

Local man recognized for rescuing elderly neighbour from fire



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A Grand Valley resident is being recognized for his heroic actions that helped save the life of a neighbour last March.

Alan Mackie was presented with the prestigious Carnegie Hero Medal on Sunday (April 14) during a special ceremony at the Grand Valley Fire Department for rescuing his elderly neighbour from a house fire.

“This award is an amazing honour, I’m still taken aback by the whole thing,” Mackie told the Free Press. “I’m really not comfortable with the attention, and I didn’t understand it being such a big deal; it’s in front of you and you deal with it.”

The Carnegie Medal is an award given throughout the United States and Canada to individuals who risk death or serious physical injury to an extraordinary degree while saving or attempting to save the lives of others.

The first medals commemorating acts of heroism through the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission were given in 1904 following the Harwick Mine explosion in Pittsburgh, PA, which claimed the lives of 179 workers.

The Carnegie Medal for Heroism is considered one of the highest civilian awards for heroism in North America. Each year, the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission receives thousands of nominations for recipients but presents less than 100 awards.

Eric Zahren, president of the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission, spoke with the Free Press about Mackie's heroic act and what stood out to the commission.

“Alan's actions on that day were amazing, he saved a life. But beyond saving a life, he set a great example for all of us,” he said. “One thing that stood out to me immediately was the fact that he was such a good neighbour, which allowed him to be a hero. We all may not be heroes, but we can certainly be good neighbours. What also stood out was his resourcefulness, he utilized what he had available to be very efficient when every second counted.”

Shortly before midnight on March 2, 2023, Mackie was up watching television in his living room when he noticed a flickering light on his neighbour's driveway. Opening the door of his Gier Street home, Mackie discovered flames coming out of the same neighbour's roof.

Quickly retrieving his phone to call 9-1-1, Mackie provided the address to the dispatcher, who asked him if there was anybody inside the house. He was told to remain outside of the home, but to make as much noise as he could to alert the individual inside. After honking the horn of his car and banging on the side of the house, which resulted in no response, Mackie decided to kick in the front door.

Inside the home, Mackie discovered his neighbour in a bedroom and recounted, "I grabbed his walker, spun him around, sat him on his walker, and dragged him out backwards."

Outside the home, the two were met with an ambulance from Dufferin Paramedic Service, which transported the elderly neighbour to a local hospital. Firefighters from Grand Valley and Orangeville responded to the blaze, which was deemed non-suspicious by the Ontario Fire Marshall.

For those who know Mackie the best, his split-second decision to act that March evening was no surprise.

"He's always willing to help everybody and doesn't really think twice about helping others," said Mackie's daughter, Torrie. "It's nice for him to get the recognition."

In June of last year, Mackie was also presented with a Citation of Heroism Award from the Town of Grand Valley for his actions.

"In these situations, you don't know what you'll do until you get pushed into it. I'm so proud to know him and I hope that his example is an example for the rest of us," said Grand Valley Mayor Steve Solomon.