



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Ritchie Honors Seaway Employees for Bravery During Dangerous Rescue Attempt

BRIAN DWYER May 31, 2019

| ISSUE: **AWARDED LIBERTY MEDALS**



State Senator Patty Ritchie recently honored five employees of the U.S. St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation with one of the highest honors a civilian can earn in New York State, the New York State Senate Liberty Award. The honor comes after the employees risked their own safety in an attempt save a man who had fallen into the St. Lawrence River.

The presentation of the Liberty Awards came during the U.S. St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation Administrator's Award Ceremony in Massena earlier this month.

Last October, the M/V Spruceglen was approaching the lower mooring wall of the Eisenhower Lock in Massena when a crewmember—52 year-old Alfred Eshun of Canada—fell into the river. Seaway employees immediately responded and engaged in efforts to retrieve the man and transfer him to emergency medical services.

During the attempted rescue, two employees, Jeremy Buffham and Nicholas Hallada dove into the water, while three others, Matthew Cole, Kevin Smith and Keith Benham were on shore, readying to bring Eshun to receive medical attention. Eshun was removed from the water within five minutes and brought to Massena Memorial Hospital, but unfortunately did not survive.

"These five brave people did everything in their power, including risking their own lives, to save the life of another," said Senator Ritchie. "While we all wish the story had a different outcome, we are still grateful for the brave efforts of these five individuals. Their actions are nothing short of heroic and I am pleased to be able to recognize them with the New York State Senate Liberty Award."

After the rescue attempt, Buffham and Hallada were hospitalized themselves suffering from a case of hypothermia. They have both fully recovered.

The New York State Senate Liberty Award is one of the highest civilian honors a New Yorker can receive. Similar to the national Congressional Gold Medal, the award is presented to individuals who have merited special commendation for exceptional, heroic, or humanitarian acts and achievements on behalf of their fellow New Yorkers.

(In the attached photo from the USDOT, four of the five employees honored by Senator Ritchie are seen receiving their awards at the ceremony. They are, (from left to right), Jeremy Buffham, Matthew Cole,

Nicholas Hallada and Kevin Smith. Keith Benham was unable to attend the ceremony)