

Knights of Columbus Present Annual Tribute To Police, Fire, Rescue Units at Awards Night

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A renewed appreciation for the courage and commitment displayed by police and volunteer emergency service personnel resonated throughout the Knights of Columbus' Awards Night 2002 program last Thursday at St. Bartholomew the Apostle Interparochial School in Scotch Plains.

An annual tribute now in its 26th year, the program is presented by Father John S. Nelligan, Council No. 5730, which represents Scotch Plains and Fanwood. It lauds members of the

two towns' police, fire and rescue squad units for outstanding performance of duty during the previous year.

Among the honored guests were the Reverend Donald Hummel, Pastor of St. Bartholomew the Apostle Roman Catholic Church, who offered a "Prayer for Peace and Justice" as a prelude to the presentation of the Shield Awards.

Also on hand were Mayor Martin Marks of Scotch Plains and Mayor Louis Jung of Fanwood, each of whom expressed gratitude to the local units

for the service they have given not just to their hometowns but to those who needed their help following the tragic events of September 11.

Noting how the term "heroes" is often ascribed to Super Bowl or Olympic champions, Mayor Marks said America's recent tragedy has given people a whole new perspective on the meaning of the word.

"Now, more than ever, considering everything that has happened over the past few months, we are getting a greater appreciation of what a hero really is," he told Knights members, award recipients and others gathered for last week's ceremony.

"We have a new appreciation of the courage of people in the service of others," concurred Mayor Jung.

Grand Knight Patrick Harrington, who was at a business meeting on the 51st floor of Tower One of the World Trade Center when it was struck by a hijacked airplane, recalled seeing firefighters ascending the building's interior bearing some 100 pounds of gear as he and others made their way down.

He proffered that people do not fully appreciate the role emergency response units play until a tragedy of such magnitude occurs.

"We are very, very grateful to the police, fire and rescue departments in each of our towns and we are very

pleased to give these awards each year to recognize them for their efforts," he said.

In the first of the Shield Award presentations, Scotch Plains Police Chief Thomas O'Brien recognized Officers Paul Belford and Dennis Murphy for their successful apprehension last April of a man who had entered a Plainfield apartment and terrorized a family there.

The two officers had pursued the suspect, whom they believed was driving a stolen landscaping vehicle, from Scotch Plains into Plainfield.

"They have no qualms about risking their lives and I'm proud of them," said Chief O'Brien, adding that these sentiments extended to the rest of his department as well.

Robert Speth, President of the Scotch Plains Volunteer Rescue Squad, presented Susan Baldani, a Trustee with the squad, with a Shield Award in recognition of her 10 years with the organization, during which time she has responded to more than 1,100 calls. She is also currently in charge of orientation for new squad trainees.

From the Fanwood Police Department, Officers Russell Yeager and Michael Schilling were honored for having resuscitated a 72-year-old man who suffered a heart attack at the borough's Sun Tavern restaurant

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