



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Senator Young Presents New York State Senate Liberty Medals to Four Local Heroes

CATHARINE YOUNG July 22, 2015



Colin Keller, John Ayers, Michael Smith and Gary Morrison applauded for quick thinking and decisive action

MOUNT MORRIS – Four local men, whose quick thinking and decisive actions saved the life of co-worker at American Rock Salt, were honored today in a special ceremony at the plant.

John Ayers, Colin Keller, Gary Morrison, and Michael Smith, who each played a pivotal role in the life-saving response to a heart attack suffered by co-worker Greg Kurelko, were awarded New York State Senate Liberty Medals, one of the highest civilian honors that a New York resident can receive, from state Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I- Olean). She also presented each of the men with a New York State Senate Resolutions in their honor.

On the morning of February 11, 2014, Greg Kurelko, a 46-year-old surface maintenance worker and third shift group leader at American Rock Salt told fellow co-workers in the lunch room that he was experiencing chest pains.

“At stake that day was the life of co-worker and all four men’s deeds were indispensable and admirable,” said Senator Young. “The ability of John, Colin, Gary and Michael to each remain calm in the face of perilous circumstances is commendable. They applied the skills and knowledge they each possessed to deliver quality care at a time when seconds meant life or death for their colleague.

“These everyday heroes are an inspiration for us all. Their actions highlight the good that resides inside each of us, and the compassion we all hope to show toward our fellow man. I applaud them for their efforts and am honored to be here today to present them with the Senate’s Liberty Medal.”

“We are so proud of John, Colin, Gary and Michael,” said Greg Norris, American Rock Salt Plant Manager. “The safety of our employees is always a primary concern of everyone at this company, and offering CPR/AED training literally proved life-saving.”

After initially resisting his co-workers’ advice that an ambulance be called, Mr. Kurelko, who had moved into the changing room, began to experience stronger symptoms, and another employee, Colin Keller made the call for an ambulance. Gary Morrison helped Mr. Kurelko back into the lunch room and then went to get the mine’s resident emergency medical technician (EMT).

John Ayers, a 15-year veteran EMT with Mount Morris Ambulance who had arrived at work early that morning, was summoned from the changing room and found Mr. Kurelko slumped over the picnic table and unconscious. Mr. Ayers instantly issued an alert to the full mine and called out for assistance from anyone in the area. Upon checking Mr. Kurelko’s pulse, he discovered Mr. Kurelko had suffered a massive heart attack and was in full cardiac arrest.

Mr. Ayers prepared Mr. Kurelko for defibrillation as Mike Smith arrived with the defibrillator and trauma bag from a nearby first aid station. The pads were positioned and the defibrillator went into shock mode. After a single shock, Mr. Keller did one cycle of 15 compressions; and Mr. Smith applied the two breaths into the mask. After a second cycle was begun, and during the first or second compression, Mr. Kurelko opened his eyes and yelled “Ow!”

After being transported to the hospital, Mr. Kurelko underwent surgery and then spent three days at the hospital before being released and returning to his home in Springwater.

The New York State Senate Liberty Medal was established in 2014 as the highest honor a Senator can bestow upon a constituent and is awarded to individuals who have merited special commendation for exceptional, heroic, or humanitarian acts on behalf of their fellow New Yorkers.

Earlier this year, representatives from the American Red Cross presented Colin Keller, Gary Morrison and Michael Smith with Certificates of Merit signed by President Barack Obama, and John Ayers received a Certificate of Extraordinary Personal Action, for their efforts that day.