

Weston Volunteer Fire Department and EMS honor their top volunteers

Written by Patricia Gay
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The Weston Volunteer Fire Department (WVFD) and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) are honoring volunteers James McGuire, Lyette Segerdahl, Diane Slovak and Lynn Pokorny for their exemplary community service.

James McGuire

The fire department named James McGuire its Firefighter of the Year. The award is given by the fire chief, deputy fire chief, assistant fire chief, and two captains to the firefighter they believe has made the most significant contribution to the fire department in the past year.

Mr. McGuire, a software engineer, was certified as a firefighter in Westport in 2007 and has been with Weston's fire department since 2009, where he serves as a firefighter and EMS first responder. He also helps with the department's computer system.

Weston Fire Chief John Pokorny called Mr. McGuire a "huge asset" to the department. "Jim really steps up and has been a great responder," he said.

"It's humbling to be selected," said Mr. McGuire. "There are so many great firefighters in the department and I look up to them. They make me a better firefighter," he said.

Mr. McGuire goes on a lot of fire calls and recently responded to the destructive house fire on Woods End Lane.

He recalled a call he went on last winter with Deputy Fire Chief Terry Blake. "There was a lot of snow and a man and his dog were trapped in back of a house. A slope had formed from the snow and the man kept falling because he couldn't climb it. We were able to rescue them," he said.

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As one of eight boys, Mr. McGuire grew up in a household where public service was the name of the game. His mother was a nurse and his father was involved with the New York Fire Department. The FDNY gave him a full scholarship so he could attend a Catholic High School. His performance there led him to earn a full scholarship to Hunter College and then UPenn.

One of his oldest friends died in the events of Sept. 11. "The FDNY gave me my start so I have always had an affinity toward fire departments and when I saw there was an opportunity to volunteer in Weston I jumped at it," he said.

Lyyette Segerdahl

Lyyette Segerdahl, a 20-year veteran of the WVFD, was honored with the President and Chief's award. This award goes to the member that has made the greatest all-around contribution to the department, encompassing administrative and staffing functions as well as field operations.

Ms. Segerdahl is both a firefighter and active member of EMS. She wears many hats in the department.



For the past 18 years, she has chaired the Weston Memorial Day parade, she is part of the Mid-Fairfield HazMat team and is the department's treasurer. She recently became the department's accountability officer and keeps track of firefighters, the calls they go on, and the length of time they spend on a scene.

Chief Pokorny said Ms. Segerdahl is also very helpful at the department's annual open house. "The open house is an important event and Lyyette comes every year and does face painting and talks about fire safety with kids. They love it," he said.

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She is a previous recipient of the President's Award as well as the David Geismar Award for EMS. In 2006, she was named Weston's Citizen of the Year. "There's a reason for that. Lyette has so much patience and continues to do a great job year after year," Chief Pokorny said.

Ms. Segerdahl moved to Weston 21 years ago from California. In 1962, when she was 12, she came to Florida from Cuba as part of Operation Pedro Pan, which allowed young children to flee the struggling country and emigrate to the United States. At the age of 43, she decided to volunteer with the WVFD and became the town's first female firefighter.

Diane Slovak

Weston EMS named Diane Slovak its EMT (emergency medical technician) of the Year. The award is based on overall team spirit, management skills and call response.



Ms. Slovak has served on Weston's EMS squad nearly five years. Although she is a single parent who runs her own construction business, Weston EMS Chief JT Sollazzo said he was impressed with the large number of calls Ms. Slovak goes on throughout the year.

"She takes the time to be available during the day and works well with her fellow EMTs," he said.

Ms. Slovak said it was an honor to be working with Weston EMS, whose motto is "Neighbors helping neighbors," because the group is dedicated to helping others in the community. "I truly feel this award is a reflection on every one of those volunteers in the department," she said.

Ms. Slovak has lived in Weston for 21 years. Her early career was in biomedical engineering. But 25 years ago, she started her own design and building firm, "The Construction Queen."

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Ms. Slovak is also a certified AKC judge for pointing dogs and an avid skeet and trap shooter. On June 22, she won the Connecticut State Trap Shooting Association competition and was named Lady II champion.

Lynn Pokorny

Lynn Pokorny is the EMT recipient of the David Geismar Community Service Award, named in honor of one of the town's EMS founding members who was on the squad for 37 years.



Mr. Sollazzo said the award is given to a volunteer who goes above and beyond the call of duty, and this year's recipient, Lynn Pokorny, fit the bill.

"Lynn has been a member of EMS for 17 years and has stepped up to the plate to help with community service," he said.

During her years with EMS, Ms. Pokorny has helped in many ways. For seven years, she was EMS treasurer and she is currently a crew chief. Although she works during the day, last year Ms. Pokorny was recognized as one of two EMTs who contributed the most hours of service. "Lynn helps with all aspects of volunteering, and is on standby when needed," Mr. Sollazzo said.

Ms. Pokorny grew up in Westport and is the assistant director of the Community Nursery School at the United Methodist Church in Westport. She is married to Weston Fire Chief John Pokorny.

While she didn't pursue it as a career, she had a desire to be a doctor, so when she saw an opportunity to volunteer with EMS and respond to medical emergencies, she took it. She called EMS the "taste" of the medical field she wanted in her life.

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"I appreciate the recognition and this award from EMS. It is an honor," Ms. Pokorny said.

Weston currently has 40 EMT volunteers, but Mr. Sollazzo said they can always use more. "We have an EMT class running shortly," he said.

For more information about Weston EMS, call 203-222-2647 or visit westonems.com.