



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Steven D. Rhoads

## Senator Steve Rhoads Awards 9-Year-Old Carter Santelmo with New York State Liberty Medal for Heroic Life-Saving Act

STEVEN D. RHOADS July 24, 2025

| ISSUE: **AWARDED LIBERTY MEDALS, LIBERTY MEDAL, WATER SAFETY, CHILD SAFETY, DROWNING PREVENTION**



On July 18, Senator Steve Rhoads proudly awarded the New York State Liberty Medal — the highest civilian honor bestowed by the New York State— to 9-year-old Carter Santelmo for his extraordinary bravery and quick thinking that saved his younger brother's life.

Carter, who previously lived in Levittown, was honored for an act of heroism that occurred during a family trip to Florida in April 2023. At just 7 years old at the time, Carter rescued his

4-year-old brother, Maxwell, who had slipped off his swim vest and unknowingly jumped into the deep end of a private pool without a lifeguard on duty.

Carter, wearing goggles and swimming nearby, spotted his brother floating unconscious, immediately pulled him to the wall, and called for help. Thanks to Carter's actions and the swift response of family members, Maxwell regained consciousness and made a full recovery.

Carter's selfless actions, presence of mind, and strength in that critical moment were nothing short of extraordinary. At just seven years old, he demonstrated superhuman strength, sharp awareness, and unshakable love — becoming a real-life superhero in the eyes of his family and community.

“Carter's courageous and instinctive actions at such a young age are nothing short of heroic,” **said Senator Rhoads.** “He represents the very best of New York — bravery, love for family, and a heart for others. It's an honor to recognize him with the New York State Liberty Medal.”

The New York State Liberty Medal is reserved for individuals who demonstrate exceptional heroism, sacrifice, and humanitarian service on behalf of others. Carter's life-saving efforts not only earned him this prestigious recognition, but he also received the highest civilian honor from the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office in Florida.

Joining Senator Rhoads for the ceremony were members of the Nassau County Police Department and the Jones Beach Lifeguard Corps. In a special moment, the Jones Beach Lifeguard Corps presented Carter with a challenger coin in recognition of his bravery — a tradition reserved for those who embody valor and presence of mind under pressure.

Carter's parents expressed deep gratitude and pride. “We are so proud of the young man he was, is, and will become. He's going to be special and we can't wait to see what he becomes.

Thank you to Senator Rhoads, NCPD and the Jones Beach Lifeguards for taking the time to make him feel special and proud for saving his brothers life” they said.

Senator Rhoads also highlighted Carter’s story as a vital message on water safety.

“Emergencies can happen in an instant. Thanks to Carter’s love, awareness, and quick action, his brother is alive today. His story will serve as an inspiration and a reminder to families everywhere.”

As summer unfolds and more families head to pools and beaches, Carter’s heroism stands as a powerful example: no matter your age, you can make a life-saving difference.