

1998

Sergeant Keith DeWitt
Patrolman Michael C. Valenti

Waite Hill Police Department

All of the training, which police officers go through, attempts to prepare them for most any situation that they might encounter. That training probably does not include rock climbing or any of the special skills used by the Jorge Medina Distinguished Service Award winners in 1998.

On October 15, 1998 Sergeant Keith DeWitt and Patrolman Mike Valenti were dispatched to an injury accident on Interstate 90 at the Chagrin River. Arriving, they found that a vehicle had gone off the road and plunged to the bottom of a cliff and into the river. The officers scaled down the 85 foot cliff without any safety equipment, and out into three feet of water, rescuing the driver who was lying across the front seat.

The vehicle, a sport utility vehicle had been eastbound on Interstate 90, when the 68 year old driver apparently fell asleep. The vehicle went off the left side of the roadway, into the median, and traveled for about 300 feet. It then flipped over a guardrail, and plummeted 80 feet, off the bridge, and onto the east bank of the Chagrin River. It flipped end over end for another 35 feet, eventually coming to a stop, upright, in the river. Chief Arnold Stanko stated that the driver "was very fortunate the vehicle fell straight down and didn't land on the hood or the roof."

Once DeWitt and Valenti reached the driver, it took EMS crews approximately 40 minutes to retrieve the driver. He was life-flighted to Cleveland Metro General Hospital where he was treated for minor injuries.

DeWitt and Valenti received their award on February 24, 1999 at the annual banquet at the Mentor Harbor Yachting Club.

DeWitt would go on to serve as Chief of Police of the Waite Hill Police Department. He retired in 2021.