

1999

Firefighter Rob Gandee

Kirtland Fire Department

You never know what the day will bring. For firefighter paramedics, it can be a never ending string of medical emergencies, car accidents, fire calls, and assists of various types. For firefighter Rob Gandee, it was a new experience, but thankfully, one he was trained and prepared for.

On July 15, 1999, two young girls, 13, & 9 years old, were playing on the north branch of the Chagrin River. They had crossed the normally docile tributary and at about 6:00 P.M. tried to head home by crossing again. However the lazy stream had been turned into a raging river by heavy rain upstream in Geauga County earlier that afternoon. The girls became stranded in the middle of the river, clinging to a small branch of a submerged tree.

The father of one of the girls attempted to rescue them but was unsuccessful due to the strong current. The Kirtland Fire Department responded to the call for help. The situation was becoming desperate. If either of the girls lost their grip, they could have become entangled in the submerged tree limbs, or been swept downstream.

Aided by a crew of three other firefighters, Gandee donned a flotation device and a lifeline to shore. He then swam out rescuing one of the girls and then made a second trip for the other one. Neither girl was reported to be injured.

Gandee, who at the time worked full time for Mentor and part time for Willoughby and Kirtland, credited his team and his training for the successful rescue. "A month earlier, in Willoughby we did water rescue training. And in Kirtland, we just got new safety equipment."

Gandee had been nominated for the award by Kirtland Fire Chief Richard Harvey. He was awarded the Jorge Medina Distinguished Service Award on February 9, 2000 at the Blue Coats annual banquet at LaMalfa Center.

Gandee has continued in his career but left the Mentor Fire Department for his new full time position as Fire Chief in Willoughby Hills.