



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Terrence Murphy

Senator Murphy awards local hero with liberty medal

[Terrence Murphy](#)

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Carmel, NY – Cullen Malzo wasn't thinking of himself when he dove into the muddy waters of Lake Mahopac on the night of November 10, 2016. All he was concerned about was saving whoever was trapped inside an overturned car.

At a ceremony held at Carmel Town Hall last night, Senator Terrence Murphy recognized Malzo for his bravery by presenting him with a New York State Liberty Medal, one of the highest civilian honors a New Yorker can receive.

"If not for Cullen's heroic actions, we would be going to not one, but two funerals," said Senator Murphy. "Knowing their lives were hanging in the balance, Cullen acted swiftly and decisively, disregarding his own safety. You can tell when you speak with him that Cullen has a great deal of integrity and character. He displayed it that night. He deserves to be recognized as a hero."

Malzo was standing in his driveway when he heard a crash. Two 17-year-old girls were in a car speeding down North Lake Boulevard when the driver, Dana Sirelli, lost control of the vehicle. It hit a utility pole then flipped over, landing upside down in Lake Mahopac. "I was going too fast," Sirelli recalled. "I was following after my friends, who were egging me on to speed up. I swerved over the double yellow line. I tried to pull back, but it was too late."

As Malzo ran to the scene, he had the presence of mind to call 911. The 19-year-old college student then jumped into the murky water, intent of saving whoever was trapped in the car. Neck deep in muddy water, he reached through a broken window. Malzo felt the arm of passenger, Julia Brower, pulling her to the surface. Reached back into the cloudy water a second time Malzo felt Sirelli's foot, pulling her out through the broken window.

"There was no decision to be made," Cullen said. "I was going in the water no matter what."

The New York State Senate Liberty Medal is one of the highest civilian honors a New Yorker can receive. The award is given to individuals who have merited special commendation for exceptional, heroic, or humanitarian acts and achievements on behalf of their fellow New Yorkers, and is the highest honor bestowed upon an individual by the New York State Senate.

Malzo also received a proclamation from Carmel Town Supervisor Kenneth Schmidt and a life saving certificate from Putnam County Sheriff Donald Smith.

Extraordinary acts of heroism are becoming regular occurrences in Senator Murphy's 40th Senate District. Senator Murphy presented Lewisboro resident Riley DeJong with a Liberty Medal in May 2015 at his annual Women of Distinction Ceremony. Riley, a certified EMT was recognized for coming to the aid of injured passengers at the scene of the Metro North Train Crash in Valhalla on February 3, 2015. In July of this year, Michelle Margilaj, a bartender at Il Laghetto Restaurant in Mahopac, was awarded a Liberty Medal for rescuing an 8-year-old boy from drowning in Lake Mahopac.