



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR  
Catharine Young

## Hinsdale Resident's Grandfather Honored 90 Years After His Death

CATHARINE YOUNG October 14, 2011



Senator Catharine Young and Hinsdale residents Jeff and Susan VanDeCar stand near the Fallen Firefighters Memorial Wall in Albany on Tuesday with other members of the VanDeCar family. Almost 90 years after fighting a fire that took his life, Jeff's grandfather, Charles H. VanDeCar, was officially inducted and included among the 2,366 names that are etched on the Memorial Wall.

Idents: l-r: Senator Young, Jeff and Susan VanDeCar, Deborah and Eric Haslun (Jeff's sister & brother-in-law) and John VanDeCar (Jeff's brother).

ALBANY – Almost 90 years after fighting a fire that ultimately took his life, Hinsdale resident Jeff VanDeCar's grandfather finally received the recognition that his family knew

he deserved.

On Tuesday, Jeff, who is a Deputy County Administrator for Cattaraugus County, his wife Susan, siblings, Deborah and John, and their special guest, Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I – Olean), joined a crowd of hundreds at this year's Fallen Firefighters Memorial Wall induction ceremony in Albany to honor nine brave firemen who lost their lives in the line of duty.

Jeff's late grandfather, Charles H. VanDeCar, is now among the heroes whose names are etched into the memorial wall to forever be officially remembered for his service.

"Our grandfather Charles died in 1922 as a result of a tragic fire in the City of Troy, New York. Charles was a father, grandfather and a great grandfather to a family who never knew him. On this special day he finally was recognized for his bravery and dedication. This will be a wonderful memory of our grandfather for our family to embrace. We only wish that our Dad could have been a part of this ceremony," said Jeff VanDeCar.

The induction is the culmination of a process that began before Jeff's father died in 2008, when vital missing pieces to the family's long-time efforts to file an official application to include their grandfather on the Memorial were discovered – an obituary, notice of death, and workmen's compensation papers.

Jeff's sister Deborah Haslun and brother-in-law Eric had been searching archives for years in hopes of finding the required documentation. After the death of Jeff's father in September of 2008, a box of his personal papers was given to Deborah. Included in the documents was exactly what was needed for the application submission.

"If not for the unending perseverance of my sister and her husband, this day would not come to fruition," said Mr. VanDeCar.

The paperwork finally proved that Charles had died at 26 years of age as a result of his injuries sustained when the second floor of the building collapsed while fighting the fire at the Rome and Cohen Rag Shop in Troy, New York on May 1, 1922. Charles would succumb to his injuries four months later. The same fire had taken the lives of two other firemen, Lieutenant William J. Christopher and Firefighter Joseph P. McCann, whose names appear on the Memorial Wall.

With the help of the City of Troy's Fire Department, in 2009 Deborah filed the initial application with the hopes of including their grandfather on the Memorial's list of names, but the application was tabled by the Fallen Firefighters Selection Committee pending the request for additional information.

In 2010 the VanDeCar family applied again on behalf of their grandfather, but was met with further setbacks. As a result of a new selection criteria rule instituted that same year, firefighters would no longer be considered for induction if their line of duty death did not occur within five years of the application for consideration by the Selection Committee.

"My grandfather died 90 years ago, so automatically this new five-year rule took him permanently out of the running. We felt the rule was arbitrary in nature and completely contradicted the original purpose of the Memorial, to honor all that perished in the line of duty." said Jeff VanDeCar.

The VanDeCar's immediately appealed the decision of the Committee, and shortly after, Jeff sought the assistance of Senator Young in an effort to get the Selection Committee to reconsider the criteria that had led to the exclusion of his grandfather.

"My heart went out to the VanDeCar family when Jeff asked for help. I immediately reached out to the Secretary of State and reminded her that the single purpose of the Memorial

when it was created was to include every firefighter who died in the line of duty. Denying Charles this honor was a travesty.” said Senator Young.

As a result of the VanDeCar family’s persistence, Senator Young’s intervention and additional lobbying efforts by other firefighter groups, the decision of the Selection Committee was overturned and the five-year rule since has been abandoned.

“I am thankful to Senator Young for stepping in and appreciate the efforts by everyone who helped our family get this recognition for our grandfather. He was a hero and deserved to be officially remembered that way. The Senator has and continues to be so supportive of New York’s firefighters and first responders” said Jeff VanDeCar.

“I am very grateful to my sister and brother-in-law for their tremendous commitment, the support of the Troy Fire Department and the decision of the Fallen Firefighter’s Selection Committee,” added Mr. VanDeCar.

On Tuesday, Senator Young also presented Jeff and his family with a Senate Resolution that honors their grandfather Charles and officially recognizes his inclusion among the 2,366 names that align the Fallen Firefighters Memorial Wall.

“We honor Charles for his service and the incredible sacrifice he made on behalf of his community. We owe him our deepest gratitude,” she added.

Charles was born in 1896 and lived in the City of Troy his entire life. He was remembered as one of the most popular members of the Troy Fire Department, having served as Driver of Pumper 11 at the Read Firehouse.

In addition to Charles’s heroism as a firefighter, he served on the Mexican border with Company C, Second New York Infantry, and later was deployed overseas during World War I.

The Memorial Wall, officially dedicated in 1998, is located on the Empire State Plaza in Albany. Standing in front of the Wall is a bronze sculpture that depicts two firefighters carrying an injured colleague.

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