

2013

Lieutenant Brian Bittner
Firefighter/Paramedic Jeremy Szydlowski
Firefighter/Paramedic Rollin Pachinger

Mentor Fire Department

You can never predict the day that the term "hero" will be imposed on you. It's not like you roll out of bed in the morning and decide that this is the day. And in your wildest dreams, that day would never occur on your second day at a new job. But for three members of the Mentor Fire Department, that day occurred on May 5, 2013.

Always a dangerous call, a structure fire was reported at a mobile home park in Mentor. A woman was reported to be trapped in the structure. Upon arrival, fire was venting from the windows, door, and roof of the structure. Lieutenant Bittner and his crew located a resident who had escaped the home, and confirmed that his mother was still inside. He was able to provide information as to where she would be inside.

The crew of three, entered the burning structure with a hose line, and even after it became entangled, were able to locate the victim and remove her from the home. Lieutenant Bittner then reentered the residence to confirm that there were no other occupants and begin to fight the fire.

Szydlowski worked closely with Bittner to rescue the victim in the burning environment. Pachinger, who was serving his second shift with Mentor Fire, held back the fire, protecting his fellow firefighters and the victim, as she was rescued. Szydlowski and Pachinger then transported the victim to the hospital. She would later be released after a one week stay at the burn unit of Metro Hospital.

Chief Richard Harvey stated that "Mentor does not pull many people out of burning buildings. It's less than a once in a career occurrence. They performed flawlessly. It's risking your life for others."

Pachinger stated that the call was "an adrenaline rush. I am blessed that I work with such a great crew. These two are my mentors." Bittner stated that the crew had just done their "day to day job." Szydlowski credited the other responders including pump operator Don Bednarik for the successful operation. "That's the situation you prepare for you whole career," Szydlowski said. The award is "a huge honor. It's like winning the Heisman Trophy."

With these awards, the Blue Coats have now honored 104 first responders since 1969. These young men stand tall among their predecessors, for their actions on that day.