



# CARNEGIE HERO FUND COMMISSION

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*News release*

FOR RELEASE:  
Sept. 23, 2019

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## 18 NAMED CARNEGIE HEROES FOR ACTS OF EXTRAORDINARY HEROISM

PITTSBURGH—Four police officers who went above and beyond the line of duty to rescue people are among the most recently named Carnegie heroes. In separate incidents, two of those officers entered burning mobile homes to rescue their occupants. The other officers forced their way into burning vehicles to save those trapped inside.

The Carnegie Hero Fund Commission today recognized 15 Americans and three Canadians for risking their lives while trying to save others from perilous, life-threatening situations including the late **David Covington**, who several months before his death from natural causes and at age 72, swung and struck at two dogs attacking a 6-year-old until they released her, and **Kote Mhitari**, who, while on a family vacation in Hawaii went into cardiac arrest after jumping from a 15-foot-cliff attempting to save his adult son from drowning. He was revived and survived the incident.

The Carnegie Medal is given throughout the U.S. and Canada to those who risk their lives to an extraordinary degree while saving or attempting to save the lives of others. With this third announcement of 2019 recipients, a total of 10,117 Carnegie Medals have been awarded since the Pittsburgh-based Fund's inception in 1904. Commission Chair Mark Laskow said each of the awardees or their survivors will also receive a financial grant. Throughout the more than 115 years since the Fund was established by industrialist-philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, \$41 million has been given in one-time grants, scholarship aid, death benefits, and continuing assistance. The awardees are:

<b>Rebecka Blackburn</b>	Leduc, Alta.	<b>Allen Sirois</b>	Salado, Texas
<b>Sommer Marie King</b>	Leduc, Alta.	<b>Jordan Scott Lambay</b>	Okinawa, Japan
<b>Jason P. Maxwell</b>	Maple Valley, Wash.	<b>Richard Thomas Krochta</b>	Florissant, Colo.
<b>Kote Mhitari</b>	Sandy, Utah	<b>Richard J. Gandolfo</b>	Suffolk County, N.Y.
<b>Phillip H. DiLuca</b>	Clinton, Maine	<b>Robert M. Hosey</b>	Coplay, Pa.
<b>Todd D. Lyford</b>	Dover-Foxcroft, Maine	<b>Nathan Scott Wanhala</b>	Santa Cruz, Calif.
<b>J. Ryan Thornton</b>	Thornton, Colo.	<b>Heather Zabrowski</b>	Olympia, Wash.
<b>Michael Douglas Barkhouse</b>	Walton, N.S.	<b>Darren M. Smith</b>	Vero Beach, Fla.
<b>Leon Wright</b>	Orlando, Fla.	<b>David Covington</b>	Rockingham, N.C.

Summaries of the acts follow. To nominate someone for the Carnegie Medal, complete a nomination form online or write to the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission, 436 Seventh Ave., Suite 1101, Pittsburgh, PA 15219. More information on the Carnegie Medal and the history of the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission can be found at [carnegiehero.org](http://carnegiehero.org). Follow us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/carnegiehero) and Twitter: [@carnegie\\_hero](https://twitter.com/carnegie_hero).

**Rebecka Blackburn  
Sommer Marie King**  
Leduc, Alta.

Rebecka Blackburn and Sommer Marie King on June 20, 2018, rescued a man who was struggling to stay afloat in the middle of the North Saskatchewan River near Devon, Alta. The man waved his arms while flailing in the cold water, while the swift current carried him downstream. Blackburn, an 18-year-old college student, and King, a 33-year-old educational assistant, entered the river and swam toward him. Blackburn had nearly reached him, when the man submerged. She submerged, grasped him, and brought him to the surface. As she towed him toward the bank, she became nearly exhausted and called to King for assistance. From nearby, King joined them, and with both women grasping the man, they towed him to water near the riverbank where they waded to safety.

**Jason P. Maxwell**  
Maple Valley, Wash.

Jason P. Maxwell, a 43-year-old vessel operations manager, on Aug. 13, 2018, entered deep, cold water at a Seattle dock to save a crewman who was floating face-down in the water near a large cargo ship. Maxwell jumped from the dock, which was 15 feet above the surface of the 59-degree water. He swam about 150 feet to the man, who had submerged in the 50-foot-deep water. Maxwell submerged and swam to him at a point about 10 feet below the water's surface. Grasping the man's coveralls, Maxwell pulled him to the surface and holding his head above the water, towed him with difficulty to a life ring that a bystander had thrown to a point about 75 feet from the dock. At the life ring, Maxwell supported himself and the man in the water. A diving salvage boat then arrived and its two-man crew assisted Maxwell and the man from the water. The crew performed CPR on the man, who was by then unconscious, as Maxwell lay on the deck, nearly exhausted. They both recovered.

**Kote Mhitari**  
Sandy, Utah

On March 4, 2018, Kote Mhitari, 54, attempted to rescue his adult son, Georgi Davidov, 28, from drowning in the Pacific Ocean, while the family was vacationing in Lahaina, Hawaii. Mhitari and Davidov, as well as their partners, were visiting a cliff about 15 feet above the ocean, when Davidov fell into the ocean. Despite being a poor swimmer, Mhitari, a truck driver, jumped into the water and swam to his son. They grasped each other until rough surf separated them. Davidov trod water near rocks at the base of the cliff, and Mhitari was carried to a point about 80 feet away. A responding lifeguard on a personal watercraft rescued both men and took them to a nearby beach. Mhitari was unconscious and in cardiac arrest. Both men were taken to the hospital, where Davidov, nearly exhausted, was treated for bruising and scrapes, and Mhitari, who was revived, required extensive hospitalization and therapy.

**Phillip H. DiLuca**  
Clinton, Maine

Off-duty Clinton Police Officer Phillip H. DiLuca, 24, entered a burning mobile home, searched until finding the home's occupant, and guided him from the structure on June 13, 2017 in Clinton. At night, 53-year-old Shawn C. Skehan slept in the bedroom of his mobile home when fire broke out in the home's attic. Neighbors banged on the doors and windows but could not rouse Skehan. DiLuca was on his way home from work when he heard about the fire on his police radio. He drove to the scene. Unable to enter the home's front door, DiLuca ran to the rear of the home, forced open a door, and entered, encountering intense heat and smoke. DiLuca crouched low and moved quickly throughout the house, using a T-shirt to shield his nose and mouth from smoke. After searching the home's other two bedrooms, DiLuca found Skehan in the third bedroom. He shook him, waking him after several seconds, and then guided him through thick smoke and nearby flames to the backdoor where they exited to safety. The chief of police of DiLuca's department stated that DiLuca went above and beyond the call of duty to enter the burning home without protective gear.

**Todd D. Lyford**  
Dover-Foxcroft, Maine

Dover-Foxcroft Police Officer Todd D. Lyford, 54, saved a 65-year-old woman from burning after a July 30, 2018, accident caused her vehicle to leave a Dover-Foxcroft roadway, travel down a steep, wooded embankment, and come to rest tilted against a tree trunk. The vehicle's front end, which was several feet off the ground, broke out in flames. Lyford responded to the scene and arrived before firefighters. After emptying a fire extinguisher on the flames, Lyford opened the front, passenger door with difficulty. Despite the base of the door being 3 feet off the ground, Lyford extended his upper body and arms inside the flaming vehicle and grasped the woman's upper body, pulling her to the ground and then a short distance from the vehicle. He and others then dragged her up the embankment. Although she was not burned, she died nine days later from injuries sustained in the wreck. After the rescue, Lyford was nearly exhausted and had inhaled extinguisher chemicals. He recovered after emergency room treatment that day.

**J. Ryan Thornton**  
Thornton, Colo.

After responding to the scene of a mobile home fire on Sept. 5, 2018, in Thornton, police Officer J. Ryan Thornton, 41, kicked open the door of the home and entered the structure that was filled with heavy smoke and blistering heat. He crawled about 15 feet to a 61-year-old woman, who could not leave the structure on her own. Briefly retreating outside for fresh air, Thornton re-entered and returned to the woman's bedside, despite flames burning nearby. He picked her up and carried her toward the front door. While retreating, Thornton tripped and fell to the floor. He dragged the woman the remaining distance to the front door of the home, where they were met by emergency responders. Thornton was hospitalized for two days for treatment of inhalation burn injuries, and he recovered.

**Michael Douglas Barkhouse**  
Walton, N.S.

A 44-year-old construction worker on June 17, 2017, saved a kennel attendant, 42, from an attacking dog at a shelter in Yellowknife, N.W.T. Michael Douglas Barkhouse was driving to work when he spotted the woman in a fenced kennel with the dog and heard her screaming. Wearing leather work gloves and using a wooden stake that he took from his truck, Barkhouse forced open an outer latch on the kennel and entered it. He yelled at the dog and struck the dog with his feet and hands until it released the woman. As the dog retreated, Barkhouse dragged the woman to the kennel's holding area and closed the inner gate to separate the dog from them. The attendant was hospitalized for treatment of numerous bites. Barkhouse's right hand was bruised.

**Leon Wright**  
Orlando, Fla.

Leon Wright was shopping Sept. 8, 2018, in Orlando when he heard a car horn honking erratically. A couple was parked at a drive-through bank machine nearby when a man armed with a box cutter approached their car and reached through the driver's window in an attempt to steal the purse of 55-year-old driver Mildred Ortiz. As Ortiz tried to drive away, the assailant shut off the car and struggled with her and her husband, passenger Albert Vasquez, 60, for control of the purse. As Wright, a 51-year-old car interior restorer, approached, the assailant had an arm around Ortiz's neck and the retracted box cutter against her throat. Wright punched the assailant's head and side and pulled on him, until he moved away from the car and swung the box cutter at him. The struggle continued away from the car, with the assailant falling to the pavement where Wright and another man kicked at him. The assailant regained his footing and lunged at Wright, who backpedaled away from him and fell. The assailant fled. Ortiz and Vasquez were not physically injured. Wright suffered a fractured wrist, which required surgery and therapy.

**Allen Sirois**  
Salado, Texas

After a May 26, 2018, highway accident in Belton, Texas, 20-year-old delivery driver Allen Sirois responded to the scene: a concrete mixer truck had overturned onto its driver's side, flames were burning in the engine area, and its driver, Melvin K. Belcher, 60, was trapped inside. Sirois used a fire extinguisher in an attempt to douse the flames, but it did little to extinguish the blaze. He kicked a small hole in the windshield, but he could not gain access to the cab from there. He climbed the truck and, standing on a platform between the cab and the mixer, he opened the passenger door. He saw Belcher inside the smoke-filled cab, which flames had breached near the driver's door and windshield. Sirois reached through the open door and, with difficulty, pulled Belcher partially out of the cab. Another man moved onto the truck and pulled Belcher fully free from the cab. Others took Belcher to the ground and carried him to safety. Belcher and Sirois sustained minor burns, and they recovered.

**Jordan Scott Lambay**  
Okinawa, Japan

It was a late Sunday night when Truman State University student Jordan Scott Lambay became alerted to a June 29, 2018, attack occurring outside his Kirksville, Mo., home. Leaving the house barefoot, Lambay, 22, ran to a man who had dragged a bloodied woman into a neighborhood street and was hovering above her with an axe. Despite weighing 40 pounds less than the assailant, Lambay grasped the axe handle with his hands, prevented the man from hitting the woman again, and took him to the ground. Lambay pinned the man to the pavement and attempted to wrestle the axe away from him until his partner seized it and removed it from the vicinity. The woman, who had been hit with the axe several times before Lambay intervened, was treated at the hospital for serious injuries; she survived. Lambay was not injured.

**Richard Thomas Krochta**  
Florissant, Colo.

Freight trucker Richard Thomas Krochta saved Scott C. Smith, 70, and Denese M. Kostrzewa, 59, from inside a burning minivan Aug. 29, 2018, after an accident in Woodland Park, Colo. Krochta, 56, was driving nearby and spotted the burning vehicle after it had crashed in a wooded area. Krochta went to the van, where fallen tree branches blocked his access to the driver's door. Hearing Smith call for help, Krochta moved to the van's passenger side and tugged on the passenger door, forcing it open several inches. He reached through the small gap and, by the collar, pulled Smith from the passenger seat, where he stood straddling Kostrzewa's prone body, and out of the car. Smith told Krochta about Kostrzewa, who was still inside the van. As flames grew and spread, Krochta returned to the van, located Kostrzewa and pulled her through the passenger-door opening as well. Smith and Kostrzewa were hospitalized for crash-related injuries; they were not burned.

**Richard J. Gandolfo**  
Suffolk County, N.Y.  
**Robert M. Hosey**  
Coplay, Pa.

Nineteen-year-old Mercedes C. Ramos was trapped inside a burning sport utility vehicle after an April 20, 2018, accident in which the front of her vehicle struck and became wedged beneath the rear end of a truck in East Patchogue, N.Y. Flames broke out on the vehicle's hood and spread to its interior. Suffolk County Police Officer Richard J. Gandolfo, 55, responded to the scene, but he could not open any of the vehicle's doors. Passing motorist Robert M. Hosey, 38, construction worker, also responded and, with difficulty, opened the rear, driver's-side door. Working together, Gandolfo and Hosey maneuvered Ramos into the backseat of the car and then removed her to safety. Another man helped the duo move Ramos away from the burning car, which was shortly engulfed by flames. Ramos sustained second-degree burns to her legs and a broken ankle. Gandolfo sustained smoke inhalation injuries and burns to both hands. He recovered. Hosey was treated at the scene for smoke inhalation.

**Nathan Scott Wanhala**  
Santa Cruz, Calif.

Bus passenger Nathan Scott Wanhala rescued a woman, 25, and her toddler daughter, 3, from assault aboard the interstate bus on March 5, 2018, in Visalia, Calif. A passenger armed with a knife forced her way between the mother and daughter, put the girl in a chokehold, pointed the knife at her throat, and threatened to kill her. The girl's mother quickly pulled her daughter away from the assailant and urged her to run to the front of the bus. The assailant stabbed the mother twice in the torso. Wanhala, 30, moved between the mother and the assailant and grasped the assailant's right arm in both of his hands, attempting to wrest the knife from her. They both struggled for control of the knife; Wanhala was stabbed in the wrist and cut on his hands during the altercation. Others helped Wanhala subdue the assailant. The mother was hospitalized for treatment of the stab wounds, and the toddler suffered an abrasion to her forehead. The assailant was arrested and charged. Wanhala was treated for his injuries, and he recovered.

**Heather Zabrowski**  
Olympia, Wash.

After a July 30, 2018, accident near Olympia, 29-year-old administrative assistant Heather Zabrowski responded to a burning sport utility vehicle that had come to rest in a ditch. Despite flames burning beneath the vehicle and dry grass around the vehicle aflame, Zabrowski opened the driver's door and saw 67-year-old Alan E. Rathbun slumped over the steering wheel. She extended her upper body inside the passenger compartment and reached across Rathbun to unlatch his seat belt. She then turned Rathbun to face her and pulled him from the vehicle to the ground. Too heavy for her to lift, Zabrowski called to others nearby for help. Zabrowski and a man who responded aided Rathbun to safety. Flames grew to engulf the rear of the vehicle and spread to its interior. Rathbun was not burned.

**Darren M. Smith**  
Vero Beach, Fla.

Golf professional Darren M. Smith, 31, saved a 17-year-old girl from burning after she was trapped inside an overturned sport utility vehicle after a nighttime highway accident March 4, 2017, in Vero Beach. As Smith approached the scene of the accident, he heard the girl screaming from inside the vehicle, which had flames on its undercarriage. Smith retrieved a golf club and used it to break out the vehicle's front, passenger window. He then went to his stomach and crawled inside the smoke-filled vehicle. He grasped the girl's feet and pulled her toward him and then alongside him until her feet were through the window opening. Another man arrived and fully removed her by her feet. Smith backed from the vehicle, which was shortly engulfed by flames. The girl was treated at the hospital for injuries she sustained; she was not burned. Smith suffered lacerations to his hands and arms, and he recovered.

**David Covington**  
Rockingham, N.C.

A 72-year-old man intervened as two dogs attacked a 6-year-old girl who had just gotten off her school bus Jan. 9 in Rockingham. Two pit bull dogs were mauling her near the bus, when David Covington saw the attack and went to her aid. Wielding a 4-foot-long tree branch, Covington swung at and struck the dogs until they ceased their attack. The girl was hospitalized for treatment of serious injuries, and she recovered. Covington died in May from causes unrelated to his heroic rescue.