

Sherman Fire Company Volunteers Receive ‘Unsung Hero’ Award

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Pictured from left are Doug Neal, Bob Crane, Joel Fisher and Matt Oehlbeck being recognized with New York State Assembly citations by Assemblyman Andy Goodell, R-Jamestown. P-J photo by Katrina Fuller

SHERMAN – The Stanley Hose Company was filled with laughter and joy on Thursday evening in celebration of four selfless individuals.

Bob Crane, Joel Fisher, Doug Neal and Matt Oehlbeck all received the Axel W. Carlson “*Unsung Hero*” Award from the Chautauqua Region Community Foundation. The award focuses on people who give back to their community and make an impact while expecting nothing in return.

The award has been given out to helpful heroes for 32 years.

Crane was nominated by Danielle Crane, his granddaughter. He is a volunteer at the Stanley Hose Company, an EMT, ALS and rescue captain.

Fisher, science teacher at Sherman Central School, is a volunteer at the fire company. He is a grant writer and is currently the financial secretary for the company.



Bob Crane, at right, shakes hands with his son, Doug Crane, at left after he handed him a donation check for the Stanley Hose Company at the Chautauqua Region Community Foundation Axel W. Carlson "Unsung Hero" award ceremony in Sherman. P-J photo by Katrina Fuller

Likewise, Neal is part of the EMS program with the company, and volunteers in other efforts, including the renovation of Sherman Community Church.

Oehlbeck has been a member of the company since he was 18, and is the current fire chief.

Community Foundation Executive Director Randy Sweeney welcomed the crowd to the fire hall and explained the history behind the award. Axel W. Carlson was born in Sweden in the 1890s and came to the Chautauqua County area when he was a teenager. After an illness which caused him to return to Sweden, Carlson came back to the area and laid down roots.

"He was the guy next door that always had something to help," Sweeney said.

After Carlson died in November 1981, he left a portion of his estate to the foundation, which created the award in his honor.

Sweeney said the committee that chooses the winners has a tough job figuring out who should receive the award each year due to all the qualified nominees.

Bob Young, chairperson of the committee, said this is the first time that four people have won the award. This year, however, the Stanley Hose Company nominees also nominated the others in the company, leading the committee to decide to award four of them the award.

Overall, Young said the award ceremony and process has been a pleasure.

State Assemblyman Andy Goodell, R-Jamestown, said the fire department volunteers deserved to be honored due to their hard work and sacrifice.

"We're honoring members of the fire department here, and we know they're all on call," Goodell said. "They're out there saving lives. So, guys, thanks so much for all you do."

He also presented each member with a citation recognizing their efforts from the New York State Assembly.

The recipients were honored with plaques commemorating their achievements, and each one received \$1,000 and \$500 to be awarded to a charity, or charities, of their choosing.

Crane selected Women and Children's Hospital of Buffalo and Stanley Hose Company; Fisher selected Women and Children's Hospital of Buffalo; Neal selected Stanley Hose Company and Sherman Community Church; and Oehlbeck selected Stanley Hose Company.

"Most of the people in this room could be standing up here receiving this award," said Fisher. "That's what I love about this place."

Each recipient thanked the community for their support, their families for understanding when duty called and also the community foundation for recognizing their efforts.

For more information on the foundation, visit crcfonline.org.