

Glen Ellyn firefighter honored for bravery in apartment fire



By Alex Keown,
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Chris Guare (Glen Ellyn Volunteer Fire Department, Handout)

Chris Guare, a Glen Ellyn volunteer firefighter, received a Medal of Valor from The 100 Club of DuPage County for his attempt to save a man's life during a May 10 apartment fire in Glen Ellyn.

Guare and other members of the Glen Ellyn Volunteer Fire Department responded to an early morning Duane Street fire that was confined to a single apartment of a three-story building. Once the door to the apartment was forced open by firefighters, oxygen flooded the apartment and the fire became "fully engaged." Guare, who had been using a thermal imaging device to scan the apartment, saw the occupant identified as Abdullah Rantissi, lying on the floor and rushed in to save him. Members of Guare's crew used hoses to battle the fire in order to give Guare time to reach the occupant and drag him out of the building, Guare said.

"Chris crawled in on his belly, got the victim and was able to remove the victim from the apartment and out to the paramedics," Chief Jim Bodony said. "Single-handedly, he was the one who went in. It was pretty difficult and he put his life on the line for this guy."

Although Guare was the one to rush into the burning apartment, he said he could not have done so if he did not have the support and assistance of the other firefighters on his truck.

"I couldn't have reached him in time if it had not been for the guys on my truck," said Guare, 33. "They directed their hoses into the apartment, and that gave me time to get in there and get to the occupant."

In addition to pulling the resident out of his apartment, the married father of three drove the victim to the burn unit at Loyola University Medical Center while paramedics treated his injuries. The victim later succumbed to the injuries sustained in the fire, Guare said.

Bodony submitted Guare's name to The 100 Club of DuPage County, a nonprofit organization established to support first responders, for consideration for a Medal of Valor. Guare, a lifelong resident of Glen Ellyn, was recognized for his efforts during that fire during an awards dinner Oct. 30 at the Lisle/Naperville Hilton. Guare is the first Glen Ellyn firefighter to receive the award.

Guare said he was honored to receive the award, but added he would not be considered for it without the assistance of the other firefighters on his engine.

"I was the one in position, I had a few seconds on the other men on my truck," Guare said,

Guare credited his training for his actions that day. He said when things happen quickly, the skills learned through repeated training take over and become second nature.

Bodony praised Guare not only for his actions the day of the fire but also for all the additional work he does for the department.

"He's definitely one of our more active firefighters. He contributes a great deal to our training program, and he helps me with securing grants for the fire department," Bodony said.

In addition to Guare, The 100 Club of DuPage County also recognized Naperville Firefighter/Paramedics Benjamin Bezaire and William Kostelny a Bensenville Police Officer Thomas Gilligan with Medals of Valor.

While Guare was singled out for the Medal of Valor, Lt. Craig Eldridge, the public information officer for the volunteer fire department, said the other three firefighters who fought the apartment fire, Assistant Chief Jeff Buccola, Lt. Leigh Mikolajczyk and Firefighter Matt Andris. Along with Guare, will each receive a departmental honor for their efforts during a Glen Ellyn Village Council meeting later this month.

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