



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Terrence Murphy

Bartender Who Saved 8-Year Old Boy From Drowning Receives Liberty Medal From Senator Terrence Murphy

TERRENCE MURPHY July 28, 2016

MAHOPAC, NY - In a moment of crisis, with another person's life on the line, some of us would undoubtedly think twice about acting. Not Michelle Margilaj. Sensing danger, Michelle Margilaj jumped into Lake Mahopac and saved an 8-year-old boy from drowning. Last night, at a ceremony held at Carmel Town Hall in Mahopac, Senator Terrence Murphy presented Michelle with a Liberty Medal, one of the highest civilian honors a New Yorker can receive.

"Michelle saw a child in danger of drowning and never hesitated to act," Senator Murphy said. "She jumped into the frigid water at great personal risk. Through her unwavering courage and her skill as a swimmer, Michelle was able to save a young boy's life. She is an amazing woman, and a true hero."

"We are all very proud of her. She deserves to be recognized for her act of heroism," said Kenneth Schmitt, Supervisor for the Town of Carmel. "Michelle spun into action when a child was in distress. She put saving the child and his father before her own life."

Michelle Margilaj, a 23-year-old bartender at the Il Laghetto Restaurant in Mahopac, was at work on a rainy and chilly night in April when she looked out of a restaurant window and noticed a kayak in Lake Mahopac. She quickly realized that the boat had capsized and a man

was clinging to its side.

Michelle ran outside to get a better look. Calling out to the man, she asked if he was alright. He yelled back that he was in trouble and needed help. The boat had drifted far from shore. He was trying to turn the boat over, but due to the effect of the cold water his legs had literally frozen and he could barely move.

It was then that Michelle thought she heard a boy yelling for help. She saw a boy in a life jacket struggling in the water near the boat. Acting on pure instinct, Michelle leaped into the freezing water fully clothed.

"It shouldn't be a surprise that someone should try and help, especially when a little boy is involved," Margilaj said. "You have to help a child when they're in danger. I have several young cousins. I'd want someone to come to their aid if they were in trouble. The game also changes when someone is helpless. You have to do whatever you can to save them."

Michelle had always been a strong swimmer. Her father loved fishing and often took his children out in his boat with him. He was adamant about his children being good swimmers.

The boy was wearing a lifejacket, but it was too big for him and it was hindering him more than it was helping him. Michelle flipped him on his back so he could float.

With his legs almost completely frozen, the father was unable to help. Assuring him everything would be fine and that she would help his son, Michelle urged the man to paddle toward shore. Michelle followed, pulling the boy behind her.

Since the life-saving incident, Michelle has become Il Laghetto's resident hero and has rightfully been dubbed "Wonder Woman" by her co-workers and the press.