

2002

Lieutenant Denise Mercsak
Patrolman William Smith
Community Services Officer Jeff Baldrey

Painesville Police Department

On October 26, 2002, fire broke out at an apartment complex located at 7 North Park Place in the City of Painesville. Among the first responders to the scene were Lieutenant Denise Mercsak, Patrolman William Smith, and Community Services Officer Jeff Baldrey. The three officers entered the burning building to find several elderly residents still inside. Some of them did not realize the extent of the emergency or the danger that they were in. Ultimately, the officers helped 5 people evacuate the building, some from the third floor.

All three were awarded the Jorge Medina Distinguished Service Award by the Lake County Blue Coats, Incorporated, and the annual banquet at LaMalfa Center. Over 165 persons attended the awards dinner which took place on February 19, 2003.

The three officers were unanimous in downplaying their actions. Baldrey stated “it’s our job to knock on doors and make sure everyone’s safe.”

“In a situation like that you know what has to be done, and you do it. That’s what we train for” stated Smith.

Lt. Mercsak expressed her pride in the officers under her command. “It was a team effort. My officers acted positively, and bravely.”

Lt. Mercsak is now retired from the Painesville Police Department. Jeff Baldrey accepted a position with Highland Heights PD in 2015. Smith is currently assigned to the Painesville Detective Bureau.