



# CARNEGIE HERO FUND COMMISSION

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## HERO FUND RECOGNIZES 18 INDIVIDUALS FOR EXTRAORDINARY ACTS OF HEROISM

The Carnegie Hero Fund is honored to recognize 18 individuals, including a New York City art teacher who intervened in a subway attack, a 34-year-old healthcare worker who saved a boy who had fallen through ice covering an apartment complex pond, and a 62-year-old repairman who entered a burning home three times to rescue an 11-month-old baby.

All the men and women recognized today, in acts of extraordinary heroism, risked serious injury or death to save others. This is the Hero Fund's final award announcement for 2024. Each individual will receive the Carnegie Medal, North America's highest honor for civilian heroism.

Other rescuers this quarter include a 31-year-old mother who died attempting to save her 1-year-old son from their burning home, a 28-year-old father, who drowned attempting to save his 7-year-old daughter, and a 45-year-old father who died attempting to save his teen daughter from drowning.

The Carnegie Medal is given throughout the U.S. and Canada to those who enter extreme danger while saving or attempting to save the lives of others. With this announcement, the Carnegie Medal has been awarded to 10,476 individuals since the inception of the Pittsburgh-based Fund in 1904. Each of the recipients or their survivors will receive a financial grant. Throughout the 120 years since the Fund was established by industrialist-philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, more than \$45 million has been given in one-time grants, scholarship aid, death benefits, and continuing assistance.

The recipients are:

**Giovanna Cabrera\*** Houston  
**Michael Clark** Bel Air, Maryland  
**John Catania** New York City  
**Ronald L. Diehl, Jr.** Quakertown, Pennsylvania  
**José Sirven** Miami  
**John Dean Forbush\*** Gassaway, West Virginia  
**Marvin A. Pinckney** Enterprise, Alabama  
**Henry Norman Brooks\*** Hope, Maine  
**Austin Scott\*** DeRidder, Louisiana

**Kelly Bailey\*** Hornbeck, Louisiana  
**Troy Middleton McCollough\*** Merryville, Louisiana  
**Albert Evans** Lufkin, Texas  
**Shannon Sade O'Neal** Aurora, Illinois  
**Chase Michael Dupre** Chauvin, Louisiana  
**Jeff David Lapeyrouse** Bourg, Louisiana  
**Kenneth Jeremy Davis, Jr.** Owosso, Michigan  
**Kevin E. Huzsek** Somerset, Pennsylvania  
**John J. Stickovich** Cleveland

***\*deceased***

To nominate someone for the Carnegie Medal, complete an online nomination form at [carnegiehero.org](http://carnegiehero.org) 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: [facebook.com/carnegiehero](https://facebook.com/carnegiehero), Instagram: [@carnegiehero](https://instagram.com/carnegiehero), and Twitter: [@carnegie\\_hero](https://twitter.com/carnegie_hero).

### **Giovanna Cabrera, deceased**

During the early morning of February 3, 2024, 1-year-old Gabriel Peña was in his crib in the bedroom of his family's one-story house in Houston, when a fire started in the living room. Asleep in the living room was Gabriel's mother, 31-year-old sales clerk **Giovanna Cabrera**, and Gabriel's siblings, a 9-year-old brother and 6-year-old sister. The brother awoke to flames in the room and went to the front door to open it, but it was locked. He described the room as dark and smoky when Cabrera responded and unlocked the front door. As her two older children exited the house, Cabrera chose to remain inside. The brother saw Cabrera move into the hallway that led to Gabriel's room, but she did not come back out. At some point, Cabrera called 911 to report the fire but the call shortly disconnected. A neighbor heard noises outside and was alerted by the two children about the fire. She called 911 to inform first-responders that Cabrera remained inside the burning house with Gabriel. The fire grew to engulf the front half of the house by the time firefighters arrived 13 minutes after they were dispatched. Firefighters later found Gabriel and Cabrera on the floor at the bedroom doorway. Both died from smoke inhalation and burns.

### **Michael Clark**

Before dawn on April 10, 2024, 44-year-old Erica E. Paff entered the dimly lit, enclosed breezeway of her Bel Air, Maryland, home where she encountered a 31-year-old man wearing a ski mask and holding a .32 caliber revolver. He aimed the gun at Paff and ordered her to turn around, holding the gun about an inch from the back of her head. Paff's fiancé, 54-year-old business owner **Michael Clark** had just exited the shower at the house's opposite end when he heard Paff scream in the breezeway. He wrapped a towel around himself and moved toward the sound. At a point about 5 feet from the door to the breezeway, Clark saw Paff and the assailant through the door's window. He swung open the door and lunged at the assailant, reaching for the gun. Clark dipped his shoulder before he tackled the assailant and the two tumbled through an exterior door onto the patio in the backyard. As the assailant scrambled to his feet and began to flee, he turned and fired a single shot in the direction of Paff and Clark. The bullet grazed Paff. The assailant then fled the scene. Clark helped Paff back inside before he ran to his bedroom and retrieved his own pistol. He exited the house and searched for the assailant for several minutes before returning inside. Law enforcement used a drone to locate the assailant nearby 15 minutes after he had fled. Paff recovered. Clark was unharmed during the incident.

### **John Catania**

A 28-year-old woman was sitting on a subway car in New York City on Nov. 22, 2022, when a 6'4", 30-year-old man walked up to her and suddenly slashed her in the face with a 3-inch, bladed weapon described by police as a shank. **John Catania**, a 29-year-old art teacher from New York, stood across from the assailant as the train made its stop. He saw the first strike and yelled at the assailant, who ignored him. The assailant struck the woman again with the weapon. Catania rushed at the assailant and shoved him away from the woman, which allowed her to escape to an adjacent car. Other passengers on the moving train scattered as Catania grappled with the assailant, who stabbed him repeatedly in the head and back. As they struggled, Catania grabbed the assailant's legs and took him to the ground as the train reached a stop and the assailant fled the scene. Catania, who was covered in blood, also exited the train, where a bystander wrapped Catania's head with a sweatshirt and escorted him to police above the platform. He suffered 11 lacerations to the head and upper back, which were stapled and sutured shut. Catania recovered. The woman suffered a cut to her cheek and her hand. She too, recovered. The assailant was arrested on attempted murder, hate crimes, and other charges. At the time of the Hero Fund's investigation, he was awaiting trial.

### **Ronald L. Diehl, Jr.**

On Sept. 28, 2022, in Salisbury Township, Pennsylvania, flight instructor Philip McPherson, 34, had just taken off in a small airplane with a 49-year-old trainee when the engine partially lost power and fell from the sky, crashing into a large tree in front of a suburban home. The plane fell to the ground and flames immediately broke out. One of the wings broke off on impact with the tree, where it remained stuck in its branches and leaked fuel onto the burning engine below, feeding the flames. A 47-year-old carpenter, **Ronald L. Diehl, Jr.**, from Quakertown, Pennsylvania, had just arrived to work at the house when he witnessed the crash. He ran to the burning plane where he could see McPherson's foot sticking out of the mangled passenger compartment. He pulled on McPherson's leg and freed him from the wreckage. By the time Diehl dragged McPherson a few feet from the plane, it exploded and sent a fireball into the sky, along with burning debris in all directions. A piece of sheet metal struck McPherson and burned him. Diehl kicked it away and then dragged McPherson to safety about 60 feet to the home's driveway. At some point, McPherson informed Diehl that his student was still inside the plane. Diehl moved toward the cockpit, but the intense heat forced Diehl back. An ambulance arrived and took McPherson to the hospital. A coroner later determined the trainee had died upon impact with the tree. Diehl did not sustain any injury from the rescue.

### **José Sirven**

During a violent storm near Cutler Bay, Florida, on April 11, 2021, Carolina Olazabal, 38, was on a sinking boat with her family when she jumped off the vessel with her 11-month-old daughter into the water. The two of them were among eight people in the water who had jumped from the boat, 5 miles from shore. Neither Olazabal nor her daughter wore life jackets as Olazabal struggled to stay afloat in the water. Miami software engineer **José Sirven**, 25, was on his own boat with his wife, friend, and four children, when he saw a flare from the distressed boat. He eventually saw the sinking boat amid the choppy water and high waves. After he weighed his options with his friend to get the others to safety, Sirven ultimately decided to maneuver his boat toward the sinking vessel. After they picked up several passengers, Sirven saw Olazabal and her infant in the water. Sirven told his friend to pilot the boat before he dived into the stormy waters without a life jacket. He swam 20 feet to Olazabal, who submerged. He, too, submerged to grab her and held her above the surface as he called to his friend over the loud winds to drive the boat toward them. On his third attempt, the friend piloted the boat close enough for Sirven to swim with an exhausted Olazabal toward the back of the boat. He helped push her aboard and the baby was also pulled aboard to safety. Sirven took control of his boat, overloaded with 15 people now on board and piloted it through the storm to a marina. An ambulance took Olazabal and the baby to a hospital, where they were treated for swallowing water, hypothermia, and lack of oxygen.

**John Dean Forbush, deceased**

On May 1, 2022, a 44-year-old suicidal woman drove her sport utility vehicle containing her and her 8-year-old daughter from a parking lot into the Elk River near Sutton, West Virginia. As the vehicle submerged in swift, frigid water that was 10 feet deep, a witness called 911. A volunteer firefighter for a neighboring fire station, **John Dean Forbush**, 24, Gassaway, West Virginia, auto garage operator, learned about the incident while off-duty at his place of business and drove to the nearby scene. Forbush reported to the county's dispatch center when he arrived that the vehicle was completely submerged and that he could hear occupants banging on the vehicle's glass. Forbush entered the 58-degree water without rescue gear from one bank while another man entered from its opposite end. Responding first-responders tried to arrange for a rescue boat as Forbush struggled in the water and called for help. He submerged and did not resurface. After the girl exited the vehicle, the other man was closer and attempted to tow her to safety. She struggled with him and they separated, where she ultimately submerged. The man went downstream but a deputy entered and pulled him to safety. Other first-responders swam to the vehicle and removed the unresponsive mother from the vehicle. They moved her to the river bank, where she was pronounced dead from drowning. Authorities stated that the river moved swiftly due to water released from a dam. Once water levels were reduced by the dam crews, rescuers recovered the girl and Forbush hours later. They had both drowned.

**Marvin A. Pinckney**

A fire broke out in the first-floor garage of a two-story home in Enterprise, Alabama, on Sept. 4, 2022. Mary H. Griffin, 82, and her caretaker, Angela R. Byrd, 56, were in a den on the first floor when the flames ignited. Retired army aviation operations specialist **Marvin A. Pinckney**, 51, was outside his home nearby when he saw smoke coming from Griffin's garage. He knew Griffin utilized oxygen and a wheelchair which limited her mobility and called 911. As Pinckney ran to the home's back door, he saw flames in the garage. Pinckney entered through the back door and found the women in the den. As spreading flames blocked Pinckney's exit at the back door and heavy smoke blocked a clear pathway to the front door, Pinckney assisted Byrd in moving Griffin from an electric lift chair, which wasn't operating because power was out due to the fire, into her wheelchair and guided them toward a front bedroom to escape through a window. As they followed him, Byrd became disoriented in the smoke. Pinckney called out to guide her and moved ahead of the women to clear a path to safety. He lifted a bed to allow space for the wheelchair and Byrd pushed the chair near the window. Pinckney opened the window and pushed out the screen. He guided Byrd through the opening to others waiting outside, who pulled her the rest of the way out to safety. Pinckney then did the same for Griffin, helping her from the chair and pushing her upper body through the opening to others outside. He then also exited through the window. The house sustained extensive damage and was later torn down. Both women were taken by ambulance to the hospital. Byrd was treated for smoke inhalation and was released. Griffin remained at the hospital overnight. Pinckney was treated for minor smoke inhalation and recovered.

**Henry Norman Brooks, deceased**

A 13-year-old girl and her 12-year-old sister were playing on a large, algae-covered rock next to the St. George River in Union, Maine, on July 8, 2023, when she slipped and fell into the fast-moving water. The sister attempted to grasp the girl, but she, too, slipped into the water. Their father, a 45-year-old climate technology field mechanic, **Henry Norman Brooks**, of Hope, Maine, was with his 27-year-old son at a park picnic table nearby when they heard the girls cry for help. The brother grabbed a life and the two men entered the water. Brooks swam about 15 feet to his 13-year-old daughter, while the brother swam to the sister with the life jacket and towed her to wadable water on the opposite shoreline. The brother then swam back toward Brooks and the older girl. As he approached, Brooks forcefully thrust his daughter about 3 feet toward her brother. It was at that time that the brother lost sight of Brooks and grasped his sister. He towed her to wadable water, where emergency personnel waited. The trio were taken to a nearby medical center; none of them were injured during the incident. Brooks' body was recovered less than an hour later in water about 7 feet deep, some 300 feet downriver. He had drowned.

**Austin Scott, deceased, Kelly Bailey, deceased,  
Troy Middleton McCollough, deceased, and Albert Evans**

A group of people were caught in the strong current of the Sabine River near Merryville, Louisiana, just after sunset on Aug. 26, 2022. Bently Fountain, 4, and his 6-year-old sister Evangeline Fountain were with their mother Aria Briggs, 27, and 7-year-old Keeley Bailey when they reached a point, 20 feet from a beach where they struggled to swim. Briggs called for help as she could not touch the bottom and tried to keep all three children above the surface. Along the shore was skid steer operator **Austin Scott**, 29, of DeRidder, Louisiana, and his friend **Kelly Bailey**, a 28-year-old motorhand of Hornbeck, Louisiana, who was also Keeley's father and Briggs' partner. The two men entered the water and reached the quartet while Briggs held onto Evangeline. Scott collected Bently while Bailey grasped his daughter. The current carried all six downstream toward flooring business owner **Troy Middleton McCollough**, 57, of Merryville, who was with his wife walking their dog. They were alerted by the group's cries for help and McCollough advised his wife to call 911 as he moved to the water's edge. His wife left the immediate area to retrieve a phone and sought help from heater technician **Albert Evans**, 51, of Lufkin, Texas, and his wife, who were camping upstream near a boat ramp. Briggs later stated in an interview that McCollough entered the water in an attempt to reach Bailey and Keeley before he ultimately submerged. Keeley managed to grasp onto a limb protruding from the water and remained in a spot close to the opposite side of the river. Around this time, Scott, Bailey, and Bently went underwater and did not resurface. Evans saw Briggs struggling to stay above the surface with Evangeline as she tried to move toward Keeley. Evans removed his boots and swam to Briggs and her daughter. He reached them, but was unable to touch the bottom. With difficulty, Evans swam back toward the beach as he pulled Briggs with Evangeline in her arms, trying to keep her above the surface. As they got closer, Evans' wife helped Evangeline and Briggs to land. Although he was nearly exhausted, Evans used a two-seat float that his wife retrieved and re-entered the river. He swam to Keeley, who was moved further downriver. Evans placed Keeley atop the float and towed her back to safety on the beach. Briggs, Evangeline, Keeley, and Evans were not injured. First-responders searched the scene into the night without finding any of the missing four. Search crews eventually found McCollough the next day, while Scott and Bailey were found two days after. Bently was found three days after he submerged. All had drowned.

### **Shannon Sade O'Neal**

A group of several young friends were throwing a football near an ice-covered retention pond at the center of an apartment complex in Aurora, Illinois, on Nov. 23, 2022. Among them was 9-year-old Tyshaun LaFlore, who lived in the apartment complex. After the football was thrown onto the ice, Tyshaun walked on the surface to retrieve it when he felt the ice give way beneath his feet. He submerged in the cold water and struggled to swim. He attempted to grab the edge of the ice, but it kept breaking as he grasped at it. As this occurred, one of the panicked children ran to their apartment and alerted their mother and healthcare worker, **Shannon Sade O'Neal**, 34. She rushed to the water's edge and discarded her shoes. She stepped onto the ice and walked about 30 feet out when she heard the ice crack beneath her feet. She dived into the water where she covered about 12 feet and resurfaced within arm's reach of Tyshaun. The boy flailed and panicked in the water, but O'Neal managed to calm him down and instructed him to wrap his arms around her shoulders. He clung to her back and was instructed by O'Neal to reposition himself as she treaded water for several minutes then heard sirens approach. She called out to bystanders on the bank to help police find the pond while continued to tread water. Police rushed to the water's edge with emergency water rescue kits and entered the water. The police broke the ice and waded into the water before swimming to O'Neal and Tyshaun. Additional officers on land threw rescue ropes into the water and O'Neal was able to grasp one. The officers in the water and on the bank pulled O'Neal and Tyshaun to shore. Tyshaun was exhausted and cold, but otherwise unharmed. O'Neal suffered abrasions and cuts to her arms, as well as intermittent vomiting after she swallowed water. She recovered.

### **Chase Michael Dupre and Jeff David Lapeyrouse**

On Dec. 7, 2022, Kelin E. Martinez Mejia, 30, was driving in Gibson, Louisiana, with her two sons, Brayan L. Cardona Martinez, 4, and Osman Y. Cardona Suazo, 1, and her 17-year-old sister Kathrine A. Martinez Mejia. Martinez Mejia was following another vehicle that braked suddenly and caused her to swerve off the roadway, down an embankment, and into a marshy canal where her vehicle began to submerge. Project manager **Chase Michael Dupre**, 32, of Chauvin, Louisiana, and electrical engineer **Jeff David Lapeyrouse**, 42, of Bourg, Louisiana, were driving in separate vehicles behind Martinez Mejia when they saw the accident. They each pulled over to respond to the scene. Lapeyrouse could see Martinez Mejia banging on the rear, driver's-side window and went back to his vehicle to search for an object to break it. Dupre descended the bank, then waded and swam to the car. Water quickly filled the passenger compartment as Dupre grasped the handle of the rear, driver's-side door and forced it open. Lapeyrouse was unable to find an object to break the window and descended the bank to enter the canal. He swam to the vehicle at around the time Mejia Martinez moved to the rear passenger compartment and removed both boys from their car seats. She handed them both to Dupre, who briefly submerged while holding them, but quickly resurfaced. Dupre then handed both boys to Lapeyrouse who towed them to the bank and up to safety at the top of the embankment. Lapeyrouse re-entered the canal and swam behind Dupre to help him pull Martinez Mejia from the car. Dupre again reached inside the vehicle and pulled Martinez Mejia by her arms out of the vehicle. He handed her off to Lapeyrouse, who swam with her to the bank and ascended it with her. Kathrine moved to the rear passenger compartment and jumped into the water. She briefly submerged but resurfaced where Dupre was able to hold her above the water's surface. Lapeyrouse returned to help Dupre swim Kathrine to the bank and aided her up the embankment. Martinez Mejia was sore from injuries sustained in the accident, but she recovered. Dupre sustained minor cuts and scratches, but did not require treatment. Lapeyrouse and the others were not injured.

### **Kenneth Jeremy Davis, Jr.**

Just before midnight on March 31, 2024, 21-year-old Jacob Scott was driving his sedan in Owosso, Michigan, when the vehicle left a rural road and hit a fence and tree. The impact caused the vehicle's front end to catch on fire and push the burning engine into the driver's compartment. The engine broke Scott's ankle and pinned him inside. Owosso heavy equipment operator **Kenneth Jeremy Davis, Jr.**, 46, was sitting in his pickup truck with his partner when he saw the crash. While his partner called 911, Davis drove to the scene. Scott remained trapped in the car with his shoes and part of his pants briefly on fire. He called for help as Davis tried to open the vehicle's doors, but the wreckage had pinned them closed. Davis ran back to his truck and donned a pair of gloves. He punched the rear, passenger-side window six times until it broke and he climbed into the back seat. Davis grabbed Scott's arm and pulled him into the back seat with him. He backed himself through the window and reached back inside to pull Scott out. Despite Scott being 9 inches taller and 30 pounds heavier than him, Davis pulled him out through the window and dragged him 20 feet across a gravel driveway. The car's front tires burst and flames intensified. With help from a neighbor nearby, Davis dragged Scott farther away to safety. Scott suffered broken bones from the crash, including a fractured collarbone, but he was not burned. Davis suffered a swollen hand from punching the window but was otherwise uninjured.

### **Kevin E. Huzsek**

Flames broke out in the living room of a one-story house in Somerset, Pennsylvania, on March 26, 2024, with a woman inside who had limited mobility. Mary Ellen Fockler, 89, utilized oxygen and was in her bedroom in the subgrade basement when the flames broke out. Somerset police officer **Kevin E. Huzsek**, 50, was patrolling nearby and dispatched to the scene. He arrived to find the Fockler's son had exited from the main floor and alerted Huzsek that she was still inside. Huzsek entered through a side door on the main floor, but saw the flames had spread up a stairwell from the basement. He retreated and descended an outside stairwell. Huzsek kicked in a basement door and found heavy smoke inside that limited visibility. He crawled beneath the smoke to advance inside the house, but he shortly found a wall of flames on the outer wall of Fockler's bedroom. He retreated through the door and approached one of the bedroom's windows, breaking it with his police baton. Huzsek cleared the remaining glass from the window frame and called inside for Fockler. He heard Fockler's voice and climbed onto the window ledge and entered the home, head-first. He saw Fockler, disoriented, sitting on her bed. He lifted her from the bed and carried her to the window, where other officers outside the window helped her out to safety. Huzsek started to exit, but his duty belt became caught on the window frame. One of the officers returned and aided him out through the window opening to safety. Flames soon entered the room and engulfed it. Fockler was taken by ambulance to a hospital for serious burns. She died about two months later. Huzsek was taken by ambulance to the hospital for treatment of cuts and smoke inhalation. He recovered.

### **John J. Stickovich**

An 11-month-old child was trapped inside a burning building in Cleveland on May 6, 2024. Opal Siska was in her family's first-floor unit after fire broke out in the living room and blocked entry at the front door. **John J. Stickovich**, a 62-year-old repairman of Cleveland, was driving to work when he noticed smoke rising from the house. Stickovich saw no firetrucks and approached the scene. He found Opal's mother outside with Opal's twin sister. The mother told him that Opal was still inside. Stickovich ran to a side door and kicked it in before entering the home to find thick smoke that forced him back outside. Stickovich ran to the back of the house to ascend steps that led to an attached deck with access to a back door. He encountered smoke pouring from the open door that forced him to his hands and knees. On his stomach, he entered the house and crawled through the kitchen. Stickovich searched for Opal but was unable to locate her. He crawled out of the house and ran back to the mother to ask for Opal's location. After learning that Opal was near a baby gate at the far end of the kitchen, Stickovich rushed back into the house and crawled through the kitchen, waving his hands in front of him to feel for Opal. Again, he was unsuccessful. He saw flames flicker through the thick smoke as the heat intensified and conditions around him deteriorated. Stickovich was about to exit again when he heard Opal cry. Stickovich used his legs to launch himself in the direction of the sound and his left arm came down on Opal's leg. He grasped her and cradled her before he attempted to stand. The smoke again forced him to his knees. Crawling backward, he dragged Opal toward the back door. As he reached the door, Stickovich stood up and carried Opal out of the house to the emergency personnel outside. Opal inhaled smoke and suffered minor burns including to her face and a second-degree burn to her scalp. At the time of the Hero Fund investigation, she continued to recover. Stickovich inhaled smoke and was treated at a hospital. He recovered.

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