

DEAL ISLAND/CHANCE VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY
P. O. BOX 129
DEAL ISLAND ROAD
DEAL ISLAND, MARYLAND 21821

Gladhill-Colburn Award
Recommendation

The Deal Island/Chance Volunteer Fire Company would like to recommend the following members for the Gladhill-Colburn Award for an Outstanding Act of Heroism based on the information provided below.

Donald Ford, Chief
J.R. Walters - Firefighter/EMT
Ryan Evans – Firefighter/EMT

On January 4th, 2010, the Deal Island/Chance VFC received a rescue call at approximately 6:15 PM. The call for help indicated that one of two watermen, in the vicinity of Deal Island Harbor, had fallen overboard and was missing. The weather had been below freezing for several days and the waters surrounding Deal Island in the Tangier Sound were almost frozen solid for over a half mile off shore. The temperature this evening was below freezing, the winds were blowing between 20 to 25 knots and it was pitch black out. The exact location of the waterman's boat was not known.

Chief Donald Ford, J.R Walters and Ryan Evans responded to the call as a crew and met at the Deal Island Harbor with the recently acquired 23 ft. fire/rescue boat. The weather was treacherous, and in retrospect, Chief Ford has questioned his decision to leave the harbor, but at the time the urgency of a man overboard under such conditions took precedence over their own safety. As they left the harbor, another waterman boarded the fire/rescue boat and pleaded to help with the rescue. It was the father of the waterman who called in the alarm from the boat. His son was the man left on board the missing boat. They left the harbor in search of the boat and the two watermen, one missing and one still on board. The initial call for help reported an approximate location near the Wenona Harbor and that's where the rescue crew headed. Other potential rescuers were at the harbor but couldn't take their boats out due to the icy conditions in the waters. DNR and the rescue helicopter had been notified but were not on location at that time. The fire/rescue boat searched with their lights for over an hour to no avail. The chief was about to call off the rescue due to the treacherous conditions. The boat was icing up, the waves were slamming over the bow of the boat and they were losing power for their lights and radar. Just before heading in, they caught a glimpse of something shining ahead. They headed toward it and found the waterman's boat they were searching for. They were now a mile and a half from the original search site. The boat had drifted that far since the original call for help. When they approached the boat, the waterman on board was standing as if in a daze, not really reacting to their

approach. Contact was made to the authorities by radio and Trooper 4; the police helicopter came to the location and assisted by lighting the area. In the high winds and waves, the rescuers faced their biggest challenge of the night. They needed to come along side the other boat in what seemed to be an almost impossible task. With help from above, they were able to transfer the boy's father, also a waterman, aboard the other boat to bring it back to safety. There was no sign of the missing waterman who had been overboard for over 3 hours by that time.

This was a miraculous rescue of one waterman by these three firemen. They undoubtedly risked their lives that night. They exhibited great courage with their heroic actions, well above the call of duty. DNR and local authorities had continued search efforts almost daily for the missing waterman. Sadly, the other waterman was not found until several weeks later when his body washed ashore, not far from the rescue site.

The purpose of the Gladhill -Thompson Award is to recognize volunteers for outstanding contributions to the Maryland State Firemen's Association and their community. Based on the information provided, the three volunteer firemen, Donald Ford, J. R. Walters and Ryan Evans certainly have met the criteria and are excellent candidates to receive this Gladhill-Thompson Trophy on behalf of the Deal Island/Chance Volunteer Fire Company. Please accept this letter as our recommendation.

Respectfully submitted by:

James Corbett, Vice President
Deal Island/Chance Volunteer Fire Company

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