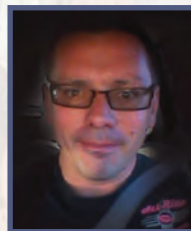


INDUSTRY HEROICS

2017 American Towman Medal Recipients



Bobby Unruh, All-Rite Towing & Repair; Tucumcari, New Mexico (receiving the Medal for her son was Linda Unruh, the owner and founder of All-Rite Towing)



On February 19, 2017, Bobby was dispatched with his service vehicle to do an oil cleanup where All-Rite's heavy-duty operator Chad Becerra was preparing to tow a heavy-duty truck on Interstate 40. Bobby took a trainee with him. At the scene, he positioned the trainee on the non-traffic side of the vehicles, then got behind the trucks to direct traffic to move over a lane while Becerra was working. Just moments before, Linda Unruh had learned from the dispatcher where Bobby was, and called him, urging him to take all precautions out there. He told her "Mom, no one is going to get hurt on my watch." Then, looking down the near lane, he could tell an oncoming tractor-trailer wasn't going to move over. Becerra had just come out from under the truck that was leaking the oil and had moved to the toolbox. He was grabbing for the air hose when he heard Bobby shout a warning. Becerra looked up and saw the oncoming 18 wheeler. After shouting his warning, Bobby bolted toward to his fellow operator, a friend he had known for 10 years, instinctively intent on protecting him. At 37 years old and a 20-year veteran of working the white line, Bobby was fully aware he had thrown himself into jeopardy. Seeing the truck roaring towards them, Becerra turned his back to the wrecker just before Bobby pushed him into the toolbox compartment, then sprinted to the front of the wrecker. The oncoming semi ripped the toolbox door off its hinges and then clipped Bobby at the hip, sending him airborne, his head coming down on the truck's mirror. When Becerra stood back onto the road, he saw Bobby was gone. "If it wasn't for Bobby," Becerra told American Towman, "It would have been me."

American Towman Medal

Eddie Whiteman, Eddie's Collectibles; Erie, Pennsylvania



On December 11, 2016, Eddie was doing paperwork close to 3 a.m. after some police tows when he heard a popping sound coming from the yard. He checked the security cameras and saw some cars were on fire at the fence line.

(A disgruntled man set the fires after his vehicle had been impounded in the weeks prior. He has since been arrested on arson and other charges.) Eddie's girlfriend called 911; she pleaded with him not to go out. He said he had to do something because a family lived in a building on the other side of the fence from the flames. He hopped into his truck, backed into the fire, got his wheel lift under a flaming 2016 Infinity and pulled it away, still blazing. Moments later the fire department showed up and took control of the scene.

American Towman Medal

Aaron Palacios, Western Towing; San Diego, California



On July 8, 2017, Aaron was driving his tow truck on Interstate 5 when he suddenly was confronted with a wrong-way driver in a sports car that hit him head-on. The impact caused the vehicles to explode in a ball of flame. Without regard for his own injuries, Aaron got himself out of his tow truck and ran towards the burning sports car. Witnesses said they saw Aaron attempting to free the driver from the burning sports car even as his own clothing was on fire. As the fire raged, it became too much to continue rescue attempts. Aaron ran up a nearby embankment to save his own life from additional burns and explosions. He suffered burns to more than 50 percent of his body and was in a medically induced coma for many weeks.

American Towman Medal

David Lowery, Lowery's Wrecker Service; Dyersburg, Tennessee



On July 19, 2017, on Interstate 155, a semitrailer crashed with a mowing tractor whose operator was unresponsive; the semi was on its side over an embankment with the driver pinned inside. The vehicle was unsteady as well. Within minutes of his arrival, troopers said David was able to secure the tractor-trailer for a rescue of the driver to begin. David also climbed into the cab and freed the driver's legs from under the dash and steering wheel. The trucker was then airlifted to the hospital. "I truly believe that with the speed of his arrival time and knowledge of his wrecker, Mr. Lowery saved this man's life," said

State Trooper Sgt. William Butler III. The mower operator who died was a lifelong friend of his, and David assisted the trooper in delivering the death notification to family.

American Towman Medal

Al Pinheiro, Active Towing; Kitchener, Ontario, Canada



On May 17, 2017, Al Pinheiro helped police catch a murderer by intervening during a gunfight. While listening to a police scanner, he heard reports of a police shootout following a routine traffic stop. Al drove his truck into the suspect's car as the man was shooting at police officers. The collision dazed the man, and gave police enough time to arrest him. Not only did Al's actions aid officers under fire, the shooter they arrested was a suspect in a murder case that was quickly going cold. That criminal has since been sentenced to life in prison. Al was honored by Waterloo Regional Police for his courage in protecting officers.

American Towman Medal

Jeffrey Bell, Nick's Towing Service; Rutherford, New Jersey



On June 2, 2017, Jeffrey was on a tow assignment, traveling west on Route 80, when he saw a large puff of dust and debris fly up about 100 yards down the road in front of him. A woman driving a small SUV, accused of driving drunk, struck a man on a motor scooter. "I immediately turned on my emergency lights and positioned my tow truck to protect the scene," Bell said. He told the woman to stay at the scene and found the scooter rider knocked clear to the woods past the shoulder. He immediately called state police, and helped perform CPR with the first trooper there until more troopers arrived. Unfortunately, the man did not survive.

American Towman Commendation

Richard "Bubba" White, White's Gulf County Wrecker Service; Panama City, Florida



On September 3, 2017, the Florida Highway Patrol called Whites to an accident that closed down all eastbound lanes of travel after one semitrailer had rear-ended another, causing his rig to rollover and careen down an embankment into a ravine. Bubba, a 2012 American Towman Silver Star recipient, backed his 75-ton rotator down close enough to rig and stabilize the cab; then he showed rescuers the cut points they needed to free the trucker. "We had to cut the seat apart with a Sawzall, and we had to spread the cab open to get the man's feet out," Bubba said. Firefighters gave Bubba total credit for saving the trucker's life. "It was a team effort, all working against the clock," Bubba said.

American Towman Commendation

Fred Deluca, Sterry Street Towing; Attleboro, Massachusetts



On May 25, 2016, a tractor-trailer crashed on Route 95 and state police requested swift response from the Sterry Street Towing to assist the two fire companies already on scene. Firefighters were using hydraulic tools, cribbing and chainsaws to free the heavily entrapped driver, with little progress. After he formulated a plan and shared it with firefighters, Fred quickly began rigging a snatch block off a tree and a main line to the truck's cab to secure it to where firefighters could extricate the trucker, who survived. One fire captain said Fred was "instrumental in freeing the trapped driver."

American Towman Commendation

John Abel, Abel Brothers Towing; Malvern, Pennsylvania



On September 19, 2017, a large quarry transporter truck fell about halfway down the wall of an enormous quarry and was resting upside down with the operator still in the machine. Abel's was called in to secure the transporter for rescuers to get the driver out safely. "They used my truck to rig off of and used my line to go down," Abel said. "The speed with which I arrived and helped to secure was essential to the driver's survival." "As always John Abel and his crew can be counted on to assist us," the police chief said.

American Towman Commendation

John Collins, Jason Sullivan and Ronnie Doss, Morton's Towing and Recovery; Clarksburg, Maryland



John



Jason



Ronnie

On March 16, 2017, a cement truck flipped while navigating a curve, crashed into a utility pole and knocked down power lines, pinning the driver inside. The Shock Trauma Go Team was called to the scene. The trauma team worked around the pole, downed wires and remnants of the truck cab to cut metal while Morton's stabilized the mixer and lifted weight off of the driver. "We had to bring it up perfectly straight, couldn't tweak it at all because of the way the driver was trapped," Collins said. "His head was pinned under the top of the door with the roof pinched down on him." It took more than two hours to free the driver, successfully.

American Towman Commendation

Silver Star

The Joe Doblmeier Memorial Award

Address Read by Martin Doblmeier on Festival Night, November 18th, 2017

by Steve Calitri

The namesake of the Joe Doblmeier Memorial Award overcame the crippling effects of polio to raise a family by operating a trade show business. Joe teamed with American Towman back in 1989 to found the Exposition that became, and still is, the greatest tow show in the world. The words on the medal known as the Silver Star, were cast by Joe's life: Overcoming Adversity, and, Inspiring an Industry.

When our Silver Star recipient was 14, he and his older brother pulled the car over for a stranded motorist, and the younger proceeded to attach jumper cables to the stalled car's battery. That's when the vehicle was sideswiped by a passing car, landing this 14-year-old in the hospital with a busted fibula and tibia below the knee, broken kneecap and fractured pelvis. Little did he know then that this life-threatening experience would prime his character for the



2016 Silver Star Recipient, Eric Luchini, congratulates 2017 Silver Star, Mike Corbin

campaign of his life.

Fast forward to 1999, when a delivery truck plowed into his car, putting him in and out of the hospital repeat-

edly for a year while he mended two broken vertebrae, a broken hip and a cracked pelvis again. He was finally released with a bolt of titanium in his spine and a protective metal cage screwed into his back. To this day, his hip has barely enough bone to hold his leg.

He continued providing for his family as a building contractor, having learned the carpentry trade in his twenties. He engaged in this physical work during the week with severe pain in his back and hip, and during the weekends he pursued the career that was his passion, composing songs and performing them.

American Towman sought him out in 2011 for help in creating the first-ever Towman Ballad, "The Road Calls." Other songs with a towing theme followed, including "Booms in the Sky," which became the anthem for the Spirit Ride.

When he and his wife, Ilce, were approached to command the ground-support team for the Spirit Ride, he understood that the schedule would be grueling and the driving hard on his back and hip. The job wouldn't pay much, but he liked that he would get to sing his songs and play his guitar.

He went to work building the custom casket that was called Spirit. When he got Spirit transported to artist Cecil Burrowes, he then got to work phoning the towers who had signed up for the Ride. Meanwhile, he collaborated in creating the song that would help rally the industry around the project, "Bless the Spirit Riders." When the casket was delivered to Las Vegas, Mike was on-hand with his band for the concert that kicked off the Spirit Ride's Maiden Run.

The Ride officially began on June 1 in Haverhill, Massachusetts, the first of 134 Rides where Mike and Ilce performed, staging the ceremonies, participating in them, recording them and becoming the Ride's ambassadors before TV cameras ... all while engaging with the many first responders who showed up to participate, and of course, bringing up the rear with the Spirit Ride motor coach in all the processions that followed the ceremonies.

Throughout the summer and fall, the Corbins led the towers in making the Rides happen. The Corbins averaged 10 ceremonies a week, two and sometimes three per day (and in New Mexico, presiding over six relays in

one day in 110-degree weather).

In Michigan, the Corbins made the effort to include a tower in Muskegon who wanted in, having been struck himself while loading a car onto his flatbed a couple years ago. The impromptu detour cost the Corbins two scheduled days off, but earned valuable TV coverage in that area.

When the Ride swung back up into Missouri, there was a call from Amy Gresham in Kansas City who said she'd do anything to have "Spirit" at the annual vigil for her son Blake, who was killed on the roadside three years earlier. She was told, however, the Ride couldn't put the route in jeopardy, nor Corbin's health, detouring 300 miles and back. Not only did Corbin's bones need another scheduled two days' rest, but he was under a doctor's care for a racing heart. There was always the question hanging of how long he could hold together.

Corbin was told of Gresham's request and the explanation for turning it down. There may have been a slight pause in the phone conversation, and then, "Tell her we'll go."


The Spirit Ride in Kansas City had 100 trucks in the procession from the Kansas City Speedway to the site of the vigil for Blake Gresham. It meant the Corbins would work the Rides through 12 days straight without a day off. But the Ride earned television coverage in Kansas City as it did in

most of the cities in that stretch.

Mike has witnessed the Ride being embraced by first responders all around the country, and the action of police escorting Spirit onto the carrier bed, directed by the Corbins, has been a staple image of the Spirit Ride wherever it went.

The songs that Mike sang in the ceremonies paying tribute to first responders has played no small role in the strengthening of ties among first responders and tow operators, and no small role in the decisions by TV producers to air the story on the nightly news.

It may not be accurate to say that one man made this mission successful, for there have been many men and women around the nation who have contributed to the Spirit Ride's success. But it would be accurate to say that no one has done more for the Spirit Ride and its mission than this one man.

And so, for Overcoming Adversity and Inspiring an Industry, American Towman presents Mike Corbin the Joe Doblmeier Memorial Award: the Silver Star. 



Heroes saluted by Towman Order on Festival Night.



Towman Order "Black Shirts" salute the new Captains of the Order.