



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Ritchie Presents Liberty Awards to Heroic State Trooper and Oswego County Sheriff's Deputy

BRIAN DWYER August 20, 2018

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At the New York State Police Troop D Headquarters in Pulaski Monday, State Senator Patty Ritchie presented New York State Trooper Aaron Eastwood and Oswego County Sheriff's Deputy Phillip Illardi with the Senate Liberty Award for actions that saved the lives of two men whose fishing boat was taking on water while on the Oneida River.

“One of the most terrifying, helpless feelings a boater can experience is being out on the water while the boat is taking on water. Fortunately for everyone involved, Trooper Eastwood and Deputy Illardi were nearby, ready to take action,” said Senator Ritchie.

“When they responded to this call, Trooper Eastwood and Deputy Illardi put their own lives on the line, doing whatever was necessary to save the lives of two men. It is my absolute honor to recognize them for their heroism with New York State Senate’s Liberty Award.”

On May 16<sup>th</sup> of 2017, Trooper Eastwood responded to call of a boat distress on the Oneida River, with two males trapped, one, a paraplegic.

Arriving on the scene, Trooper Eastwood—along with Oswego County Sheriff’s Deputy Phillip Illardi—observed a 19-foot Ranger fishing boat taking on water, caught in the current and pinned to one of the floodgate channels. Trooper Eastwood and Deputy Illardi jumped down onto the boat where they were able to level it.

While on board, Trooper Eastwood crawled under the flood channel and moved the boat's damaged trolling motor and bow seat, allowing the boat to pass through to the west side of the dam. Trooper Eastwood then tied a strap to a cleat on the boat's bow, took off his boots and vest, and dove into the river. While attempting to swim to shore, he ran out of line but made efforts to get to land. He was able to find a calm, shallow spot near a bridge abutment to pull the boat to land. Once on shore, Trooper Eastwood and Deputy Illardi carried the subject up the riverbank, along with the help of Caughdenoy Fire Department members.

“When we responded to this call for help, Deputy Illardi and I did what any other officer or first responder would have done,” said Trooper Eastwood, “As law enforcement officers, we are proud to do whatever is necessary to protect those in our communities. I am tremendously grateful that I was able to answer this call and am thrilled that these two men

are still with us today. This honor is extremely humbling and shows what can be accomplished when emergency responders work together.”

“These are the calls you hope you never get, but when they come in, you have to think fast and act in the appropriate manner to ensure everyone’s safety,” Oswego County Sheriff’s Deputy Phillip Illardi said. “I am proud of the actions of my fellow officer, Trooper Eastwood and would like to thank Senator Ritchie for this honor.”

The New York State Senate Liberty Award is one of the highest civilian honors a New Yorker can receive. Similar to the national Congressional Gold Medal, the award is presented to individuals who have merited special commendation for exceptional, heroic, or humanitarian acts and achievements on behalf of their fellow New Yorkers.

Recently, Trooper Aaron Eastwood was honored with a New York State Police Superintendent's Commendation Award for his role in the rescue.

*(Senator Ritchie (center) is pictured at the New York State Troop D Headquarters in Pulaski with New York State Police Trooper Aaron Eastwood (left) and Oswego County Sheriff’s Deputy Phillip Illardi (right))*