

02-16-1985 Miami – FL – Shawn O'Dare – FF PSD -Vehicle in Canal – Rescue Attempt- Breath Hold

In memory of Shawn O'Dare, PSD LODD

<https://forums.firehouse.com/forum/rescue-special-ops/underwater-rescue-and-recovery/74371-in-memory-of-shawn-o-dare-psd-lodd>

In memory of Shawn O'Dare, PSD LODD

03-16-2007

On February 16, 1985, a 28 year old firefighter drowned while attempting to rescue a child from a submerged vehicle in a canal. The firefighter was utilizing only a mask, fins and snorkel. Shawn O'Dare is the only Public Safety Diver in the State of Florida to die in the line of duty. Today, a street in Miami was named in his honor



Street Dedicated to Fallen Firefighter Mar 16, 2007

(CBS4) MIAMI Twenty-two years ago, Miami-Dade firefighter Shawn O'Dare drowned trying to save a little girl who fell into a canal.

His death was not in vain; it led to the creation of some of the most specialized and sophisticated water rescue units in the nation.

It founded what's now called The Miami-Dade Dive Rescue Team.

Twenty-two years later, his name is memorialized and placed on a street at 16699 NW 67th Ave. in Miami Lakes at Fire Station 1.

=====

The following "Guest Editorial" appeared in my home town newspaper, the Vero Beach PRESS JOURNAL on February 19, 2002. I have held on to these words because they are important and worthy of being repeated...

Seventeen years ago on February 19th, a hero was laid to rest.

Sadly, he didn't know in life that he was one. Amidst the estimated 1,000 mourners stood his family devastated, consumed with grief, inconsolable.

There was no church large enough to accommodate the crowd. The service was held in an auditorium. The procession from the service to his final resting place stretched seven and one half miles, with nearly 500 vehicles. Each and every intersection for the twenty mile trip was marked with silently flashing blue and white lights. And, there were fire engines. Ladder trucks on opposite sides of each intersection provided highly polished ladders that reached high into the sky, coming together to form arches through which his flag draped casket would pass, atop the fire engine that just three days before, he rode. A Fire Department Honor Guard stood in full dress with white gloves and at full attention beside each engine, each window covered in black cloth. Mile after mile hundreds of citizens lined the roadways.

All stood silent, some offering a somber salute to honor this hero. Hundreds of school age children stood motionless, looking up, trying to understand the meaning of a casket on top of the fire engine.

Television news crews from around the state buzzed overhead, their mission intrusive, in helicopters chopping away at the sound of silence, as did an army of journalists, all assigned to covering this "human interest" story.

Never before had Metro-Dade County experienced such an outpouring of love and support. Never since.

28 years old, 7 years with Metro-Dade County Fire Rescue, he died a hero.

He was a firefighter. He was a Certified Fire Rescue Diver, one of the very first in the state. His training was comprehensive and thorough and paid for without reimbursement from the county. His passion for his job and his commitment to the value of life defined his untimely death. He lived as a hero would, not knowing he was one.

On February 16th, his unit responded to what would have been his "last call", his "final alarm." A possible DUI, vehicle overturned, underwater, children trapped. His last breath was that of cold February air. He had no wetsuit to insulate him, to keep his body warm. He had no portable air tank to provide him oxygen. He had no goggles to make clear his vision in the murky waters where children lay trapped. Although they provided none, county regulations prohibited use of personal dive equipment while on duty.

Sadly, the equipment that may have spared his life was found inside his parked

truck at the fire station. If only.

"No equipment, No funds in the budget" his family was told. Nothing more than politics dictated that a man should die for just simply doing his job.

How much did a tank of air cost? Within days after the funeral, "retrospect" became a popular word whispered among county administrators and officials.

Within 30-days a mandatory declaration was passed. Funds appeared, as did equipment. Ironically, the expense to Metro-Dade County for participation in a hero's funeral far, far exceeded what the actual cost of equipment might have been. So much for their budget.

This world has been a much sadder place without him in it. His family, still grieving his loss, recently found simple solace knowing that with honor and respect, he reached out on September 11th, from his place above, to hold the hands and the hearts of 343 of his fellow fallen firefighters as they assembled at God's front gate led by Franciscan Friar Father Mychal Judge.

Sadly for all of us, the fire department continues to grow in heaven.

Firefighters were heroes long before September 11th and they will be so, long after. They are respected and revered all over the world. What they are willing to give, far, far outweighs what they receive.

Shawn Thomas O'Dare, Firefighter, is missed. Deeply and profoundly, he is missed. He was a hero. He was a human being. He was a son, a husband, a brother, an uncle and a friend. He was a dedicated firefighter. He did not lose his life in the line of duty. He gave it. He was an angel among us.

Shawn Thomas O'Dare died as county administrators and officials turned a deaf ear to repeated requests for equipment and funding. The recent words of Joe Allbaugh, National Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency in his nationwide appeal to support firefighters bear repeating. "Firefighters are the first in line for budget cuts and the last in line for recognition.

This must stop!" As do the words of the Commander and Chief of the United States, The President, George W. Bush, who in his recent State of The Union Address, issued a statement to all Americans to recognize and support firefighters across the nation.

The message of support is crystal clear. Expecting anything less from politicians, community leaders and administrators is simply unacceptable and quite possibly for some, who choose to ignore the words of a United States president, un-American.

Susan O'Dare

Fire Service Line of Duty Deaths

<https://www.facebook.com/fireservicelineofdutydeaths/posts/709552462539035:0>

February 16, 1985 - LODD
 Firefighter Shawn O'Dare, 28
 Metro Dade FireDepartment. Miami, FL

Firefighter O'Dare drowned while trying to aid another firefighter in locating a child that was trapped in an overturned car at the bottom of a canal. He was supposed to be on the shore, acting as a back-up diver. Once the original rescue diver found the child, he brought her to the surface, where he and his officer began to perform CPR on her. Upon looking for their third man to assist them, he was discovered to be missing. The rescue diver entered the water again and finally found the missing firefighter after using two bottles of air. The firefighter and child were rushed to the hospital, both in full arrest, where the firefighter was pronounced dead on arrival.

The girl died two days later.

Photo: National Fallen Firefighters Memorial. Emmitsburg, Maryland



Street Preserves Firefighters Name

<http://www.firefightingnews.com/street-preserves-firefighters-name/>

March 22nd, 2007

There was something special about Shawn O'Dare. Lt. Joey Formoso was first clued in on this when he noticed his colleague at the then Metro-Dade Fire Station No. 1 would always make sure to use Formoso's first name during conversation. Formoso asked O'Dare what was behind his habit.

"It makes people feel good," Formoso remembered O'Dare telling him. "People like hearing their name."

The memory was just one of many shared among firefighters and relatives of Shawn O'Dare, who, 22 years ago, lost his life while trying to save an 11-year-old girl trapped in a canal. They gathered in front of what's now Miami Lakes Fire Station No. 1 on Ludlum Road to mark the station's side street being named for O'Dare.

It was two decades earlier, on the night of Feb. 16, 1985, that O'Dare and Formoso left the station headed to a canal near Northwest 57th Avenue in Miami-Dade. They received the dispatch that a Jeep had skidded into the cold, murky waters.

"We didn't think this would be anything out of the ordinary; we had responded to a similar situation just a month earlier," Formoso recalled in an interview after the ceremony.

When the two firefighters arrived at the scene, Formoso was the first to plunge into the water. O'Dare was to remain behind to advise others that Formoso was underwater.

"Shawn was the type of guy that I don't think could just sit by the side and observe; he just wanted to help out however he could," Formoso said.

Without telling anyone, O'Dare jumped into the canal to try to unfasten the seat belt of Tina Russell, 11, who was caught in the water along with the driver, Paula Miller.

Twenty-two minutes after Tina and Miller were pulled out of the canal, O'Dare still had not surfaced. His body was found 15 feet from the overturned Jeep.

O'Dare's death sparked changes in how the county equipped and trained its firefighters to respond to such calls.

By May 1985, scuba gear was put on all county rescue vehicles and a county underwater rescue training program was implemented.

Friday's memorial service had been three years in the making.

In 2004, the Miami Lakes Town Council unanimously approved a measure to rename the town's northernmost boundary after O'Dare.

By 2005, the state Legislature had approved changing the name of the strip of Northwest 167th Street running parallel to the Palmetto Expressway.

Signs were placed on both the east and west bound corners at Northwest 67th Avenue. The official naming ceremony was delayed while O'Dare's family members were located.

The fallen firefighter's mother was among those on hand for the ceremony, looking up at the metallic sign that bears her son's name.

"I'm just absolutely overwhelmed," Betty O'Dare said.

Before leaving the lectern, where he addressed the crowd, Formoso told the gathering that O'Dare "did not lose his life in the line of duty. He gave it."

Street To Be Dedicated In Honor Of Miami-Dade Fallen Firefighter Shawn O'dare

<https://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P3-1230146331.html>

March 9, 2007

The Miami-Dade County government issued the following news release:

Miami-Dade Fire Rescue will participate in a street dedication ceremony in honor of fallen Miami-Dade Fire Rescue firefighter Shawn O'Dare. The event will take place on Friday, March 16, 2007, at 2:00 p.m. at Station 1 located at 16699 NW 67th Avenue in Miami Lakes.

Firefighter O'Dare died in 1985 in a drowning accident while trying to save the life of a 12-year-old girl who had fallen into a local canal. ...

Mdfr Pays Tribute To Firefighter Who Drowned In 1985 After Saving Girl In Canal

<https://wsvn.com/news/local/miami-dade/mdfr-pays-tribute-to-firefighter-who-drowned-in-1985-after-saving-girl-in-canal/>

February 16, 2020 BY ROBBIN SIMMONS

NORTHWEST MIAMI-DADE, FLA. (WSVN) - Miami-Dade Fire Rescue held a special ceremony to pay tribute to a firefighter who gave his life while rescuing a child 35 years ago.

The touching tribute to Shawn O'Dare was held Sunday at Miami-Dade Fire Station 1 in Miami Lakes.



"He was the kind of guy that every morning would get to work before me, and he would make coffee for everybody, and he didn't even drink coffee," said retired MDFR Firefighter Joey Formoso. "That was just the kind of guy that he was."

O'Dare, a firefighter and diver, died in the line of duty back on Feb. 16, 1985, while rescuing a girl from a canal in Northwest Miami-Dade.

Current and former MDFR members came together to celebrate his life, as well as the heroism he showed that day.

"A little girl rolled into a canal in a Jeep. She was seat belted in, and the Jeep was upside down in the canal," said Formoso. "He actually went in, not telling anybody, so I got the little girl out, and when I got up on shore, and then he wasn't there, we knew that he would be in the water, because he was that kind of guy."

Formoso said that little girl wasn't the only life O'Dare saved that day. He credits the fallen first responder with changing certain policies that have potentially saved hundreds of lives over the years.

"Because of him, there's numerous stories of our fire department's dive rescue saving lives now, and it's all because of him," said Formoso, "because if he wouldn't have lost his life, they wouldn't [have additional gear] in the truck. Every truck has two sets of gear now."

It wasn't just updating the gear. O'Dare's death led Miami-Dade County to start its dive rescue program, now the largest of its kind in the country.

"None of us can ever forget that it took a tragedy such as Shawn giving his life in order for the county to react and provide the funds," said retired MDRF Battalion chief Abel Fernandez. "We see the county trying to cut funds in different departments, and public safety is a department where funds should never be cut, because how do you place a price on life and safety of visitors to this town? It's immeasurable."

Flags were flown at half-staff at Station 1, where O'Dare served his community, and a wreath was laid in his memory as these public servants came together to honor one of their own.

"Our dive rescue program is a volunteer program, and our guys give 110%," said Capt. Abraham Iglesias with MDRF's Dive Rescue Bureau. "We do it because of the love of our job, and we do it also in memory of Shawn O'Dare."

The Miami-Dade Volunteer Diving Program currently has over 450 public safety divers ready to help their community.

Copyright 2021 Sunbeam Television Corp. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.