

04-24-2007 Wellsville NY – Ronald Thomas – Vol FF Waterfall Rescue Attempt

Volunteer N.Y. firefighter dies in river rescue -

<https://www.volunteerfd.org/article/284976/>

4/29/2007 The Associated Press

WELLSVILLE, N.Y. — A volunteer firefighter died while trying to rescue a man caught up in a whirlpool near a small waterfall on the Genesee River.

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Ronald Thomas

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"We could've had five people killed," state police Investigator Jack Migliore said in Monday's Wellsville Daily Reporter. "He tried to do what he could do. Unfortunately, there was a chain reaction and while everyone did their damndest to save him, there was nothing they could do.

"Eventually, the whirlpool spit Ron out, who was the third in, and he floated down the river."

Colleagues pulled him out but could not resuscitate him.

Witnesses said they believed Thomas may have hit his head on a rock and was under the water for as long as eight minutes.

An autopsy will determine if Thomas drowned or possibly suffered a heart attack, Migliore said. The other four people were treated for hypothermia at a hospital in this southwestern New York town and later discharged.

Volunteer firefighter dies in river rescue

<http://www.silive.com/newsflash/metro/inde...orylist=simetro>
4/30/2007, From the Associated Press

WELLSVILLE, N.Y. (AP) — A volunteer firefighter died while trying to rescue a man caught up in a whirlpool near a small waterfall on the Genesee River.

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Spring fishing derby turns tragic in Wellsville Volunteer firefighter dies trying to save two from whirlpool

05/01/07 By Maki Becker NEWS STAFF REPORTER

It was a gorgeous spring day on Sunday — perfect for fathers and sons to come together for an afternoon of fishing at the annual Great Wellsville Trout Derby.

But the popular community event turned tragic when a volunteer firefighter died

trying to rescue another man and his teenage son who had become trapped in a powerful whirlpool.

The firefighter's own son nearly drowned trying to save his dad.

The heartbreaking chain of events began at about 2:20 p.m.

About 2,700 people had descended on Wellsville to take part in the Lions Club-sponsored trout derby on the Genesee River. Cash prizes and some serious bragging rights were at stake.

Kevin Allen, 46, had waded into 3 feet of water in a spot just below the Weidrick Road Bridge. With him was his 16-year-old son, Dan.

Kevin Allen suddenly lost his footing and tumbled down a small waterfall.

"The father got caught up in what was like a whirlpool," explained Wellsville Fire Chief David Pinney. "It pulled him down."

Seeing that his father was in peril, Dan reached over to try to reach his hand. "He, too, went over [the waterfall]," Pinney said.

Among those fishing nearby were Ronald W. Thomas, 56, a volunteer firefighter with the Wellsville department, and his son, Ryan, 23.

A 35-year veteran of the Dyke Street Engine Company, Ronald Thomas recognized the danger Allen and his son were in and raced into the water to try to help.

Several other people also made their way toward the dangerous current.

"I heard some yelling," said Jeffrey Fredericks, 63, who was fishing nearby when the commotion broke out. "I ran over and saw bodies rolling in the waterfall. . . . There's a tremendous undertow there."

Kevin Allen managed to break free of the whirlpool's grasp and made his way to safety. "Save my son!" he yelled to bystanders. "Save my son!"

Dan Allen was soon able to wade over to a rock and was rescued. But Ronald Thomas, whose waders had filled with water, police said, remained stuck in the swirling water — and his son went in after him.

Ryan Thomas "kept [his father] above the water," Fredericks said. "They were rolling around, but he grabbed hold of him and wouldn't let go."

People on the river's edge yelled: "Save yourself!" They could see that the man Ryan Thomas was holding was beyond saving. But Fredericks said Ryan Thomas refused to let go "until finally, he couldn't do it anymore."

"By then, one man had gotten this long branch and he got over into the water to the current as far as he could, and extended the branch out," Fredericks said.

Fredericks said the man pleaded with Ryan Thomas: "Please let go and grab this."

Fredericks described how "with his last energy, [Ryan Thomas] grabbed hold of it and they managed to pull him out."

Fredericks' wife, Bonnie, a nurse, ran over to tend to Ryan Thomas. "He was in shock," Jeffrey Fredericks said. "They turned him over and worked the water out of him. It was unreal."

Fredericks said he was in awe of Ryan Thomas's selflessness. He did not know at the time that Ryan was Ronald Thomas' son.

"Ryan stayed until the bitter end, long after the man was dead," he said. "He just wouldn't quit. He was going to give his own life."

Several minutes after Ryan Thomas was pulled from the water, the current set Ronald Thomas' body free. His fellow firefighters who had been dispatched to the scene recovered his body downstream. They tried to resuscitate him, but Ronald Thomas was beyond saving. He was pronounced dead at Jones Memorial Hospital.

The Allens, Ryan Thomas and at least one other man who had participated in the rescue were also taken to Jones Memorial Hospital, where they were treated and discharged.

The death was under investigation Monday by state police and an autopsy was scheduled, but investigators are calling the incident an accidental drowning.

Monday, Chief Pinney remembered Ronald Thomas as "an all-around good guy." "He was willing to help whenever he was available to do whatever he could," Pinney said.

Ronald Thomas, who worked for Alstom-Mayer Air Preheater Co. in Wellsville, is survived by his wife, Sue, a daughter, Katie, and two sons, Scott and Ryan.

UPDATE-NY FIREFIGHTER DROWNS ATTEMPTING WATER RESCUE

<https://www.firefighterclosecalls.com/update-ny-firefighter-drowns-attempting-water-rescue/>
May 1, 2007

WELLSVILLE One day after Wellsville firefighter Ronald W. Thomas died trying to save a man and his teenage son, the state is working on determining that Thomas died in the line of duty.

Wellsville Volunteer Fire Department Chief David Pinney is being assisted by state officials this morning in filing the proper paperwork.

On Sunday around 2:30 p.m., Kevin Allen, 46, who was visiting family and fishing in the Derby, fell over the small falls and into a vortex, a spinning whirlpool-effect in the Genesee River. Emergency officials said his 16-year-old son, Dan Allen, went in to save him. Two others then went in and Thomas quickly went in to save them.

Thomas died saving them.

Pinney said Thomas actions shed light on the dangers of being a volunteer rescue worker or firefighter. Many of his colleagues in the Wellsville Volunteer Fire Department were in the water trying to save him.

It's what you would have expected from Ron or anyone else in the emergency services, said Pinney. That's why we're here and that is what we do. I'm sure that 99.9 percent of the members would have done the same thing. You don't calculate your own risk when you are out trying to help or save someone else.

Thomas was a 35-year member of the Dyke Street Engine Company and a past captain and an officer.

He was a good interior firefighter, he was always good and always suited up, said Bob Madden, a firefighter with the Dyke Street Engine Company.

Thomas wore interior tag 067 and his father-in-law, Dick Fleischman, was a past chief in the company.

Ron not only was one of the best when it came to fighting a fire, he was always helping the department and company, Madden said.

Allegany County Fire Coordinator Paul Gallmann said this might be the first firefighter to die in the line of duty in about 40 years. There was an assistant chief of the Short Tract Department killed in the 60s.

An autopsy is being performed to determine the exact cause of death.

Funeral arrangements and account for family set

Scott Thomas, the oldest son of Ron Thomas, is finishing up a final exam at college in Florida. As a result, the calling hours and funeral for his father's funeral will not take place until Sunday and Monday.

Calling hours will be from 2-4 and 7-9 p.m. on Sunday at the J.W. Embser Sons Funeral Home, 34 W. State St., Wellsville.

The funeral will take place Monday. The time and details have not been announced. An account has been set up at First Citizens National Bank in Ronald Thomas name. The family does have unexpected medical bills. Roger Ramsey of Computer Solutions on Main Street in Wellsville has made a \$50 donation.

I sponsored two \$25 fish in the Wellsville Trout Derby. One of them was caught, explained Ramsey, who only had to pay out \$25 because only one fish was caught.

However, I am donating the entire \$50 and I hope others will match this.

Wellsville firefighter dies saving two men drowning

By JOHN ANDERSON/Daily Reporter

Wellsville firefighters and rescue workers react to the reality they will not be able to save the life of their fellow firefighter Ron Thomas, who risked his life to save others drowning in a vortex in the Genesee River Sunday.

WELLSVILLE When a teenage boy and his father were caught up in a whirlpool in the Genesee River on Sunday afternoon, their lives were in danger. So were the lives of two others attempting to help.

Wellsville Volunteer Firefighter Ronald W. Thomas, who was fishing alongside hundreds of others, didn't think about the danger as he jumped in to help.

Four people were saved, but Thomas, 56, died Sunday afternoon after his rescue attempt.

Thomas was a member of the Dyke Street Engine Company with the Wellsville Volunteer Fire Department and many of his fellow firefighters were trying to save him and resuscitate him on the banks of the Genesee River near the Weidrick Bridge in Wellsville.

Amity-based State Police said Thomas was pronounced dead, possibly of accidental drowning, at Jones Memorial Hospital at 4 p.m. The incident took place at 2:30 p.m. Sunday during the Great Wellsville Trout Derby.

We could've had five people killed. The father and the son (who were rescued) feel terrible, said State Police Investigator Jack Migliore. Here he (Thomas) was in a position to help save a 16-year-old and there was no preparation time, he tried to do what he could do. Unfortunately, there was a chain reaction and while everyone did their damndest to save him, there was nothing they could do.

The dangerous whirlpool is just past a small waterfall about 100 yards from the Weidrick Road Bridge and the 3-road intersection of County Road 44 and River Road in Wellsville.

Kevin Allen, 46, who was visiting family and fishing in the Derby, fell over the falls and into the whirlpool, troopers said, and his 16-year-old son, Dan Allen, went in to save him. Two others then went in and Thomas quickly went in to save them.

The first man's fishing vest was caught and drowning him, troopers said, and he calmly took the vest off and was able to get out of the whirlpool and back into the

current. At this point, several fishermen formed a human chain and pulled the man to shore.

Dan Allen managed to get to a rock and was pulled out, but Thomas and his son, Ryan, 23, and another man in his 20s from Olean named Tim, were still trapped. Dan Allen was able to grab a fallen branch and hand it to others trying to get them. The fifth person in the water was able to get Ryan Thomas out. However, Ronald Thomas was going under as water had filled his waders.

Eventually, the whirlpool spit Ron out, who was the third in, and he floated down the river, said Migliore. There was plenty of assistance for him by people fishing, good Samaritans and the rescue workers.

Anthony Voccola, who lives in a house near the bridge, saw the incident and also went in the river in an attempt to save the older Thomas.

I tried ... I tried as hard as I could, said a crying Voccola, moments after coming out of the river. I saw someone needed help, I took my shirt off and jumped in. I helped carry him up to the bank ... I feel so bad ... I wish I could have been there earlier, I wish I could have heard it quicker. Migliore said many do not know this dangerous whirlpool is in the river near this popular fishing spot.

Someone said there was a tire in that whirlpool, said Migliore. I went back there three hours later and it was still in there spinning around, so who knows what else is down there and could have contributed to this.

At the scene, witnesses said they believed Ronald Thomas may have hit his head on a rock and was under the water as long as eight minutes.

An autopsy will show us the exact cause of death, whether he drown or even if he had a heart attack, said Migliore. We do know the response time was unbelievable and the work of the firemen and rescue workers was quick.

Troopers said four people, including Ryan Thomas, were treated and released from Jones Memorial Hospital for hypothermia. They were transported to the hospital by ambulances from Wellsville, Andover, Amity and Bolivar.

The Wellsville Volunteer Ambulance Corps and Rescue Squad responded to two fatal accidents in a nine-hour span on Sunday. As a result, a crisis session was held Sunday night. Volunteers also went over the incidents and how they responded.

He cared very much for other people. He was very people oriented, said Pastor Robin George of the Brookside Wesleyan Church. He was so civic-minded. And in church, he was often one of the people who would offer up prayers for other people, he wanted Gods help for other people. And he gave his life trying to help other people.

George said the Thomas family was in church Sunday morning.

Every year he goes to the Derby, but this year he was there because it was his daughter Katie's last Sunday here, explained George. She is moving to Maine and is getting married in August. So they decided to go to church as a family one last time.

Thomas is survived by his wife, Susan and children Scott, Ryan and Katie. As they notified family and friends of the death, George said, "Everytime we contacted someone, they said he always gave me a hug. Ron was very loved at the church and he cared for everybody he always hugged everybody."

New York Works to Determine if Firefighter's Death Was LODD

[HTTP://WWW.FIREHOUSE.COM/NEWS/10505231/NEW-YORK-WORKS-TO-DETERMINE-IF-FIREFIGHTERS-DEATH-WAS-LODD](http://www.firehouse.com/news/10505231/new-york-works-to-determine-if-firefighters-death-was-lodd)

JOHN ANDERSON ON MAY 3, 2007

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Pinney said Thomas' actions shed light on the dangers of being a volunteer rescue worker or firefighter. Many of his colleagues in the Wellsville Volunteer Fire Department were in the water trying to save him.

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Legislator says he would not have signed Crandall's letter to local firefighters

<http://gm2-newebvarnish.newscyclecloud.com/x1056536632>

Mar 25, 2008 By Brian Quinn

An administrative law judge is reportedly still considering whether the family of Wellsville Firefighter Ron Thomas should receive benefits stemming from his death in April 2007.

However, at Monday's Allegany County Legislature meeting, one legislator took issue with a letter sent earlier this month to a fire official explaining the county's position.

Thomas died April 29, 2007, when he dove into the Genesee River to try to save lives during the Great Wellsville Trout Derby. The people Thomas was trying to save survived.

The claim concerns death and funeral benefits, said Douglas Dillon, executive secretary and plan administrator for the county's self-insurance plan, said the claim

has technically been controverted, meaning it's in controversy — one side feels that it should be covered and the other side feels it shouldn't. He said this is what the judge will decide.

"We anticipate in the next two or three weeks it should be decided," Dillon said after the meeting.

The letter, dated March 11, was written to Paul W. Gallmann, Allegany County fire coordinator, by Legislature Chairman Curtis Crandall, R-Caneadea. Crandall wrote it on County Board of Legislators letterhead. Karl Kruger, R-Friendship, said he felt all legislators should have been given a chance to review the letter before it was sent.

"There are a few things I disagree with so wholeheartedly that, offered the chance to sign that letter, I would not have," Kruger said.

After the meeting, Kruger underlined a portion of the letter that stated, "Although we do not believe a volunteer firefighter is 'on duty' 24/7, the county is fully prepared to honor its legal and moral commitment to any volunteer firefighter injured in the line of duty."

Kruger said afterwards, "They're unpaid, so they're never really 'on duty,'" but added, "When do they turn their pagers off?"

Kruger also said he agreed with some of what was in Crandall's letter to Gallmann. He noted a line which stated, "We know there are many who believe the Thomas family was dealt with unfairly and that compensation never should have been denied."

Kruger said, "I am one of the people who feels that way and there are several legislators who feel that way. Not all legislators feel like denying the claim was the right thing to do."

Crandall said copies of the letter were also sent to all county fire departments and ambulance companies.

"That letter was reviewed and looked at by our county attorney and outside counsel before it went out," Crandall said.

In the letter, Crandall wrote that Dillon, the plan administrator, is charged with overseeing benefits paid under workers' compensation law in conjunction with volunteer firefighters' benefit law. He said Dillon made his determination given the law and the facts of the incident as presented to him. The county stands behind Dillon, Crandall said in the letter.



Legislative chairman Curtis Crandall during Monday's meeting.

"In a nutshell, we have to live within workers' compensation law and firefighters' benefits law and it's not a decision that can be made at the county level," Crandall said. He said that he didn't think a single legislator would be opposed to the Thomas family receiving benefits, but did not feel it is appropriate for the county to discuss the merits of the claim, since it's in the judge's hands.

Crandall said the county understands the concerns of those who feel that a fireman's duty is a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week commitment. He also admitted that the line between on-duty and off-duty firefighters is not always clear and will be a matter of evolving law. He said he welcomes discussion with firefighters on these issues.

"We need to have a sit-down with these people," Crandall said. "There's been a lot of conversation on the side.

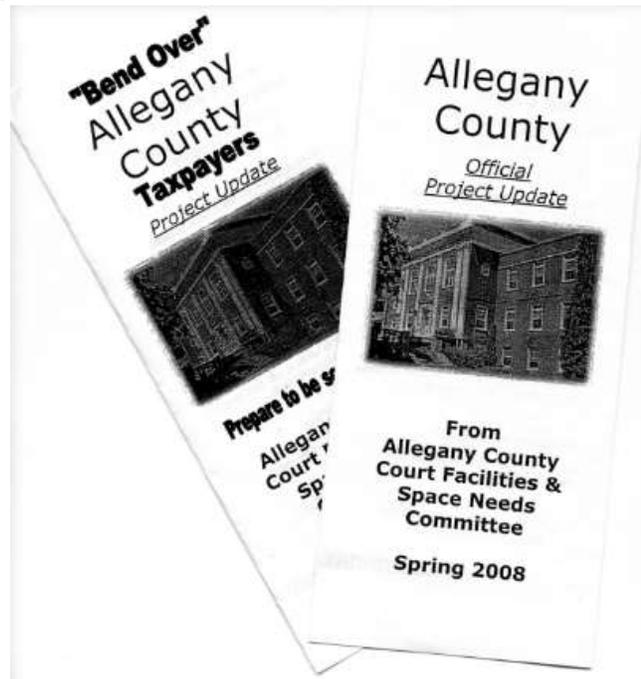
Gallmann on Monday night said he received Crandall's reply. He said he had addressed his letter to all the legislators.

"I consider it that the firemen are on duty 24/7," Gallmann said. He said part of the issue is responding to an incident before volunteers are formally called out or waiting for a call.

"A fireman standing on the banks is not going to wait for tones to go out. It doesn't matter. It's the same thing if someone is having a heart attack. Do you stand there and wait for the tones to go out?" Gallmann said.

He said firefighters have been quiet throughout this process although they have strong feelings on the matter.

"My main issue for writing the letter was to make sure that if they did find in favor of the family, the county not fight it," Gallmann said. "I think



The pamphlet on the right was created by Allegany County Legislative Chairman Curtis Crandall to explain the new court facility. The one on the left, partially obscuring a word, was created by Legislator Karl Kruger.

we'll wait and see what happens after the law judge makes his decision. Either side can appeal it."

When Kruger voiced his concerns about the letter, Brent Reynolds, R-Alfred Station, said he couldn't understand Kruger's dissent with Crandall.

Reynolds noted that Kruger had printed copies of a pamphlet on the proposed court addition and renovation project, but had altered the cover. Kruger's cover explained graphically how Allegany County taxpayers will benefit negatively anatomically by the court facility committee. It even explained the positions taxpayers would be put in.

Kruger is not identified on this second pamphlet as its creator.

"I just found it curious that you questioned our chairman," Reynolds said.

Kruger said he changed the front cover of the pamphlet, originally put out by the county as a way to answer some project-related questions, as "political satire." He said he was willing to go on record as being the person who had the second pamphlet printed.

Kruger said he didn't change anything on the inside of the original pamphlet. "I gave them to friends, business people I know around the county," he said after the meeting, saying he got the idea when he saw the original pamphlet. He said he didn't think this would become such a big deal.

"I thought, 'You know, I think others will get a snicker about this and they have,'" Kruger said.

CARNEGIE MEDALS AWARDED TO 25 FOR EXTRAORDINARY ACTS OF HEROISM

<http://www.carnegiehero.org/awardees/awardee-press-releases-1998-present/october-2-2008/#2>

October 2, 2008

In its third award announcement of 2008, the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission today named 25 individuals as recipients of the CARNEGIE MEDAL. The medal is awarded throughout the United States and Canada to those who risk their lives to an extraordinary degree while saving or attempting to save the lives of others. Four of the awardees lost their lives in the performance of their rescue acts.

The heroes announced today bring to 73 the number of awards made to date in 2008 and to 9,224 the total number of awards since the Pittsburgh-based Fund's inception in 1904. Commission President Mark Laskow stated that each of the awardees or their next of kin will also receive a financial grant. Throughout the 104 years since the Fund was established by industrialist-philanthropist Andrew

Carnegie, \$30.9 million has been given in one-time grants, scholarship aid, death benefits, and continuing assistance. The awardees are:

Ronald Thomas, deceased
Wellsville, New York

Ronald Thomas died attempting to save Daniel G. Allen from drowning, Wellsville, New York, April 29, 2007. Daniel, 16, and his father were fishing from atop a man-made waterfall that spanned the Genesee River when the father toppled into the boil of water at the base of the falls. Attempting to help him, Daniel also fell into the boil. They could not extract themselves. Thomas, 56, sub-assembler and welder, was fishing nearby, also above the falls. He moved along the falls to a point above Daniel and his father and extended his fishing pole toward Daniel. Daniel reached for the pole, but then Thomas fell from the falls into the boil. Both Daniel and his father became free of the boil and were aided by others to the bank. Rescue personnel arrived at the scene and were preparing to enter the water to recover Thomas when he became free of the boil and floated downstream. Rescuers removed him from the water but could not revive him, as he had drowned. Daniel and his father were taken to the hospital for observation, but they were not injured.

80272-9024

In Remembrance...

http://www.dhSES.ny.gov/ofpc/memorial/documents/08_booklet.pdf

October 7, 2008



Ronald W. Thomas
April 29, 2007

Ronald W. Thomas April 29, 2007 Ronald W. Thomas was born on September 2, 1950. He joined the Dyke Street Engine Co. No. 2 on the Wellsville Volunteer Fire Department on May 1, 1972 and was a member of the company for 35 years. On September 7, 1974 in Wellsville, he married the former Susan Fleischman. He is survived by his wife Susan, one daughter Katie Nixon, two sons Scott and Ryan Thomas. At the time of his death he was an employee of the Alstom Power Inc. Air Preheater Co. in Wellsville with more than 30 years of service. Ronald was a very dedicated firefighter and took firefighting very seriously. He was very active in company fundraisers and would always arrive at a fire scene fully suited up and was ready to perform any assignment given to him. Ronald died on April 29, 2007 following an accidental drowning in

the Genesee River in Wellsville while attempting to rescue a fisherman who had fallen into the river. The Dyke Street Engine Co. No. 2 extends their heartfelt sympathy to the Thomas family, as they had so graciously shared Ron's life with them.

Fallen firefighter Ron Thomas wins first ever Volunteer of Valor Award

<http://www.wellsvilledaily.com/x1780972645/Fallen-firefighter-Ron-Thomas-wins-first-ever-Volunteer-of-Valor-Award>

Sep 12, 2008 By Brian Quinn



Among the firefighters there to honor their colleague and friend, Ron Thomas, were, from left, past Fire Chief Jerome Hart, past Fire Chief Stan Ingraham, First Assistant Chief Brent Cobin, Second Assistant Chief John Fleischman, State Sen. Catharine Young and Chief David Pinney. — BRIAN QUINN

The state Senate saw fit to honor Wellsville firefighter Ron Thomas, among others, in Albany this summer with the state's Volunteers of Valor Award.

Another presentation took place Thursday at the Dyke Hose Company and this time, Thomas was the sole honoree. He received the award for his actions during the 2007 Greater Wellsville Trout Derby. Thomas died while trying to rescue another man and his son from the Genesee River during the derby.

State Sen. Catharine M. Young, R-Olean, presented the certificate and a proclamation to the firefighter's widow, Susan. Local officials and fellow firefighters also were on hand.

Thursday marked seven years to the day after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Young compared Thomas' actions during the derby to those of rescuers, including firefighters, who tried to help others on 9/11.

"They didn't hesitate for a second, but went into the World Trade Center to help those who were trapped inside," she said. "He didn't hesitate for a second, just like those firefighters on 9/11.

"Ron Thomas' heroism and selfless determination truly exemplifies what it means to be a caring member of the

community and someone whose commitment to saving lives was more important than his own well-being," Young added.

The senator noted Thomas' involvement in the community, which included 12 years as a girls' softball coach. He also was an assistant coach for the Wellsville Little League and a member of the Brookside Wesleyan Church. Thomas was vice president of the Twin? Tiers Riders Chapter and Christian Motorcycle Association. He worked at Alstom? Power Inc. Air Preheater Company in Wellsville for more than 30 years.

Thomas also was a 35-year member of the Dyke Hose Company.

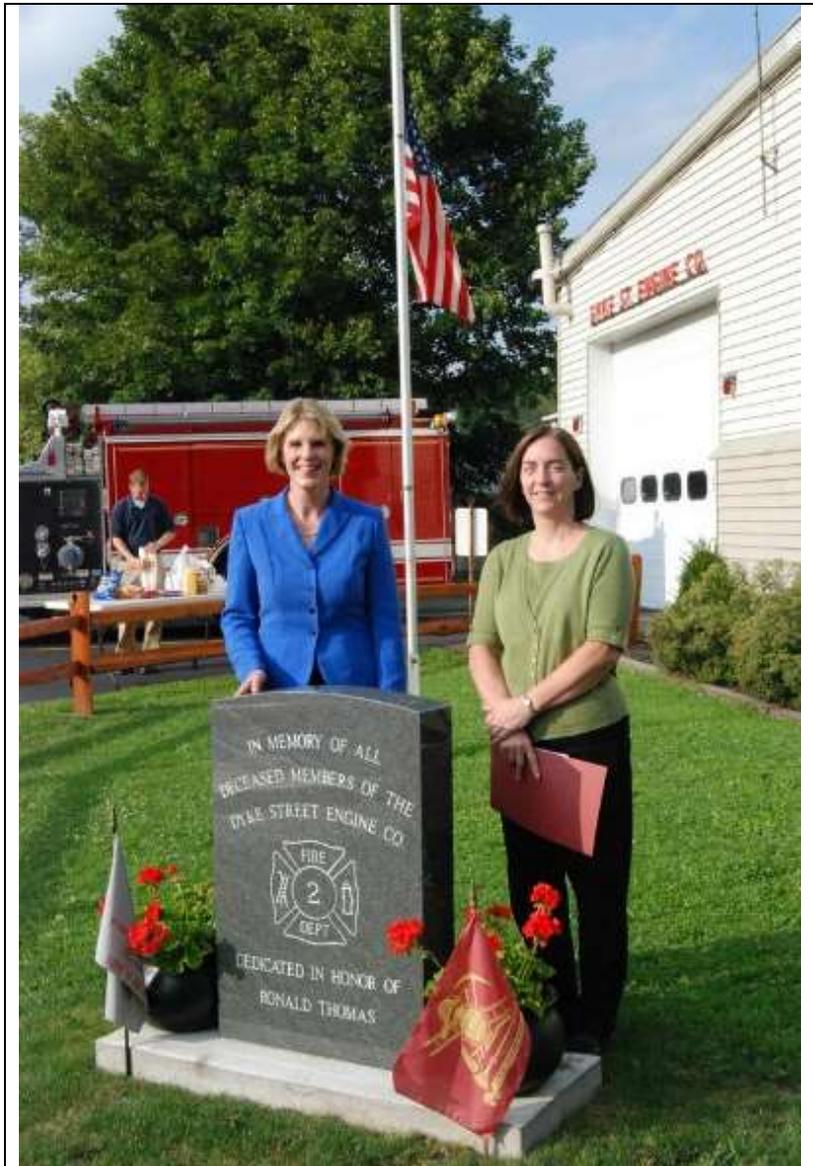
“Ron was a dedicated firefighter, serving in many capacities in his company. He is remembered and greatly missed by all firefighters who had the pleasure of serving with him,” Young said. “His willingness to be involved in so many of life’s activities is witness to his character. Of all those who have received the Volunteers of Valor Award, Ron is surely the most deserving.”

The award was organized this year to honor firefighters, emergency medical technicians and others for heroic and brave acts in the line of duty, Young said. The honorees were chosen from nominations statewide.

“I firmly believe we need to recognize our firefighters across the state,” Young said of the award’s inception. “We didn’t really have anything that did that.”

Wellsville Fire Chief Dave Pinney, Village Mayor James Cretekos, Village Trustee Donald “Tink” LaForge Jr. and Town Supervisor Dar Fanton also attended the ceremony.

Afterwards, Pinney said, “We thank the senator for taking the time to come down here and do this. It was probably as good a day as any.”



State Sen. Catherine M. Young, R-Olean, presents Sue Thomas with the certificate and proclamation for the Volunteers Award during Thursday’s ceremony at the Dyke Hose Company. –Brian Quinn

In the line of duty?

<http://my.firefighternation.com/forum/topics/889755:Topic:509782?commentId=889755%3AComment%3A801782>

April 1, 2008 Joe Stoltz

Update October 3, 2008:

"Ronald W. Thomas, the Wellsville volunteer firefighter who died trying to save two drowning fishermen at a trout derby last year, has been posthumously awarded the Carnegie Medal for his bravery, the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission announced Thursday.

"The medal comes just a couple of weeks after Thomas became the first recipient of New York State's Volunteer of Valor award.

"Pittsburgh steelmaker and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie started the fund in 1904 to recognize men and women who risk their lives while saving or attempting to save the lives of others. "

<http://www.buffalonews.com/cityregion/otherwny/story/453906.html>

BELMONT, NY - Local volunteer firefighters are urging Allegany County lawmakers to pay death benefits to the family of fallen Wellsville firefighter Ron Thomas, who lost his life after he dove into the Genesee River to rescue someone else.

Mr. Thomas died on April 29, 2007, after he dove into the Genesee River to rescue someone who had fallen into the water during the Wellsville Trout Derby.

Shortly thereafter, state officials began investigating Mr. Thomas's death, trying to determine whether or not he died in the line of duty. Had he been in the line of duty during his death, Mr. Thomas' surviving family would be eligible for a death benefit package.

Now an administrative law judge in Rochester is determining if, in fact, Mr. Thomas' family has benefits due to them. The decision is based around whether or not Mr. Thomas was responding to a call as a firefighter or acting on his own when he attempted the rescue.

(County Fire Coordinator) Gallman is arguing that in an emergency situation, a responsible firefighter may not necessarily wait for the tones that indicate an emergency situation. Mr. Thomas had been an eyewitness to several people falling into the water.

"There is a thin borderline between what is on duty and what is not, I grant that," Mr. Gallman said. "In a case where they actually act, they should be on duty. You can't wait for the tone if your watching the act in front of you."

Mr. Thomas is survived by his wife, Susan; daughter, Katie; two sons, Scott and Ryan; his mother, Esther Thomas; his foster father, Theodore Bliven; and a niece and nephew.

He was a 35-year member of the Dyke Street Engine Company, where he was a past captain and an officer.

In May 2008 the court decided that FF Thomas did in fact die in the line of duty, and his family was awarded the death benefit package.

Wellsville firefighters' coverage expanded under Volunteer Firefighter Benefits Law

<http://www.wellsvilledaily.com/article/20151001/NEWS/151009979>

Oct 1, 2015 By Brian Quinn / Daily Reporter

WELLSVILLE — If a firefighter from Wellsville encounters a fire or other emergency situation outside the Wellsville Fire Department's jurisdiction, he or she can now respond immediately and be covered under the Volunteer Firefighter Benefits Law (VFBL).

Village trustees passed a resolution this week approving the extension of coverage to firefighters from Wellsville if they ever find themselves at an emergency scene in another department's jurisdiction. If no officer from the department which has jurisdiction is there, the Wellsville firefighter or firefighters may respond immediately and be covered by the benefits law. Once an officer from the local department arrives on scene, the Wellsville firefighter has to offer his or her services at the scene. If the firefighter's service is not accepted, he or she must stop assisting at the scene.

In May, Allegany County informed Grant Duke Hose Company No. 1 that there was a change in General Municipal Law Section 209-1, which covers emergency services by volunteer firemen. The change expands VFBL coverage, in limited circumstances, to firefighters who volunteer their services outside their jurisdiction.

Before Section 209-1 was amended, a firefighter who came upon an emergency outside of his or her jurisdiction would report to the fire department which had jurisdiction and offered his or her services. If the firefighter's offer was accepted, he or she would be protected by General Municipal Law as long as services were rendered.

Village Trustee Randy Shayler said at Monday's meeting, "This covers a firefighter if he is out of jurisdiction, but is the first responder. This covers the small likelihood and short window that the firefighter is on the scene before the local fire department gets there."

Treasurer Earl Johnson said a sample resolution was provided to the village, to which village attorney Dan Synakowski made modifications prior to trustees' approval.

Body type J: "There's no cost to us. We'd be covered under the county workers' compensation plan," Johnson said this week. "The only cost would be if something were to happen if a firefighter responded and it would become a workers' compensation issue. Essentially, what this law is saying is if you pass a resolution you can include them in workers compensation coverage. The county asked all the municipalities in its workers' compensation plan if they wanted to pass this resolution.

"You don't want a qualified firefighter happening on a scene somewhere and not being able to do anything just because it's not in their area (of jurisdiction)," Johnson said. "They might possibly be able to save a life by doing it."