

2011

Lieutenant Arthur Lagerstedt
Firefighter Robert Vencel
Firefighter William Whalen

Painesville Township Fire Department

The patch says Painesville Township Fire Department. But, when the tones sound and the call goes out, there are no boundaries. That was the case on November 19th, 2011, when as part of an automatic aid response protocol, the Painesville Township Fire Department was dispatched to a structure fire in the City of Painesville. Painesville Fire was tied up on another call, and was only responding two firefighters to this call. Arriving on scene, the Painesville Township crew reported a fully involved fire in a first floor apartment of a two story apartment complex. As Firefighter Vencel began pulling a hose line to attack the fire, he reported screams for help from a second story apartment directly above the fire. Central Communications also was receiving reports from people trapped in their apartments by heavy smoke in the common hallways.

The fire attack crew, consisting of Lieutenant Lagerstedt and Firefighters Vencel and Whalen immediately shifted to a rescue operation. Vencel put a ladder up to the second floor balcony, however, the intensity of the fire rendered the ladder useless as an escape route. Lagerstedt decided to attack the fire with a hose line, allowing Vencel to climb the ladder and access the apartment. He located 3 people, an adult and two children. He evacuated all three, one at a time, by carrying them down the ladder. Whalen, who had charged the hose line, assuring an adequate water supply, was then able to assist Vencel with the ladder rescue.

Painesville City Fire arrived on scene and rescued two additional adults from the fire. One of them, the occupant of the burning apartment, died several days later.

Fire Chief Francis Whittaker nominated his men for this award. In his letter of nomination he stated; "Had it not been for the quick decisive actions taken by the initial crew arriving, I feel there would have been more tragedy associated with this fire. The team work displayed by Lagerstedt, Whalen, and Vencel, is what we expect from our employees, but it is not often that they get a chance to display and perform in the manner we expect. The crew saved the lives of that mother and her two children, as the conditions in the hallway prohibited an escape through the common hallway and stairs. The coordinated effort of attacking the fire, raising the ladder, and carrying the victims down the ladder might not seem difficult, but for every one of that crew to know their individual responsibilities while a fire is burning out of control and while people are trapped is commendable."

The Lake County Blue Coats agreed with Chief Whittaker and awarded these men the prestigious Jorge Medina Distinguished Service Award. They were honored at the annual Blue Coats meeting and awards dinner at the LaMalfa Centre on February 8th, 2012.