition bestowed by the Carnegie Medal.

And yet, at some level most of them are aware that they too could have shared in the sorrow experienced by the families of perished Carnegie heroes.

RESCUES AFFECT HEROES’ FAMILIES TOO

By Mark Laskow, Chair Emeritus Carnegie Hero Fund Commission

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By the following April, the Hero Fund had hired a special agent who was traveling the U.S. and Canada investigating cases, as well as the Hero Fund’s first disaster appropriation – the R. B. Grover & Company’s shoe factory fire in Brockton, Massachusetts, that left 59 people dead, 90 people seriously injured, and 126 people without a breadwinner in the family.

The Commission would not make any awards until May, when it contributed $10,000 to the relief fund established for “the relief of sufferers” affected by the shoe factory fire. It also reviewed 16 reports of heroic acts investigated by the special agent and reviewed by the Fund’s executive committee. They voted to award medals to seven men and two women, ranging in age from 17 to 44, in nine of the 16 cases: a Pittsburgh drowning and suffocation case, water rescues in New York, Massachusetts, Maine, and Ontario, and an ice rescue in Iowa.

Since the first awards, 10,422 Carnegie Medals have been earned and distributed. Since the inception of the Commission, the number of yearly awards has ranged from 40 in 1945 to 174 in 1966, resulting in an average of 87 Carnegie Medal recipients each year.

In 2023, 65 individuals received the Carnegie Medal for Heroism, including a case involving a shooting at a Birmingham, Alabama, church potluck in which a 79-year-old subdued the assailant who was armed with a semi-automatic handgun and actively firing shots.

The most frequent awarded type of act in 2023 was drowning (24 cases), followed by burning building (16 cases), assault (7 cases), submerging vehicle (6 cases), and burning vehicle (5). Historically drowning cases, burning vehicles, burning buildings, suffocation, and rescues from the path of a moving vehicle comprised the top five most frequently awarded acts. During the last decade, the top five types of cases were drowning, burning vehicles, burning buildings, assault, and submerging vehicles.

Drowning cases continue to be the deadliest of acts — historically 56% of all posthumous awards are in drowning cases and 32% of all drowning cases that have resulted in a Carnegie Medal were given posthumously. In 2023, 13 of the 16 posthumously-awarded medals were for drowning. The other three were burning building, moving vehicle, and submerging vehicle cases. About 24% of the cases awarded last year were posthumous, a higher percentage than the Fund’s historical percentage of 20%.

Recipients ranged in age from 15 to 79 years old and came from 28 U.S. states and two Canadian provinces, which is a typical geographical representation for the Hero Fund.
JOHN G. PATRICK

Carnegie Hero John G. Patrick, 84, died Saturday, February 17, 2024, at University Hospital of Cleveland. Patrick received the Carnegie Medal for Heroism in 1962.

At the age of 21, Patrick and his father witnessed a out-of-control sedan veer onto a highway berm and ultimately strike a go-kart containing 16-year-old Peter H. Shanaberg. The impact wedged the go-kart’s frame between the car’s fender and bumper, and it was dragged onto the highway as the car, moving at 45 m.p.h., in Vienna, Ohio. Patrick and his father, Steve Patrick, followed the sedan in Patrick’s car. Patrick drew alongside the sedan. As the cars approached a curve in the highway, Steve Patrick reached through the window and steered the sedan around the curve. The car’s frame shook loose of the car, and, with Peter still in the seat, veered into a ditch. Patrick then used his slowing car to force the sedan off the road. The driver was in shock but revived after being given insulin. The boy was hospitalized and recovered within seven weeks.

Patrick was born on October 16, 1940, to Steve and Pauline Patrick in Brookfield, Ohio. Patrick served six years in the Army National Guard and was the owner and operator of Patrick Service in Vienna. He married Gail (Witherow) Patrick, on January 17, 1961. She died January 6, 2021, days before their 60th wedding anniversary. Patrick served six years in the Army National Guard and was the owner and operator of Patrick Service in Vienna. He served, Chase was decorated for fighting a fire on a munitions ship. He was honorably discharged in 1952.

He married Carmela Marotta on April 11, 1952.

Chase started working for the Santa Fe Railroad in 1955 and retired in 1994 to take care of Millie through her illness with Lou Gehrig’s disease (ALS). He was also very active with the Kern County Fair serving on the sheep committee for many, many years.

He is survived by his children; sons Steve, Michael, and David; daughters Lynnette Chase and Kathy Bird; and many grandchildren and great grandchildren.

In addition to his wife, John was preceded in death by four brothers and one sister.

LEWIS HERBERT CHASE

Carnegie Hero Lewis Herbert Chase, 93, died Friday, February 16, 2024. He was awarded the Carnegie Medal in 1981.

On May 22, 1948, following an accident with a train, a 36-year-old man fell unconscious in his pickup truck, pinned to his seat amid flames. Railroad conductor, Chase, then-50, ran to the truck and three times entered it in unsuccessful attempts to free the man. Despite increasing flames and intense heat, Chase entered the truck again, freed the man, and pulled him to safety. The rescued man was hospitalized for his burns, while Chase sustained minor burns. Both men recovered.

Chase was born April 10, 1931, to Herbert and Vee Chase, but due to an error made by a delivery-room doctor, he had a legal birthdate of March 10, 1931.

Chase joined the U.S. Navy in 1948 serving as a submarine rescue/recovery diver. While serving, Chase was decorated for fighting a fire on a munitions ship. He was honorably discharged in 1952.

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In addition to his wife, Chase was preceded in death by a granddaughter and two brothers.

from p.2

BOARD NOTES

This can make for a complicated mix of emotions, but the emotions involved are completely normal.

What parent would not shudder at least a bit on learning that a child had taken a risk that could have resulted in their death?

We often emphasize here that the heart of the Carnegie Medal is that the hero made a free, unforced choice to attempt a dangerous rescue.

But family members would be entirely justified to ask, “But what about us? We had no influence on your choice, but we had much to lose as well.”

This discussion, if there is one, is probably best for the heroes and their families. We should be aware of this issue, and listen sensitively if it comes up, but I personally am not sure that as outsiders we have much to add. Listen, respect, defer.

That said, I would offer three very general observations.

First, parents, spouses and even children influence the character of their family member who became a Carnegie hero. They had an indirect but real effect on the hero’s decision to undertake a risky rescue.

Second, the very character traits that lead a Carnegie hero to plunge into a rescue doubtless showed up in other parts of their life, to the benefit of their family.

In more ordinary, day-to-day circumstances this character made the hero a loved and useful part of their family and community.

Finally, these heroic rescues benefit not only the immediate victims, but they add goodness and strength to the communities and culture in which the heroes’ families live.

In fact we would all like to live in a world in which everyone, in matters large and small, would display the character of the Carnegie heroes. I know I would.
NEWEST CASE INVESTIGATOR FINDS HEROES AN ANTIDOTE TO NEGATIVITY

I came to the Hero Fund as a case investigator in November 2023 after a 35-year career as a newspaper reporter, the last 20 of which I spent covering the federal courts in addition to other duties. In that role, I wrote about all the human depravity you could imagine — and maybe some you cannot: even those who would exploit and victimize children and the helpless; so many scammers, fraudsters, and gun-toting drug dealers that they all ran together over the years.

But it was the Tree of Life massacre — a Pittsburgh synagogue shooting in 2018 that resulted in the deaths of 11 worshipers and injuries to an additional six — that affected me the most. Our paper won the Pulitzer Prize for our coverage and it fell to me to follow the death penalty case of the lone perpetrator for five years, culminating in a soul-searing trial that gave me nightmares despite having covered several other mass shootings in my career and untold numbers of homicides. My adult children would sometimes say, “Dad thinks everyone is a scumbag.” It was true. It got to the point where I started to ask myself: Are there any good people left in this world?

For anyone afflicted by that mindset, the Hero Fund is an antidote. I’d known about the organization before and written a story or two on Hero Fund recipients over the years. When it came time to leave journalism — still a noble profession despite the many flaws of its practitioners — I wanted to do something equally noble. I felt the Hero Fund might be a good fit. Instead of writing about the worst of humanity, I would be helping to reward the best. Above all, I wanted to be proud of my workplace and my second career as I head slowly toward my retirement years. I feel good about the organization and what we do. Everyone I tell about this job has the same reaction: “Man, that sounds...”

Seneca Falls’ annual celebration of Carnegie hero gathers community

Every year the residents of Seneca Falls, New York, — a 6,000-person hamlet at the north end of Seneca Lake, the largest of the finger lakes — gather to celebrate an Italian immigrant who died more than a century ago after saving a 19-year-old woman who had jumped into the Cayuga-Seneca Canal in an attempt to take her own life.

Antonio Varacalli — somewhere between the ages of 17 and 20 depending on who’s asked — jumped into the canal, pulled the woman to safety, but then drowned. His rescue act is memorialized on a plaque on the Bridge Street Bridge.

On Saturday, April 14, a couple hundred people, including Hero Fund President Eric Zahren and his wife, Laura, and Varacalli’s great, great nieces, Shelley Farrell and Madalyn Justian, packed themselves into the Seneca Falls Community Center to celebrate Varacalli on the town’s official Antonio Varacalli Day, established in 2012.

The Antonio Varacalli Day program also includes presenting a Seneca Falls resident with the prestigious Antonio Varacalli Hero Award, a flower ceremony, and presenting the winners of a grade school essay contest answering the prompt: “How have you, or how might you, be a good citizen by making a difference in someone’s life?”

“It’s like a slice of Americana,” Zahren said. “It was so nice to see this tight-knit community come out to recognize Varacalli and pay homage to his sacrifice.” Zahren read the Hero Fund’s official account of the rescue and then spoke about why it’s important to continue to recognize heroes such as Varacalli.

“I’m proud to represent the Carnegie Hero Fund which recognized the heroism, altruism, and selflessness sacrifice of Antonio Varacalli, an Italian immigrant...”

Hero Fund President Eric Zahren, center, poses with Madalyn Justian and Shelley Farrell, great nieces of Carnegie Hero Antonio Varacalli, who is honored annually by the Seneca Falls, New York, community. Zahren attended the 2024 event and spoke on the importance of keeping alive the legacies of Carnegie heroes.
There were children that needed assistance. He went without hesitation into the water and saved these children. Unfortunately, his life was not saved. — Best friend of Peter Rosengren, Carnegie Hero #10279

I am thankful no one was hurt. The recognition, I appreciate it, but that wasn’t on my mind when I did what I did. I wasn’t thinking about rewards. I wasn’t thinking about being a hero. I was just thinking about making sure Van was safe. — Darnell J. Wilson, Carnegie Hero #10294

In a million years, you could never expect for something like this to happen to you. But then you take a step back and look at it, and if anyone would have done this, it would be Adam. He thought he was invincible. — Brother to Adam Layman Thomas, Carnegie Hero #10306

I’m not a hero. It’s just something I had to do. — Kenneth S. Andreen, Carnegie Hero #10317

I was not going to leave without getting her out. — Frank P. Axiotes, Carnegie Hero #10318

I see David in the front and he’s kind of frozen there in pain, pain. So I said, ‘Let’s go my friend, we gotta go.’ I just grabbed him and we got out of the trailer. — Suzanne Fortin, Carnegie Hero #10319

I’m glad I was there at the right time, the right place. If opportunity came again and I had to do it, I would do it. I knew what I was risking. I knew the next second it could be my life. But every second counted. — Nicholas L. Bostic, Carnegie Hero #10319

Literally, you just ask yourself what kind of person are you going to be. — Paul Galotti, Carnegie Hero #10350

He cared so deeply for others, for the planet. He gave everything he could. — Wife of Thomas Kenning, Carnegie Hero #10351

I would hope that if I was ever in that circumstance, someone would want to help me. — Jordan B. Kurtzer, Carnegie Hero #10377

I told her privately we’re hiring for Search & Rescue. — County sheriff referring to River Barry, Carnegie Hero #10408

I didn’t want to lose my friend. It was bad. There was a big ol’ bear on top of him. I could have run and potentially lost a friend or get him off and save him. — Kendall Bybee Cummings, Carnegie Hero #10411

The dog was right there and we were eye-to-eye, and I wasn’t afraid. For some reason, I was not afraid. I had no fear until the ambulances left and we realized what just hit us. — Robyn Handley, Carnegie Hero #10420

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“I’m proud to represent the Carnegie Hero Fund which recognized the heroism, altruism, and selfless sacrifice of Antonio Varacalli, an Italian immigrant hero of more than a century ago,” Zahren said. “More than $45 million has been given to date to more than 10,000 awardees or their survivors over the life of the fund. But it’s important to recognize that after 120 years the significance of the Hero Fund has always and will forever extend beyond those facts. It was intended by its founder to remember, extol, and applaud the heroes it has recognized so that their courage and selflessness could touch all of us and ultimately make a peaceful difference in the world.”

Haidee Oropallo, who is president of the town’s It’s A Wonderful Life Festival Committee, told a Finger Lakes Times reporter before the event that she was “shocked and humbled.”

This year’s recipient of the Antonio Varacalli Hero Award was Paula Wenderlich Coffey, who told the Finger Lake Times that she was “shocked and humbled.”

Her father received the same award in 2018.

“I basically just try to help people who I come across in my life in any way that can make like a little better or easier,” she said.

Seneca Falls calls itself “the real Bedford Falls,” referencing the fictional upstate New York town in holiday classic film, It’s A Wonderful Life. It’s said that in 1945, Hollywood director Frank Capra, himself an Italian immigrant, stopped in Seneca Falls for a haircut while in the area visiting relatives. A year later It’s A Wonderful Life, was released. The movie’s pivotal scene is the rescue of a man who jumps from a steel-truss bridge.

In addition to the Varacalli rescue, other similarities—from architecture to street and family names—have the people of Seneca Falls believing that their town influenced Capra in the making of his film. Each December they hold an It’s A Wonderful Life celebration of the town’s connections to the beloved Christmas classic film.
Colleague Chris Foreman, who worked alongside Rizza as a case investigator, said that her love of her job was evident from his first interview with the organization.

“Even then, two decades into her tenure – helped to show me that there was a great team here doing terrific work,” Foreman said.

During Rizza’s 34-year career at the Hero Fund, she said she investigated more than 600 cases.

“Susan went about her daily work for many years with unfaltering zeal, focus, professionalism, and objectivity, but also with a very real sense of empathy for those involved in the cases she investigated for the Hero Fund,” said Eric Zahren, Hero Fund president. “And in Susan’s case, as the Commission’s first female case investigator, she brought a new and distinct perspective that has since served to guide others in the work; male and female alike.”

Up until the time of Rizza’s hire, Hero Fund investigations were done at the site of the rescue, and investigators, known then as “field agents,” traveled nine months out of the year.

“People were mostly single young men,” Rizza said. Rizza credits her love of writing leading her to case investigation.

“I always loved to read and write. It’s not what I always planned on doing, but when I got into college, I took literature and writing classes,” she said.

She declared her English major at the end of her sophomore year, with a minor in writing. After graduating from Mercyhurst College (now University), she worked as a writer for a few publications.

Investigating acts of heroism was a bit different than her prior writing, but she didn’t find it a daunting task, she said.

“I always enjoyed doing human interest stories,” Rizza said. “It wasn’t really challenging for me. I was used to interviewing people. It was definitely a change to talk to people all over the country and Canada.”

Not all of the stories had happy endings, with a rescuer, victim, or sometimes both, dying in the rescue.

“The most difficult thing was to talk to people who have lost loved ones or if the (victim) died,” she said. “It’s really hard. You never know what to expect or if they are going to be able to talk about it.”

Investigations Manager Joe Mandak, Rizza’s supervisor, said that her empathy was evident in her work.

“My biggest takeaway from Susan’s work is that she cared. She cared about the folks being rescued. She cared about their families. She cared about the nominees – whether they were eventually awarded or not,” Mandak said. “She did not want our investigative process to be unpleasant or disturbing to them, even when she had to gather unpleasant or disturbing facts or descriptions that are required for a nominated rescuer to be awarded.”

Rizza’s caring nature extended not only to the people involved in the rescue, but...
Suffolk police officer Sean Patrick Kalletta was presented with the Carnegie Medal for Heroism on Feb. 22 by Suffolk County Executive Edward P. Romaine and acting Commissioner Rob Waring at a presentation held at the H Lee Dennison building in Hauppauge, NY. Pictured, from left, is Waring, Kalletta, and Romaine.

Kalletta was awarded the medal after he saved a couple from burning in Selden, New York, on Jan. 2, 2021. Debra and Robert Baker were inside their smoke-filled kitchen after a fire broke out in front of their garage and spread to its roof and a vehicle. The couple attempted to usher their two dogs through the kitchen door into the backyard, but the dogs were frightened and resisted. Kalletta, 26, responded to the scene. Kalletta entered the home through the front door, running through smoke, to the kitchen. Kalletta told the Bakers that they needed to leave the house immediately. Debra took one dog and exited through the kitchen door into the backyard, but Robert refused to leave without the other dog. Kalletta reached down to grasp the dog and it bit him on the hand. Smoke intensified and it became difficult to breathe. Flames were spreading toward the kitchen. Kalletta finally pushed Robert out through the kitchen door and another officer assisted the Bakers and one of the dogs over the fence to safety. The second dog was later removed from the house and survived. The Bakers inhaled smoke, but they recovered the next day. Kalletta was treated at a hospital for smoke inhalation and the dog bite. He recovered in a week.

The Suffolk County Police Benevolent Association congratulated Kalletta on their Instagram account on his reception of the Carnegie Medal and their pride for his heroic actions.

“We are incredibly proud of Officer Kalletta, and it is an honor to call you one of Suffolk’s Finest!”

Hero Fund President Eric Zahren, right, along with Slippery Rock University President Karen Riley, left, presented Carnegie Hero David Philip Duffey with the Carnegie Medal at a March 7 private event on the Slippery Rock University campus.

Duffey, who is a graduate student at the school, was driving in Irwin, Pennsylvania, on Oct. 16, 2022, when he saw a tractor trailer veer off the highway, and collide into a guide rail, concrete barrier, and overpass. The cab came to rest facing the trailer and pointing to the sky; flames broke out in the twisted wreckage including burning near spilled fuel along the driver’s side. Duffey hoisted himself through the passenger-side window opening, which had been broken out in the accident. With difficulty, he pulled the 56-year-old driver from the cab to the ground. Duffey and another man had pulled him about 7 feet away from the vehicle when an explosion knocked Duffey and the other man to the ground. Flames grew to 15 feet high. Duffey and others dragged Moore farther away to safety. Moore was treated at a hospital for injuries incurred in the accident; Duffey suffered a back injury. No one was burned.

The presentation, which was attended by Duffey’s family and friends, faculty in his undergraduate and graduate programs, and Hero Fund staff, was held at the Russell Wright Alumni House.

“We often times think about academic achievements, we think about publications, books, lectures. We think about athletic achievements, people who have won races, have won games. But we rarely have the opportunity to recognize someone who literally risked their own life to save the life of someone else. And that is you,” said Riley, while gesturing toward Duffey. “I have had the honor of speaking to David … (and he) could not be more humble. When we talk about why and what were you thinking, his response … was, ‘Well why wouldn’t I?’”

Zahren spoke of the qualities shared by heroes which act as necessary precursors and allow the opportunity for heroic action.

“The formal requirements for consideration for the Carnegie Medal for heroism are straightforward and little changed from the Fund’s inception in 1904. But equally important, almost never talked about, generally unpublished, are the requirements of the requirements,” he said.

Zahren listed them: Awareness, concern for others, a clear head and poise under pressure, just enough confidence to overcome a paralysis of fear, and courage.

“Courage is hard to come by and we should never take it for granted,” Zahren said.

Duffey said he remembers the day very clearly.

“The real hero that day was God and Jesus,” he said. “I’m just honored I was chosen that day as a vehicle to provide the help that was needed.”
The family of **Thomas Lee Hawk** gathered to accept his posthumous Carnegie Medal for Heroism at the Morgan County Public Safety Complex in Madison, Georgia, on April 4. Rep. Mike Collins and Morgan County Fire Chief Garret Smith presented the medal. Pictured, from left to right, are Collins, Hawk's daughter, Mackenzie, his son, Eric, his widow, Amanda, and Smith.

Hawk was awarded the Carnegie Medal for attempting to rescue his son from burning in Bostwick, Georgia, on Dec. 16, 2022. Eric, 13, was in a bedroom of his family’s one-story house when flames broke out in the attic at one end of the house and spread. Smoke entered Eric’s bedroom, and he called father, who was next door at Eric’s grandfather’s house. Hawk ran to the burning house, followed by the grandfather. Hawk entered the house through a door near to the fire’s origin. The grandfather attempted to enter the house through its front door, but could not open it. He then attempted to enter through the same door as Hawk, but flames, heat, and smoke precluded his entry. The grandfather heard Eric shouting for help and went to his bedroom window. He removed an air conditioner from the window and pulled Eric through the opening, then dragged him away from the house. Eric suffered severe smoke inhalation and was hospitalized for a few days. Hawk’s body was found in the hallway near Eric’s bedroom. He sustained burns to his body, including his head and hands, and died from inhaling smoke and soot.

“He was a hard worker who deeply, deeply loved his family. Everything he did, he did it for his family,” said Fire Chief Garret Smith in an April 8 Morgan County Citizen article. “He taught by example making sure his family knew it was better to give than to receive … Your father did what he did because he loved you more than anything in this world.”

“We will always remember your dad and husband with the character of a hero because he was willing to sacrifice to make sure someone else could live,” added Rep. Collins.

Amanda Hawk looks forward to launching a new scholarship program to commemorate Hawk’s legacy.

“IT’s a way for me and the kids to give back in his honor,” said Amanda Hawk. “Anyone who knew Thomas knows he had a big heart … Our goal is not to shed a tear, but to share a smile as we remember Thomas Lee Hawk who always went the extra mile for his family and his community.”

Nebraska Lt. Gov. Joe Kelly, right, presented the Carnegie Medal for heroism to **Jordan B. Kurtzer** at a ceremony held Feb. 7 at the Lincoln, Nebraska, State Capitol building.

Kurtzer entered a sinking pickup truck to free the unconscious driver in a residential pond in Lincoln on Sept. 3, 2022. As the truck sank in water 7 feet deep, Kurtzer used a tire iron to break the truck’s rear windshield, leaned through the opening, and unlocked a rear door. Kurtzer opened the rear door, causing water to flood the car’s interior. Kurtzer entered the back seat, unlatched the driver’s seat belt, and reclined his seat to grab the man’s arm, pulling him to the back seats. Finding two child-sized life jackets, Kurtzer and the other motorist placed them around the man’s arm and floated him out of the truck to safety. A police officer who had responded also entered the pond and helped Kurtzer and the motorist take the man to the bank.
Hero Fund President Eric Zahren traveled to Canada to present the Carnegie Medal for Heroism to Alan H. Mackie at a presentation held April 14 at the Grand Valley (Ontario) Fire Station. Pictured are Mackie and Zahren after the presentation.

Mackie, who attended the ceremony with his wife, Susan Mackie; daughter, Torrie Mackie; and son-in-law, Princeton Jackson, and two grandsons, Caiden and Zaiden Mackie-Jackson, was awarded the Medal in December for a burning home rescue of a 69-year-old neighbor with limited mobility.

On March 2, 2023, despite being instructed by a 911 operator to stay outside his neighbor’s burning bungalow Mackie, a 63-year-old mechanic from Grand Valley, Ontario, kicked open the front door and entered the house despite dense smoke that limited visibility and flames that stretched from the floor to the ceiling. Crouched over under the smoke, Mackie called out for the man and walked toward his faint responses. He reached the man’s bedroom at a point about 25 feet inside and saw him standing at the foot of his bed. Mackie retrieved a walker from the living room and returned to the bedroom, where he turned the man to face away from the walker and sat him on the walker’s seat. Mackie grasped the metal bars of the walker and backed to the front door pulling the walker with him. As Mackie exited the house, he came within a couple feet of flames. The man was treated at the hospital for smoke inhalation. Mackie was not injured.

“Alan’s heroic and selfless example can provide larger lessons for us,” Zahren said at the presentation. “Be a good neighbor; we can (and should) be our brothers’ (and sisters’) keeper, if only in small ways; and even small acts will eventually change the world into a more peaceful place.”

“Let’s challenge ourselves to be part of that change and take care of one another while recognizing those who do so in dramatic ways like Alan and all Carnegie heroes,” Zahren added.

The Henderson/Morris family poses with U.S. Senator Joni Ernst who presented sisters JaCora Morris and Jasmine Lashale Morris with the Carnegie Medal for heroism on Feb. 23 at a presentation held at the West Des Moines, Iowa, City Hall. From left are father Tarbin Henderson, JaCora, mother Jacqueline Henderson, Jasmine, and Ernst.

JaCora and Jasmine entered near-freezing water to save two young boys from drowning after the boys broke through the ice of a pond near their West Des Moines, Iowa, apartment on Feb. 25, 2023. The boys struggled in water 6 feet deep at a point about 10 feet from the nearest bank. After calling out for her sister, Jasmine, 15 at the time of the rescue, entered the frigid water and swam to one of the boys. She attempted to break a path through the ice with her elbow, but failing to do that, she pushed the boy up onto the ice, so he could crawl to the safety of the bank. JaCora, 17, had entered the pond and pulled the other boy, who was sinking, up to the surface of the water. JaCora struggled to push the boy up onto the ice due to the weight of a backpack he wore. JaCora removed the backpack, letting it sink, and then pushed him up onto the ice. A bystander helped JaCora from the water, while Jasmine exited on her own. The sisters suffered minor cuts on their arms and legs but were otherwise uninjured.

“These are not given out every day, and so thank you, ladies, so much for your service to those who needed you at a split second,” said Ernst at the presentation.

Jasmine’s and JaCora’s parents attended the ceremony Friday. Tarbin said he felt “immensely proud” of his daughters. Tarbin was a police officer in Arkansas, and one of his daughters had been on a ride-along with him, but said, “I never thought they would do this.”
Lincoln police officer **Tu Anh Tran** was presented with the Carnegie Medal for Heroism on March 22 by Nebraska Lt. Gov. Joe Kelly at a presentation held at the Lincoln, Nebraska, Police Department’s annual award ceremony. Pictured is Tran with Kelly.

Tran was awarded the Carnegie Medal after he rescued a woman from drowning in Lincoln on Feb. 22, 2023. The woman, 27, remained in her sedan after it left a roadway and entered a frigid pond on a golf course. The air temperature was in the low 20s with a single-digit wind chill. Police Sergeant Tran, 36, was in his cruiser when he was alerted to the incident and responded. Tran ran down to the bank, removed his ballistic vest and duty belt, and entered the water in his uniform and boots. He reached the vehicle, which by then was submerged except for its trunk. Tran pulled on the handle of the rear, driver's-side door, opening it. He submerged his face in the water, but due to murky water, visibility was limited beneath the pond's surface. Tran reached inside the sedan and felt the woman's legs as she submerged, resurfaced, and grasped Tran by his arms. He then grasped her arm and shoulder and pulled her free of the vehicle, which fully submerged seconds later. Holding onto the woman by her shirt, Tran towed her as he swam toward the closer bank. When they reached wadable water, others assisted Tran and the woman out of the pond to safety. The woman was cold and was taken by ambulance to a hospital to be monitored. She was later released and recovered the following day. Tran was cold and nearly exhausted, but he did not seek treatment, and recovered.

“We are humbled to know his work is being honored with this prestigious award and are so grateful for his willingness to jump into freezing cold water to save someone’s life,” the Lincoln Police Department posted on Facebook after the award ceremony.

Officer Tran was also selected by his representatives, senators Pete Ricketts and Deb Fischer, to attend President Joe Biden’s State of the Union address in Washington, D.C., and was honored for his service to his community.

The family of Carnegie Hero **James G. David** was presented with his Carnegie Medal by Congressman Dan Kildee and Hero Fund President Eric Zahren at a Jan. 26 presentation held at the Saginaw county government building in Michigan. Pictured is David’s widow, center, and his two children, Adam, far left, and Emma, far right, with Kildee and Zahren.

James G. David was posthumously awarded the Carnegie Medal for attempting to save his grandson from drowning in Essexville, Michigan, on July 16, 2022. David was fishing with family on a boat in Saginaw Bay when his 4-year old grandson, who was wearing a life vest, fell off the back of the boat into the water amid waves and a large wake. The boy's father, Adam David, immediately jumped into the boat after him, but the two struggled. David then entered the water and swam nearly 200 feet to take his grandson from his son. As the father swam back to the boat that drifted away at a trolley speed, David and his grandson separated in the water. At some point David lost consciousness in the water. Another boat carrying two men arrived and retrieved the grandson and Adam from the water. Rescue boats arrived and took David aboard where resuscitation efforts began. The grandson was observed at a hospital after inhaling water and recovered. David could not be revived and drowned.

At the ceremony, Kildee presented a congressional proclamation to David’s family in recognition of his bravery.

“He’s no longer with us, but his memory should be a reminder of how we should live our lives, selflessly and without fear. People like James, hold our community together,” said Kildee.

Zahren, who traveled to Saginaw to present the medal to David’s widow, added that Carnegie Heroes are “forced to make a difficult decision to act to save another’s life. And James made the decision to act,” Zahren said.

Adam David described his father when speaking to local news outlets.

“The dude always had a smile on his face, loved to camp, loved to fish, and loved everything about his family,” Adam said.

David’s daughter, Emma David, agreed: “just the funny self he was, and the hero he died being.”

Kildee represents Michigan’s eighth district.
Hero Fund President Eric Zahren presented the Carnegie Medal to Springboro (Ohio) police officer Heath Martin Thursday, April 4, 2024, at the Springboro Council meeting.

"While we recognize with gratitude the service and sacrifice of our police and first-responders always, consideration for the Carnegie Medal for Heroism requires that the act must clearly be beyond the line of duty," Zahren said at the council meeting.

Last June, Martin responded to a house fire and entered the smoke-filled home. Inside, 36-year-old Joshua Unglesby, who is paralyzed from the waist down, was on the floor in a back bedroom and responded to Martin’s calls. Martin ran 25 feet down a long hallway to the bedroom and threw the door open. Thick, black smoke issued through the doorway making it difficult to breathe. He heard Unglesby but told him he could not reach him because of the smoke. Martin retreated and ran to the home’s front door, which he opened for responding firefighters. He then returned to the bedroom, went to his knees and crawled inside. Surrounded by flames, he found Unglesby in the back corner of the room and picked him up in a bear hug. As he attempted to exit carrying Unglesby, he tripped and the two fell. Martin then held Unglesby under his arms and dragged him to the front door. Unglesby suffered second-degree burns and continues to recover. Martin suffered minor burns and smoke inhalation but recovered.

"Officer Heath Martin clearly acted outside of his professional obligation and duty, and is being recognized for his heroic, selfless, human action, which is the basis of the Carnegie Medal," Zahren said. "By acting selflessly toward others and sacrificing his safety in behalf of a human being in deadly peril, Officer Martin did more than save a life, he also provides a shining example for us to improve on our own lives by acting more selflessly toward others."

Unglesby attended the presentation, as well as Martin’s two sons, wife, and parents.

"Thank you everyone for being here," Martin said after receiving the Medal. "I feel like I was just doing my job. What I was supposed to do. What God called me to do. I’m grateful I could be there for Josh and his family on that day."

Hero Fund President Eric Zahren presented Christine Dawn King with the Carnegie Medal at a Bensalem, Pennsylvania, Council Meeting held Feb. 26. King, then 52, was driving on I-95 in Philadelphia on July 28, 2022, when she came upon a man holding his 18-month-old daughter over the ledge of an overpass threatening to drop her to a concrete parking lot 40 feet below. The girl’s mother attempted to yank her daughter from his grasp, but couldn’t. King, of Bensalem, Pennsylvania, stopped at the scene and grasped the assailant’s torso, pleading with him to give the girl to her. The assailant, who was armed with a concealed handgun, threatened to shoot King. While she backed away from him, she continued begging for him to hand over the girl. The assailant turned and, again, held the girl over the ledge. King wrapped her arms around his torso again to prevent him from dropping the baby. The mother also held onto her daughter. Police arrived shortly, and, while being held at gunpoint, the assailant gave the girl to the officer before he was taken into custody.

A recent throat operation prevented King from speaking at the presentation, but her husband spoke on her behalf:

"On behalf of my brave and always-willing-to-help wife, we want to take this time to say thanks to the governing body here as well as the Carnegie group for taking the time to recognize her effort in saving someone’s life," he said. "She always says she would do it again if she had the (opportunity)."
Since the last edition of Impulse, the following 17 individuals have been awarded the Carnegie Medal for Heroism, bringing the total number of recipients to 10,422 since the Hero Fund’s inception in 1904. The latest awards were made in March. The next announcement will be made in June.

After hearing screams at an April 21, 2021, private service in the chapel of an Eldon, Missouri, funeral home, funeral director Jeffrey A. Hilke, 47, of Jefferson City, responded. He saw a tall, large man, 55, brandishing a handgun. The man had entered his father’s service and attempted to force outside a woman, 51, who was also attending the service with her three children. Hilke ran to the assailant, pushed him against a wall, and grasped the weapon. Scott E. Duncan, a 51-year-old maintenance technician of Kansas City, Missouri, who was attending the service, also responded, running to the assailant, who outweighed him. He also grasped the gun. The three men struggled for control of the weapon, while others, including the woman, fled the building. The men fell to the floor, with Hilke at the bottom of the pile-up, gasping for air. The gun fired, and the bullet hit the floor. The gun’s magazine fell out of the gun, but the assailant reached for a fully loaded magazine in his pocket to reload. Duncan pushed the assailant’s arm to the ground and held it there to prevent him from reloading. Police responded and still the assailant wouldn’t release the gun. A responding officer stepped on the assailant’s hand and sprayed pepper spray at him, until he released the weapon. The assailant was taken into custody, convicted, and sentenced to 34 years in prison. Hilke suffered a broken sternum and bruised ribs from the incident. The woman, Duncan, and others in the room were not injured.

A 39-year-old BASE jumper hung by his parachute 70 feet above the ground on Nov. 26, 2022 in Moab, Utah. He had jumped from the top of the 400-foot cliff, but his parachute deployed in the wrong direction, slammed him into the cliff face, and then got caught on an outcropping, leaving him badly injured and dangling. Thirty-year-old River Barry, who was in the area to go mountain biking, was flagged down by the man’s friend asking if anyone had climbing gear. Barry, a mental health therapist of Millcreek, Utah, went to the scene and used her own climbing gear and recreational experience to ascend a crack that ran up the side of the cliff directly below the injured man. No one had climbed the crack before and locals referred to the sandstone on the cliff as “slick rock” for its slippery conditions. With the help of the man’s friend belaying her from the ground, Barry climbed to a point above the man and clipped her harness to his. She cut away his parachute and descended to the ground, bearing the man’s weight, to waiting rescuers. The man suffered a compound fracture of his leg and underwent extensive physical therapy. Barry was not injured.

“This could be a one-way trip,” one eyewitness told rescuer Robert J. Selfridge III, 58, of Harvey Cedars, New Jersey, before he dove into the Barnegat Inlet on Aug. 7, 2022, to rescue a 4-year-old and her mother who were trapped inside the cabin of a capsized boat sinking off the Jersey coast. He was the fourth trained and experienced rescuer to attempt to swim under the gunwale of the boat and enter the cabin, but cold water,
and limited visibility thwarted the efforts of the other three. Four-year-old Ryleigh Krause sat on her mother’s shoulders, and they both kept their heads above water in an air pocket inside the cabin. As the boat sank, the air pocket shrank and water rose to the mother’s chin. Selfridge, an off-duty EMT and volunteer lifeguard, arrived at the scene on a WaveRunner to find rescuers using towboat lines to attempt to right the 23-foot-long boat. After determining those efforts were not working and racing against the setting sun, Selfridge told other rescuers “We gotta go under” and, borrowing a diving mask and taking several deep breaths, submerged, swimming under the gunwale and into the cabin. Maneuvering around broken railings and debris, Selfridge took Ryleigh from her mother, told her to take a deep breath, and, carrying her, swam out of the cabin, out from under the boat, and surfaced, the mother following. Selfridge sustained a broken finger but no life-threatening injuries.

Holli J. Robertson, 20, was swimming with friends on Aug. 19, 2023, in the Broad River in Fundy National Park near Alma, New Brunswick, when she lost her footing and was pulled into an area of turbulent water. She attempted to move to safety, but whirling currents trapped her in the 8 feet of water. She held onto a large boulder to keep the currents from sucking her underwater. In another party hiking in the area, off-duty police officer Bruce J. Lake, 48, from Truro, Nova Scotia, saw Robertson struggling. Lake and another man in his party positioned themselves downstream and told her to let go of the boulder. She did and immediately submerged. When she did not resurface immediately, Lake jumped into the water, feeling around for Robertson, and then, after finding her, grasping her arm. Lake kicked and used his free arm to swim to the surface and pushed Robertson toward the bank from which Lake had jumped, where another woman grabbed her hand. Lake felt himself being pulled back into the strong current when Robertson grasped his hand and the two were pulled to the boulder together. Both were assisted from the water. Robertson had swallowed water and sustained lacerations to her body; Lake was nearly exhausted and sustained a laceration to his elbow. They recovered.

A group of four college students were hiking a mountain in a remote area of the Shoshone National Forest in Cody, Wyoming, on Oct. 15, 2022. Almost immediately after friends Kendell Bybee Cummings, 19, and Brady R. Lowry, 21, discovered fresh bear scat, a grizzly bear came out of the nearby woods and attacked Lowry, striking him with its paws and knocking him to the ground. The bear bit his arm, fracturing the bone. Running from about 60 feet away Cummings, of Evanston, Wyoming, moved to a point about 20 feet behind the bear as it continued to attack Lowry. Cummings shouted and threw rocks and sticks at the bear, but it did nothing to deter the animal from continuing its attack. Cummings then ran up behind the bear where he pulled on its ear and fur to disrupt its attack on Lowry. The bear swung its head around and pursued Cummings as he ran, while Lowry left the scene to get help. The estimated 450-pound grizzly bear then attacked Cummings twice, biting him numerous times in his arm, leg, and head, before it eventually walked away. Lowry managed to get a cell phone signal and called 911 before meeting the two other friends. They searched for Cummings, eventually meeting him as he descended. They carried him part of the way as they walked to a road at the bottom of the mountain. Lowry and Cummings were taken to a hospital to be treated for their injuries. Lowry suffered a fractured arm and puncture wounds to his body. Cummings sustained puncture wounds to his arms, legs, head, and face. Both were scarred extensively and Lowry’s wrist continued to heal.

On May 20, 2023, a 76-year-old woman pulled into a Comox, British Columbia, gas station and struck a gas pump. Flames erupted at the front end of the car. Inside the station, co-owner Junyi Liu, 41, of...
Comox, immediately turned off the electrical breakers to the gas pumps, but about 1 gallon of gas in the fuel pump hose also caught fire. Within seconds, the heat from the fire burned off the rubber nozzles on a nearby propane dispenser, spilling propane onto the woman’s vehicle, which accelerated the fire. Flames quickly reached 10 feet high. Liu ran out of the store with a fire extinguisher, but the extinguisher’s pin was too tight and would not work. He ran to the car and opened its front, passenger door but he could not reach the car’s driver. A bystander joined in the efforts to help, while Liu ran to the driver’s-side door, nearest the flames, just as the woman began opening the driver’s door. With flames reaching the ceiling of the carport, Liu pushed open the door the rest of the way and picked up the woman, carrying her to safety. Within 10 seconds from the time of the crash, flames engulfed the fuel station’s entire carport. The woman was in shock and had suffered minor burns to her face but recovered. Liu suffered minor burns to his hand and arm but did not seek treatment.

A suicidal woman in her early 60s had climbed a 10-foot safety fence on the Baldwin Bridge in Old Lyme, Connecticut, on Nov. 27, 2023, and sat on a 9-inch-wide concrete ledge 80 feet above the Connecticut River.

Ashley Harkins, 37, a police sergeant from Westbrook, Connecticut, had finished her shift and was off-duty but responded to the 911 call along with another sergeant. The other sergeant attempted to talk to the shivering woman while Harkins scaled the fence behind her with no safety equipment or ropes. She descended the other side to the narrow ledge, scooted a few feet toward the woman, and then maneuvered to have one arm and one leg on either side of her. She gripped the fence and secured the woman to the fence with her body to keep her from falling. Harkins helped place the woman’s foot on her thigh for leverage while she grasped the fence with one hand. Harkins pushed the woman up by her foot so she could climb the fence to waiting officers. The woman was cold from exposure to wind and temperatures in the low 50s but was otherwise uninjured. She was taken to a hospital for emergency mental health evaluation. Harkins was not injured during the incident.

Left: A still from a body cam of another responding police officer shows Connecticut State police Sgt. Ashley Harkins climbing a 10-foot safety fence on Baldwin Bridge in Old Lyme, Connecticut, to rescue a suicidal woman on the other side of the fence on Nov. 27. Harkins scaled the fence, scooted along a narrow ledge, maneuvered around the woman, and secured her to the fence. Harkins then helped her back over the fence to safety. Right photo: A still from Harkins’ body cam footage that shows Harkins’ view of the Connecticut River 70 feet below the bridge. Photos courtesy of Connecticut State Police.
A fire broke out in the early morning hours of Jan. 10, 2023, in the Quincy, Washington, home of a 67-year-old woman who suffered from long-term illnesses and utilized home oxygen. The woman was unresponsive on the kitchen floor of her one-story house after a fire ignited in the living room, where there were oxygen cylinders. Her daughter retreated outside, called 911, and told the dispatcher that her mother remained inside. Before firefighters responded, on-duty police officer Stephen Harder, 38, from Quincy, and an accompanying detective, arrived on the scene and saw smoke issuing from the house. Harder, who was a former firefighter, opened the front door and saw flames in the living room. He and the detective went to the rear door of the house and opened it to smoke filling a hallway from the ceiling to a point about 18 inches off the floor. Harder and the detective crawled along the narrow hallway and turned into the kitchen. He found the woman unresponsive on the ground with the flames about 10 feet away. He grabbed her and pulled her to him. Crawling backward with her, he entered the hallway. The detective by then had returned to the rear porch for fresh air after she was overcome by the smoke. Harder pulled the woman to the doorway, where he was helped by the detective to carry the woman from the house. Outside, the woman was revived, and she was taken to a hospital. Harder and the detective both inhaled smoke but were medically cleared at a hospital.

A Nov. 11, 2023, shoot-out on a Houston freeway left one police officer shot and others immediately seeking cover after a 19-year-old man crashed a stolen vehicle and then opened fire on the pursuing police. Officer Jonathan Gibson, 29, had approached the car and ordered the driver out of the car, when he was shot in the left leg. Gibson attempted to hobble away as his partner provided cover and shot at the stolen car from their police cruiser. John Phillip Lally, Jr., a 40-year-old delivery truck driver from Houston, was stopped on the freeway. Lally exited his truck and saw Gibson fall, unable to seek cover from the shooting. Amid the gunfire, Lally shouted to Gibson and told him to come toward him as he moved closer. Another officer reached Gibson and dragged him by his ballistic vest about 25 feet as Lally approached. Lally grasped Gibson’s vest while he walked backwards with the other officer, and pulled Gibson about 40 feet to cover behind Lally’s truck. The assailant was shot by police and later died. Gibson was admitted to a hospital and was released a few days later. Lally was not injured during the incident.

On Nov. 9, 2021, Cynthia Chambery, 67, was in a bedroom of her one-story house in Lima, New York, when a fire broke out in the basement. Her husband told police he smelled smoke in the garage and exited. Neighbor Jeffrey Tanner, 48, a technical solution manager, was outside his home when he saw smoke coming from Chambery’s residence. Tanner drove to the scene and saw flames in the home’s garage immediately. Concluding there was no safe way to enter the residence, with heavy smoke and floor-to-ceiling flames inside, Tanner suggested using his tractor and a sledgehammer to break through the bedroom wall from the outside and then rushed home to get the tools. He rammed the front end of his tractor into the exterior wall several times and then used the sledgehammer to break the interior wall, creating a hole about 3 feet wide. A state police fire investigator said the basement, below the bedroom, was likely on fire when Tanner entered the home; the heat was blistering. Moving furniture aside, Tanner crawled into the room and found Chambery, unconscious with her upper body hanging off her bed. Tanner grasped her arm to pull her from the bed. Pulling her by her clothes, he crawled with her, inches at a time, toward the opening until they made it outside. A state trooper who had arrived helped Tanner move Chambery a safe distance from the house. The trooper performed CPR until an ambulance arrived, where she was taken to a hospital, and later died from smoke inhalation. Tanner sustained burns to his arm and was left with scarring.
A father was fishing at a bank of the Iowa River on Aug. 5, 2022, in Lone Tree, Iowa, when an 8-year-old boy entered the water and, after he waded out deeper, struggled to swim. High school custodian Wegayewu S. Faris, 42, of Coralville, Iowa, tossed aside his fishing rod and entered the water after him. Faris waded and swam until he eventually reached the boy, and he put him on his back. Then he, too, struggled in the current. Faris and the boy were separated as the two were drawn toward the middle of the river. A kayaker in the river heard calls for help and saw the boy bobbing in the water. The kayaker paddled upriver and reached the boy, who by then was unconscious and not breathing. After performing chest compressions, the boy coughed up water, and the kayaker paddled him to shore and returned to the vicinity to search for Faris. The boy’s father also had entered the water at one point and safely returned to shore. The kayaker searched for several minutes for Faris but was unsuccessful. The boy was revived on the shore and taken to a hospital, where he recovered and was released the next day. Firefighters recovered the body of Faris an hour after the incident began. He had drowned.

A 53-year-old woman was inside her Ridge, New York, home when a fire broke out in her living room on Jan. 20, 2022. The woman had poor mobility related to several health conditions. Her neighbor, 51-year-old machinist James John Vlacich, was preparing for work when he noticed smoke and flames coming from the woman’s home. He called 911 before he took a fire extinguisher from his garage and ran across the street. He encountered the woman’s roommate outside, who informed him that the woman was still inside. Vlacich approached the home and called for the woman as he attempted to extinguish flames coming from the front door, but ultimately the flames continued to burn. Vlacich ran to the home’s rear door, which entered into a sun porch. Vlacich then moved through the sun porch before entering a sliding door that connected the sun porch to the home’s kitchen, where he encountered black smoke from floor to ceiling. He called out to the woman, who replied and said she could not see anything. Vlacich used the fire extinguisher to briefly clear the smoke and allowed him to see the woman, who was lying on the floor between the living and dining rooms, before the smoke blocked his view. His extinguisher now empty, he discarded it. Smoke forced Vlacich back to the doorway. He went to his hands and knees and crawled 18 feet to the woman. Grasping her by the ankles, he dragged her while retracing his steps. At the sliding door, he stood and cradled the woman, carrying her through the sun porch to safety outside. Emergency personnel arrived shortly and took the woman to the hospital, where she was treated for second- and third-degree burns, but she recovered. Vlacich was nearly physically exhausted but did not require medical treatment.

Two teenage girls were swimming on June 22, 2023, in the Atlantic Ocean off of Edisto Beach, South Carolina, when they were caught in a rip current and struggled to...
Robyn Handley

She advanced quickly, waved her arms, and ran barefoot about 150 feet to the woman. Florissant, heard the woman’s screams and assembly worker scalp. Several houses away across the street, her to the ground, mauled her, bit into her attacked her on a sidewalk. The dogs knocked neighborhood, when four pit bull dogs

On Dec. 22, 2020, a 72-year-old woman vomited water on the beach while Lesan was crawled a few feet to exit the water. The girl could stand close to shore, the girl walked out of the water on her own. Lesan walked, then crawled a few feet to exit the water. The girl vomited water on the beach while Lesan was nearly exhausted. Both recovered.

On Dec. 22, 2020, a 72-year-old woman was out for a walk in a Florissant, Missouri, neighborhood, when four pit bull dogs attacked her on a sidewalk. The dogs knocked her to the ground, mauled her, bit into her body and limbs, and tore off parts of her scalp. Several houses away across the street, assembly worker Robyn Handley, 64, of Florissant, heard the woman’s screams and ran barefoot about 150 feet to the woman. She advanced quickly, waved her arms, and shouted at the dogs as they continued to attack the woman. Handley shielded the woman with her own body as the dogs eventually dispersed, circling in a yard nearby, and she yelled for help. A second woman, 67, heard the screams for help and was approaching the scene from the opposite direction when she was immediately attacked by the dogs. She was knocked to the ground and the dogs began to bite her legs. Handley moved away from the first woman and advanced on the group of dogs again, waving her arms and driving the dogs away. The attack ended when one dog ran off and the others followed. With all the dogs dispersed, another neighbor arrived and loaded the severely injured first woman into his car to await medics. The first woman suffered extensive wounds to her scalp, severe damage to her eye and face, and deep leg wounds. She underwent multiple surgeries and continues to recover. The second woman was also treated for bite wounds to her legs. Handley suffered no injury during the incident. The dogs attacked two other people in another neighborhood. Eventually one dog was hit by a car and killed and the other three dogs were secured and euthanized.

Two 11-year-old boys were playing near a retention pond in Bentonville, Arkansas, on Aug. 29, 2022, when the one of them slipped into the water and was pulled through a concrete drainage pipe. The boy’s brother entered the water and reached out to grasp him before the current caused him to lose his footing. He returned to the bank and ran for help. Bentonville social worker Tawny Hinton, 47, was with the boys’ mother at their nearby apartment when the brother told them the boy entered the water and submerged. Hinton and the mother ran to the pond, where both entered the water. Hinton waded, then swam in murky water to a fast-moving area near the pipe entrance close to where the boy was last seen. She then submerged to search for the boy before she, ultimately, did not resurface. The mother of the boys attempted to reach Hinton before she was forced to exit the pond from the strength of the current. Emergency personnel located the boy in a drainage ditch about 500 yards away. He was taken to the hospital, where he was later pronounced dead from drowning. Hinton was located unresponsive 50 feet away from the pond in a storm drain beneath a manhole. She was taken to a hospital, but never regained consciousness before life support was withdrawn five days later. Hinton died of cardiac arrest and complications from drowning.

A 35-year-old woman entered the Boynton Inlet near Ocean Ridge, Florida, on Nov. 30, 2023. The inlet is flanked by seawalls making exiting the water extremely difficult. Additionally, a strong, outgoing tide was carrying her rapidly toward the Atlantic Ocean. This location was known for high water velocities and according to a local fire lieutenant, is “one of the most dangerous inlets in South Florida.” The woman struggled to swim in the 17-feet-deep water. High school student Jakob Thompson, 17, from Lantana, Florida, was nearby when he saw a group of people unsuccessfully trying to help the woman. He drove to the scene, removed his shirt, took a running jump from the seawall, and landed feet-first in the water. He swam about 90 feet to the woman, intercepted her, and secured her around the chest. She was breathing heavily and nearly exhausted, but she did not struggle. Jakob then towed the woman with one arm back to the same seawall, which was now more than 200 feet from where he jumped into the water. He held her to the wall until two men responded to pull her to safety atop the wall. Jakob then exited on his own. First responders arrived and took the woman to a hospital. Jakob had minor cuts on his hands and feet from the barnacles covering the seawall.

From left, Brady R. Lowry and Kendell Bybee Cummings pose in Cummings’ hospital room while they recover from injuries sustained in an Oct. 15, 2022, bear attack in Shoshone National Forest in Wyoming. Cummings pulled at the bear’s car and fur, distracting it from its attack on Lowry. As the bear turned to maul Cummings, Lowry had the opportunity to flee.
NEWEST CASE INVESTIGATOR

pretty cool."
Yes, it is.
The transition has not been without some hiccups. I was surprised at how detailed and meticulous the staff is in preparing reports for the commission. In the world of journalism, you focus on conflict and emotion. Conflict is what drives every good story. But the Hero Fund work reminds me most of Sgt. Joe Friday (yes, I am dating myself): "Just the facts, ma’am."

I can appreciate that. We’re not rubber-stamping anything here. If you get the Carnegie Medal for Heroism, you’ve done something real and lasting – and we can prove it.

I’m glad to be part of this long-standing effort to honor average people who rise to the occasion when most of us would not.

And I’ve concluded that yes, there are still good people out there.

–Torsten Ove, case investigator

ROBERT D. PARR

Carnegie Hero Robert D. Parr, 83, died at his home in Knightsville, Indiana, on Thursday, March 20, 2024. Parr received the Carnegie Medal after helping save a man from suffocation in Indianapolis on Feb. 27, 1973.

An enamel maker at a paint plant, Parr, then 32, entered a 5-feet-deep tank after a man collapsed inside. Holding his breath, Parr moved the man to a seated position, lifted his head through the opening at the top to take another deep breath, and then, with difficulty, boosted the man, who greatly outweighed him, toward the opening. Other workers atop the tank took hold of the man and Parr, who was being affected by the fumes. When pulled from the tank, Parr was unconscious. The man was also removed, but later died. Parr recovered.

Parr was born on January 7, 1941, to Orris and Ruth Stewart Parr in Brazil, Indiana. Parr worked at Lilly Industrial Coatings in Indianapolis for 8 years. In his work career, he also worked for the Knightsville Water Department, served as town marshal in both Knightsville and Harmony, Indiana, served as a reserve deputy with the Clay County (Indian) Sheriff’s Department and was instrumental in maintaining the Knightsville and Harmony Community centers. He founded the Bob Parr Plumbing and Heating business and supported his family by his hard work and dedication.

Parr was a past member of the Brazil Elks Lodge, the Rotary, and Phi Delta Kappa’s local Chapter. He played music and was said to have a beautiful singing voice. He was described as a generous man who supported many good organizations.

On March 15, 1959, Parr married Beverly Gayle. Together they raised their children in the Knightsville area and were members of the Calvary Baptist Church.

Parr is survived by his wife; sons, Robert Parr, Jr., Daniel Parr, and Joseph Parr; and many grandchildren and great grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by two brothers and a son.

HARRY A. OILER, JR.

Carnegie Hero Harry A. Oiler, Jr., 81, of Parkersburg, West Virginia, died Monday, March 18, 2024, in Florida. He was awarded the Carnegie Medal in 1966 after rescuing a woman from drowning in the Muskingum River in Ohio.

On Dec. 30, 1965, the woman lost control of her sedan, which plunged down a bank into the river. As the vehicle drifted downstream and the front end began to sink, she climbed into the rear seat area. Oiler ran to the bank and heard the woman shout for help. After removing his shoes and jacket, he entered the cold water and swam across the current, reaching the drifting sedan in water 20 feet deep. Unable to open the rear door, Oiler told the woman to lower the window. She extended her head, arms, and shoulders through the opening. Grasping her, Oiler braced his feet against the side of the automobile and pulled. He said later he could feel the sedan tilting toward him as he drew the woman out. They were submerged briefly, but he gained ahold of her arm and Oiler towed the woman toward the bank, where he found footing.

Oiler was born October 18, 1942, to Norma and Harry A. Oiler, Sr.

Oiler was a member of Sheet Metal Local 299, which later became Local 33, for 56.5 years. He was the business agent for most of those years. He loved to fish and was an avid golfer who was said to have several holes-in-one of which he was very proud.

He is survived by his wife of 63 years, Donna (Waters) Oiler; daughter, Stacy Williams; and son, Steven Oiler.
First female investigator retires

also to the foundation: “On a personal level, it would be hard to find a nicer or more thoughtful co-worker. Through the years, I found myself bouncing over to her office to ask her about rescues that might have been similar to cases I had,” Foreman said.

Asked if any cases stick out in her mind, she said recently awarded Fairuz Jane Schlecht, left an impression on her. In this case, Schlecht rescued three children, ages 9, 6, and 5, from a burning apartment building in Newport Beach, California.

“I think it’s because it’s fresh in my mind, and (the rescue) was truly amazing,” Rizza said. “She went back into (the building), and she was so close to that fire. She just wasn’t giving up. She kept going,” she said.

Rizza’s last day at the Hero Fund was March 27, and staff celebrated with her at a luncheon in downtown Pittsburgh.

In her retirement, she said she plans to read, travel, work out at her local gym, and take some life enrichment classes at a nearby university.

Rizza lives with Paul Rizza, her husband of nearly 14 years, in their Wexford home.

— Missy A. McLaughlin, Case Investigator
High Point (North Carolina) Community Foundation President, Paul J. Lessard, received the Order of the Long Leaf Pine at the foundation’s Dec. 12 board meeting.

The Order of the Long Leaf Pine is North Carolina’s highest civilian honor given to recognize lifetime achievements of Community Service. Established in 1961 it has been given by the Governor to those who have had significant impact upon our State. Past recipients include; Billy Graham, Michael Jordan, Dean Smith, Bob Timberlake, Andy Griffith, and others.

Lessard received the Carnegie Medal for Heroism after a 1993 water rescue in which he saved the 62-year-old driver of a station wagon that was washed from a flooded highway into a creek. Using a hammer he had obtained from a nearby home, Lessard swam to the sinking car and broke out a back window. Lessard and another man who had swum to the car secured a hold on the woman and took her to safety.

Lessard is the Founder and Director of the Lighthouse Project. Established in 1994 with the monetary stipend that accompanied the Carnegie Hero Medal. For over 26 years the Project partnered with the Guilford County Schools Character Education Program to bring in over 50 nationally known role models including; Coach Boone, subject of the film, Remember the Titans; James Bradley, author of the New York Times best seller, Flags of Our Fathers; Clifton Taulbert, author of the seminal civil rights classic, Once Upon a Time… When We Were Colored; Patch Adams; Robert Woodson, McArthur Genius Grant Recipient; Joe Erhmann, subject of the book, A Season of Life, and others. To date the Projects has impacted more than 650,000 students with their speakers.

Lessard is also the Founding President of the High Point Community Foundation which was established in 1998. Under Lessard’s leadership the foundation’s assets have grown from $5 million to almost $100 million. In the past 25 years the foundation has awarded more than $107.2 million in unrestricted and Donor Advised Fund grants that have

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**Mesa man’s memorial**

By Carol Hiatt//The Norwood Post

Editor’s note: This story first appeared in the Oct. 17 edition of The Norwood Post and is about Carnegie Hero Edward Jack Miller who lived on Hastings Mesa, 22 miles northwest of Telluride, Colorado. Miller died on March 1, 2022, at the age of 83. It is reprinted with permission.

He was our neighbor for 40 years there about, and I can’t say we were very close. A salty seasoned veteran of the mesa comes to mind when I think of him. He was a hardy soul for sure, and rarely asked for help. He had a dog as a companion, and if the rumors are true a string of women. All the same, he liked to keep people at an arm’s length.

The memorial was on his 40-acre parcel. His barn and the shed were turned into museums of his life’s adventure, filled with antiquated climbing gear and old skis. Several dozen pairs of x-country ski boots were lined up on a shelf, with just one pair of very old downhill boots, whose brand name I did not recognize. Old photos and journals of his mountaineering explorations in South America were displayed on a workbench in the attic of the barn. Many of which would be sent to a university in Chile to be archived.

As impressive as that was, what I found sitting under the cover of a white cardboard box grabbed my interest. It was a baby book with his statistics noted. The cover was satin and the color pink, a particular, I found curious. Born in 1938 in Spokane, Washington, at 3:32 in the afternoon, seven pounds and six ounces. As I thumbed through this, I couldn’t help think that it was an unusual item for an 83-year-old grizzled mountain man to hang onto over the years.

At the memorial, we meditated, wished his soul adieu, chanted, and banged the gong. Many stood to say their piece, and there was grit in the speakers that somehow represented the deceased. A true admiration for his adventurous spirit and strong outdoor skills in the wild was expressed.

Some thoughts that were shared:
- He was a world-wide traveler, but it was more fun to hear about his adventures than to go on the trips with him.
• He was a guide back in the ’70s out in Yosemite and saved my life. He even got the Carnegie hero award for it.
• He was already an old man by the time I knew him. We used to sip coffee out of somewhat clean mugs.
• I had a baby on his property in a tent.
• When I first met him, I came to a sheep roast he hosted. We ate meat right off a spit with knives.
• We worked on the Green Party tether. He gave the longest slideshow ever at a rally. It went on so long the nay-sayers finally got up and left.
• He was the toughest at the end when he was wasting away.
• The person who inherited the property remarked with a lift of sarcasm, “It was an honor to clean up after him. He kept every wool sock he ever owned.”

The last speaker sang a Native American song. Crow, Ute, Apache, I don’t know, but it translated something like this: I’m with the wind now, I’m dead and nothing is going to hold me down. I’m with the wind now, I’m dead and nothing is going to hold me down. Truthfully, that perfectly summed it up.

The last time I saw my neighbor, he had his snowmobile stuck at the end of our driveway in the fresh powder. I helped him get unstuck. I shoveled around the front and the back of the sled, and packed down the snow to make a solid base for the snowmobile to be hoisted upon. We struggled together to haul the sled up onto the platform. He pulled on the cord, fired up the engine and then drove back onto the packed trail. His comment was, “I’m surprised you can get a snowmobile unstuck.” I responded, “I’ve had over 30 years of practice, so not that surprising.” He sped off without a thank you or fond farewell. I had long ago accepted that as his way.

After the memorial, I likened it to reading a book that I didn’t particularly relate to, but went to the book discussion anyway. The group shared that the story did have redeeming qualities, so I came to see its worth. The old coot may not have been shelved among the classics, but he told a tale of high-adventure with little regard for making the bestseller list. True to his roots.

In July 1970, Miller and friend William G. Worthington repeatedly risked their lives to get supplies to fellow climber Hallard B. Kinnison, who had fallen and fractured his femur about 750 feet above the base of Clyde Minaret in Yosemite National Park in California. Fearing that Kinnison would die of shock while awaiting rescue, Miller and Worthington descended 400 feet. Miller brought the supplies up another 150 feet, but he could not carry them farther and was forced to return to the group empty handed. The flashlight being lost at some point, Miller descended again, this time in total darkness, and retrieved the supplies. The next day a rescue party removed Kinnison who recovered after hospitalization.

In 2020, the Boy Scouts of America recognized Paul Lessard as the inaugural 2020 Man of the Year. He was awarded the High Point Chamber of Commerce “Business Advocate of the Year” Award. He received the inaugural Dr. Kennedy Humanitarian of the Year Award for advocating for children.

Paul earned his Bachelor of Arts in English and History at High Point College where he attended on a soccer/academic scholarship in the mid-70s. He earned his Master of Fine Arts in Communications from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He was selected to pursue post-graduate studies in Nonprofit Management at Harvard University Business School in the summer of 2006.

In addition to the Carnegie Medal, Lessard received the Congressional Commendation for Heroism, a Key to the City of High Point, and a resolution of Commendation for Heroism. He was awarded the High Point Chamber of Commerce "Business Advocate of the Year" Award. He received the inaugural Dr. Kennedy Humanitarian of the Year Award for advocating for children.

In 2020, the Boy Scouts of America recognized Paul Lessard as the inaugural 2020 Man of the Year.

Lessard is married to Jayne Isaacson Lessard and they have two adult children; daughter, Taylor Sprague, and son, Jordan Lessard. Along with his two children, Lessard is most proud of his five grandchildren.

‘ORDER OF THE LONG LEAF PINE’

impact organizations with hyper local scopes to international.

Speaking and presenting the Order of the Long Leaf Pine at the ceremony were three local past recipients of the award, including Chris Greene and Jim Morgan.

“We are grateful to Governor Cooper for awarding this most prestigious and well-deserved recognition to our friend and teammate,’ Paul Lessard,” notes Ann Busby, Past Chair, HPCF. “It always takes a team to accomplish great things and I want to thank Chris Greene, Jim Morgan, David Miller and Tom Blount who all played key roles in the nominating process.

The report sketch drawn by Hero Fund Case Investigator Bruce Brian Ideon detailing the course of Edward Jack Miller and William G. Worthington who repeatedly risked their lives to get supplies to a fellow climber who was injured.
Byrle G. Walker, a 34-year-old teacher from Idaho Falls, Idaho, was working part-time for the U.S. Forest Service, when he set out to inspect trees and do insect control work in the Targhee National Forest on June 7, 1967, in Ashton, Idaho.

After getting permission under a schoolboy work permit, Walker brought his nephew, Kristan C. Sparks, 13, also from Idaho Falls, and Sparks’ friend, 14-year-old James Allen Black from Nampa, Idaho. That day they were tasked with picking up empty cans that had been left behind when the trees were treated with insecticides the previous fall.

In an account written by Walker to the Boy Scouts of America, the three of them drove down a road about 2.5 miles above their camp and encountered deep mud holes. They stopped to search for cans after moving through an especially deep area of mud.

“Where we stopped wasn’t where I wanted to go but I thought we may as well see what we could find there,” Walker wrote.

The three of them moved east inspecting different rows of trees for the discarded containers.

“The boys and I were in separate lanes of trees which had been roped off for treatment,” Walker told reporters. “We were going to walk down those lines to look for the cans,” he said.

But as Walker pushed on a bit farther, he said later that he wondered if a bear could have been in the area. Despite failing to see any tracks, Walker found torn apart logs, which he believed a bear could have done while searching for food. He did not initially tell the boys what he had seen.

Walker thought he heard grunting and turned around to spot a male grizzly bear north of him, which Hero Fund Investigator Irwin M. Urling recorded as at least 350 pounds.

Kristan told reporters that he and James originally thought the sound of the bear was an elk “bugling.”

Walker moved away from the boys, after shouting at them to run, he began to holler at the bear in an effort to frighten it off.

“I looked back and saw this bear angling off my trail,” Walker told the reporter. “Evidently he had caught my scent and started for me at a dead run. First, I tried to climb a tree, but there wasn’t enough time, so I started running.”

Walker ran east, but the bear intercepted him. The animal knocked Walker to the ground and began to bite him; he cried out in pain.

THE ATTACK BEGINS

“The bear knocked me down, and started chewing on my neck, scalp, both shoulders, fanny, and side,” he said.

Kristian and James continued to flee, but the sound of Walker’s screams and the loud growling of the bear stopped them. They around.

Kristian and James stopped 75 from the scene; they could see the bear mauling Walker. The boys shouted at the bear to draw its attention from its prey. Despite their efforts, the bear paid no mind to them and continued to maul Walker.

In his own written account for the Boy Scouts of America, Kristan eluded to the conclusion that the bear was being territorial or protective. “The bear acted like he was doing it because he had cubs or something,” Kristan added. “We weren’t sure though because we didn’t see any cubs.”

They tried to throw twigs at the animal, but the small twigs would not carry that far. The boys continued to shout and then used sticks to beat on the trunks of surrounding trees.

The bear turned once toward the boys and went back to Walker. As the teens persisted in making noise, the animal finally took notice. It stopped its attack on Walker.

“I have never had such a relief in my life as to have him leave me,” Walker said.

The large animal lifted its front paws off the ground to stand on its hind legs and emitted a loud bellow.

Kristan told James to flee and the boys separated. James turned north, and the bear ran in a similar direction after him.
He said later that he could feel the aggressive animal on his heels as he ran through the dense brush.

The bear caught up to James, overtook him, and knocked him to the ground, but it quickly moved on from him, and continued its pursuit of Kristan. The bear reached Kristan after he had run about 150 feet. The bear seized his left wrist with its mouth and threw him to the ground. It bit deep into his left forearm and wrist, but Kristan played dead.

The bear ceased its attack on Kristan, but its aggressive assault was not done. It returned to James.

James wrote in his own account that he grabbed a stick and attempted to hit the bear in the face, with no success.

Meanwhile, Kristan had fled, running toward the road and then to camp as fast as he could.

“I was going to stop at the truck that we had driven up in, but the truck door was open and I was afraid there would be another bear and so I kept running past it,” he said.

About a mile into the journey, he stopped to remove his footwear.

“When I reached the road, I took off my heavy boots and socks in order to run faster, and I made better time after that,” Sparks told the Twin Falls Times News. “I thought the others were dead.”

In a letter to the Boy Scouts of America, Mary Walker, Walker’s wife wrote about Kristan’s actions once he got to camp.

“Kristan had made no move to even enter the safety of the trailer, and he hadn’t even mentioned or apparently thought to see to his own needs,” she wrote.

“Kristan fully intended to take us back to his place of horror, not once thinking of finding a secure place … In fact, his whole concern seemed to be to get effective help back to the other men as soon as possible.”

Back in the forest, James was not able to hurt the large bear, so he turned to face the ground, wrapping his arms around his head to protect it. The bear bit into his left arm. The force of the bite fractured his arm. The bear then bit James on his right arm and thigh.

Then it all … just stopped. The bear stopped its attack and trotted off to the south, never to be seen again.

James said he stood and followed the bear to make sure it was leaving the scene. Then he went to the road and started back toward camp to get help.

“I thought these other guys were dead,” he said.

Walker, too, eventually “got to [his] senses” and stood up. He hollered for the kids, but no one responded. He went out to the road where he waited for help.

“I thought I was bleeding to death,” he said.

Eventually he made his way to the truck and headed back toward camp, and he was reunited with Kristan and James. They were all taken to the hospital.

Walker required the most extensive care. He received 300 sutures to wounds on his head, neck, arms, and shoulders. He was hospitalized for 10 days before he recovered.

James sustained a compound fracture to his left arm and required 17 sutures on both arms, as well as his thigh. He did not fully recover for about eight weeks due to the fracture.

Kristan needed 10 sutures all on his wrist and forearm. He recovered after seven days in the hospital.

According a June 12, 1967 article from the Deseret News, hunters with dogs attempted to track the marauding bear, but no trace of the animal was found after they pursued it across the Idaho-Wyoming border.

Following the incident, both Kristan and James were nominated by Walker for the Boy Scouts of America Honor Medal.

“If he had taken any more bites out of my head, there would have been some real damage done. I hate to think what would have happened if I had been alone,” Walker wrote. “Jim Black and Kristan Sparks were faced with a decision. They made their decision and in the process it drew the bear from me and it cost them some hurt and a real experience in the process.”

Through the Boy Scouts award, the Hero Fund became aware of their act of bravery in drawing the bear away from injured Walker.

Kristan and James were awarded bronze medals from the Hero Fund. Each would later receive grants to assist in their education after they graduated from high school. Their story appeared in the May 1971 Golden Comics Digest, published by Gold Key. Kristan went on to become an optometrist in Idaho Falls, and James currently serves as a field service engineer for a healthcare company in Meridian, Idaho.

— Griffin Erdely, Communications Intern
GRAVE MARKERS  Bronze grave markers (below), cast in the likeness of the Carnegie Medal, are available at no cost to the families of awardees who have passed.  They are designed for mounting on stone or bronze memorials.

MEDAL REFINISHING  The Hero Fund will refinish Carnegie Medals at no cost to the owner. The medals are to be sent to the Hero Fund’s office by insured, registered mail. Allow a month for the process.

OBITUARIES  Written accounts of the awardee’s life, such as contained in an obituary, are sought for addition to the awardee’s page on the Commission’s website.

ANNUAL REPORTS  Copies of the Hero Fund’s most recent annual reports (2021-2022) are available online or by contacting the Hero Fund.

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CARNegie HERo FUND COMMISSION
436 Seventh Ave., Suite 1101, Pittsburgh, PA 15219-1841
Telephone: (412) 281-1302  Toll free: (800) 447-8900
Fax: (412) 281-5751
E-mail: carnegiehero@carnegiehero.org
Website: carnegiehero.org

Whenever heroism is displayed by man or woman in saving a human life, the Fund applies.

— Andrew Carnegie, Hero Fund Deed of Trust 1904