



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Sen. Griffo present Liberty Medals, honors rangers for exceptional acts

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO May 10, 2018



ROME – At a special ceremony at Rome City Hall today, state Sen. Joseph Griffo, R-I-C-Rome, presented New York State Senate Liberty Medals to three forest rangers with the state Department of Environmental Conservation. Sen. Griffo was joined by state Assemblyman Ken Blankenbush, R-C-I-Black River, at the event.

The 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.

Those honored by Sen. Griffo were:

Ranger David Cornell

On June 15, 2016, Ranger Cornell responded to a 911-radio dispatch for a personal injury motorcycle crash at the intersection of Teelin and Oswego roads in the Town of Vienna. The first on the scene, Ranger Cornell found the motorcycle operator had suffered a severe leg injury with a deep laceration and major arterial bleeding. Without hesitation, Ranger Cornell removed his issued tourniquet and applied it to the patient's injured leg to control the bleeding. He then assisted arriving EMTs with further patient care and the eventual transport to a helicopter airlift. Medical personnel said that Ranger Cornell's quick medical response likely saved the patient's life.

Ranger Luke Evans

On October 16, 2016, Ranger Luke Evans received a call from Lewis County 911 requesting assistance for a woman who was trapped in her kayak on the Moose River in the Town of Lyonsdale. The woman was participating in Moosefest 2016 when she missed her line and became submerged in her kayak facing upstream pinned against a large boulder. Her spray skirt was caught between the rock and the kayak and her fellow kayakers were fighting just to keep her head above water.

Ranger Evans immediately responded, carrying his throw bag and hiking upstream for a quarter of a mile before arriving on the scene. He assessed the situation and quickly formulated a plan of action. After his initial attempt to rescue the woman was unsuccessful, Ranger Evans, an avid kayaker, remained calm and made the split second decision to throw the bag to a Lewis County Sheriff's Deputy who was downstream along the riverbank with

four other people. Ranger Evans then coordinated the next attempt, giving direction to the others involved. The woman was successfully rescued and pulled to shore.

Ranger Robert Piersma

On the afternoon of April 10, 2017, Ranger Robert Piersma was notified that several people had capsized their canoe in Chittning Pond on Tassel Hill Woodford Memorial State Forest in the Town of Sangerfield. Ranger Piersma responded and could see two people still out in the pond, which had just recently opened up from winter ice and water temperatures were barely above freezing. Ranger Piersma learned from one capsized boat occupant who had rescued himself and another boater that the two people still in the lake had been in the water for close to 30 minutes.

Ranger Piersma called to the people in the pond but they were unresponsive. Without regard to his own safety, he grabbed his throw-bag and waded out into the lake until the water was nearly chest deep but still could not reach the victims. Both subjects were still unresponsive to Ranger Piersma's calling. Ranger Piersma exited the lake and ran back to his patrol vehicle, quickly donned his cold-water rescue suit, returned to the lake and swam out to the subjects. He found both subjects alive but completely unresponsive. Fortunately, both subjects were wearing life jackets and had their arms tightly inter-locked as if frozen together. Ranger Piersma grabbed one subject's life jacket and, with one free arm, swam pulling both subjects together at once against a stiff headwind. Arriving rescue personnel assisted Ranger Piersma in getting the subjects onto the shore. Both subjects were taken to the hospital, where their body temperature was 87 degrees.

“Rangers Cornell, Evans and Piersma displayed remarkable bravery, courage and initiative and were able to think quickly on their feet while under intense pressure and with lives on the line,” Sen. Griffo said. “They are all very deserving of this special recognition and it is my honor to present them with these Liberty Medals.”