

Industry Heroics



2014 American Towman Medal Recipients



John Reese; John Speaks, Mike's Auto Body & Towing; Thurmont, Md.

The Incident: On the chilly, drizzly evening of March 20, 2014, manager John Reese and John Speaks responded to a minivan submerged in a creek in Emmetsburg, Maryland. The driver was still in the vehicle in three feet of water, which was more than 10 feet from the shoreline and more than 300 feet from the road.

The towmen tied themselves off to a tree and entered the fast flowing water to get the driver out before rigging the van. The air temperature itself was in the 20s.

"The sheriff on-scene stayed nice and warm and dry in his squad car," Reese said.

The freezing, rushing water got to be waist-deep at times for the men, who worried about hypothermia for the victim who'd been in the car nearly 25 minutes by the time they arrived. After helping him safely navigate the rushing water, dips, crags and boulders back to safely, Reese once again waded back in to rig and plan the complicated winching out of the minivan.

"We set one truck on a bridge to get the minivan out ... it took everything—winch lines, straps—on both trucks to rig it and get it back," Reese said.

"I am glad to have employees that can handle these types of calls and that they and the equipment come back home safely," said owner Mike Jensen.

For the simple act of bravery, we recognize John Reese and John Speaks with the Towman Medal.



John Reese



John Speaks

American Towman Medal

Tim Rudolph, Pro-Tow Auto Care; Hackensack, Minn.

The Incident: The snow was coming down fierce and near white-out conditions caused even plow service to be suspended in some areas of northern Minnesota on January 25, 2014. Owner Tim Rudolph, a member of the Towman Order and Towman 500, was just returning from a night out in formal wear and had just taken back the phones when a AAA call came in at 10:01 p.m. for an elderly man crashed in a ditch who was running low on oxygen.

Without changing, he left for the shop to get his truck and get to the scene. He called the victim direct and kept him on the line while he could en-route. It was roughly six miles to the shop, then another 15 in his medium-duty wrecker to the scene. AAA time-stamped him there in 21 minutes at 10:22.

"I raced to the scene," Tim said. The Escalade was packed hard and deep into four feet of snow on the side of the rural road, and Rudolph dug out the front bumper as fast as he could to hook it and drag the SUV back to the road.

"The man's oxygen bottle was empty when I arrived; as soon as I got him out, I had to convince him to leave the scene and get to his lake house nearby to get a new bottle."

When Tim got his gear packed, he went out to the house to check on the victim who thanked him tearfully.

"It made me feel good again about what we do; the calls we take and the lives we impact," Rudolph said.

For the simple act of bravery, we recognize Tim Rudolph with the Towman Medal.



American Towman Medal

Paul Aleksandrowski, B&C Towing; Newark, N. J.

The Incident: In October 2012, as Hurricane Sandy was building force, B&C Towing was scrambling to protect its offices and move equipment to safer ground as the water unexpectedly began backing up from nearby run-off sewers negating previous sandbagging and preparations.

As Paul was moving equipment in the yard, a Newark police officer flagged him down to help with their rescue efforts for two police officers and two civilians trapped by floodwaters at the nearby armory, about two miles away. Previous police efforts to reach them by boat and garbage truck were both negated. Paul jumped into his Case W24 bucket loader and headed toward the scene as water quickly rose even beyond the tires of the machine. As the rising tide added to the driving rain, water rose to where Paul couldn't even make out the tires beneath the waterline.

"It hit me how real what we were doing was. The officer who was riding with me asked if we were alright. I said, 'As long as we keep moving, we're alright.'"

When they reached the gun range, the four trapped people were clinging to a fence above the guard shack. Paul got in as close as he could for them to climb into the bucket to bring them back to safety and paramedics who treated them for hypothermia, and one of the men for shock.

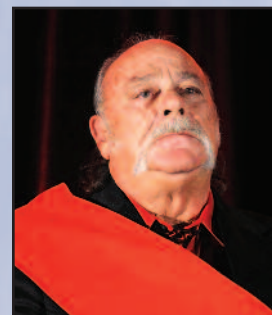
For the simple act of bravery, we recognize Paul Aleksandrowski with the Towman Medal.



American Towman Medal

Tex Randall, Randalls Towing; Apache Junction, Ariz.

Incident: On the morning of June 20, 1994, Tex Randall was on the side of rural U.S. 60 loading a burned car for the Arizona Department of Public Safety. As he was clearing the scene, he heard the squealing tires and saw the impact of a speeding Camaro as it smashed into the rear of the squad car in front of him, pinning his friend, DPS Agent Bill Reno.



The impact chopped one of Reno's legs off completely and severely damaged the other. Tex jumped into action to help his friend on the roadside, applying a tourniquet as best he could to stem the bleeding and then tried to radio for help, but the impact was so severe, it knocked out all the radio equipment in the squad car. Tex used his Nextel system to contact his son Bo at the shop in Tempe and relay enough information to demand paramedics and air evac ASAP. Medical assistance was on-scene in 10 minutes.

If not for Tex's quick actions, Reno may have lost his life instead of just one leg. After many surgeries, rehab and a prosthetic leg, Reno worked hard and made it back onto DPS two years later. He and DPS credited Tex Randall for that chance. When Tex died in 2001, the DPS officers honored him and his family by serving as his pallbearers.

For the simple act of bravery, we recognize Tex Randall posthumously in presenting his son, Bo Randall, the Towman Medal.

American Towman Medal

Larry Cyrus, Eitel's America's Towing & Transport; Orient, Ohio

The Incident: In May of 2011, a semi-tanker carrying isopropylbenzene rolled over on I-270 during morning rush hour in Columbus, Ohio. The tanker was leaking the highly flammable chemicals, endangering the hundreds of passing commuters as well as rescue workers on-scene. First responders were unable to stop the leak, so Cyrus and his crew were ready with Plan B to upright the tanker. Cyrus and his crew were outfitted with firefighting gear and self-contained breathing apparatus, adding 40 lbs. to each man, to enter the hazardous atmosphere for the recovery.

"Larry ... meticulously pulled off one of the smoothest operations I have ever witnessed," said Deputy Fire Chief James Cannell Jr. "Larry's precision performance that day saved countless lives and property."

For the simple act of bravery, we recognize Larry Cyrus with the Towman Medal.

American Towman Medal



The American Towman

Silver Star

The Joe Doblmeier Memorial Award

Garry Leach, United Towing Services; Alberta, Canada



Garry Leach got into towing in Winnipeg with United Towing in the early 1970s; he served as a Winnipeg police officer at the same time until he put towing on hold to focus on police work and become a detective. After an outstanding career with the police service, he retired and went back to his first love: towing and recovery.

In August 2013, Garry was seriously injured on a scene loading a sea container when some rigging snapped and he was hit in the face by the recoiling chain and snatch block. His injuries were life threatening, including a fractured mandible, palate, ocular bones, nose and ribs. His face was severely lacerated from his lower lip to his Adam's apple and an emergency tracheotomy was necessary to preserve his airway and permit breathing. The rear of his scalp was lacerated when he was thrown backwards onto the pavement and required 47 staple-sutures. After serving as a police officer for 20 years, he had not had a brush with death like it.

The declared weight of the container contents was 40 percent of its actual weight; it was believed to have been misrepresented to obtain a lower service rate.

Treatment included an emergency air evacuation following basic life saving stabilization at the local hospital, an induced coma to survive transport, six days in an intensive care unit before being brought out of the coma and another 17 days in hospital care and specialty units before being discharged.

"He has overcome extreme adversity from his injuries, and continues to contribute to the company's daily operations and success with a dedicated work ethic under his physical limitations," said his son, Colin Leach.

Since the accident, Garry has returned to work and continues to influence his business and the industry. Within a few months of the accident, he attended Miller Industries' Rotator School, continued with filming and promotion of Discovery Channel's "Highway Thru Hell" program, purchased and drove heavy wreckers solo back to the operation from all over the U.S. He has also participated in a

number of complicated heavy-duty recoveries during varying weather and seasonal conditions. During the 13 months since his accident, he has attended numerous medical treatments and appointments; the recovery process is expected to go another two years yet with more reconstructive surgeries.

For overcoming adversity and inspiring this industry, we recognize Garry Leach as a 2014 recipient of the Silver Star.

Randy Langer, Langer Towing; Independence, Mo.



Randy Langer started Langer Tow 26 years ago in Kansas City, Mo. According to his wife, Cynthia, he was a "typical" operator/owner who worked long hours and towed day and night. Due to diabetes and other health issues that affected him during the 1990s, he lost his eyesight in 2002 after a surgery for diabetic retinopathy—he'd been

running calls until the day before.

He worked as a driver up until he lost his eyesight; then he continued to go into the office to dispatch calls. He was also teaching safety procedures to operators, ordering parts for repairs for the trucks and arranging maintenance, and problem-solving throughout all aspects of the business.

In 2005, he suffered kidney failure and needed dialysis three times a week, but even after a long morning of dialysis he insisted on going into the office and dispatching calls afterwards. He received a kidney transplant after five years of dialysis.

Cynthia said, "He was so passionate about the towing industry and his business and giving business advice to other tow owners, or drivers. ... That's what kept him going. To stay alive on dialysis, he looked forward to get to work everyday to do his part, even though we didn't know what tomorrow would bring for him because tomorrow is never promised."

For overcoming adversity and inspiring this industry, we recognize Randy Langer as a 2014 recipient of the Silver Star.