

St. Lucie County Fire District News Release

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St. Lucie County Fire District Gives Citizen Hero Award to Couple who Saved Woman from Apartment Fire

Blind man extinguishes fire with help of another; saves resident

St. Lucie County, FL – The St. Lucie County Fire District awarded Tommy Barber and Susan Laney the Citizen Hero Award for their actions in saving a woman from a recent apartment fire.

Barber and Laney were returning to Laney’s apartment at 707 North 7th Street in Ft. Pierce the evening of September 7, 2013. When they arrived on the second floor they both smelled smoke. Barber determined it was coming from the apartment across the hall from Laney’s. He broke in and assisted the resident, who uses a mobility scooter, down the hall to a safer location.

He and Laney then took the fire extinguisher and while he held it, he instructed Laney on how to attack the fire at the base of the fire with a spraying motion.

This despite the fact that Barber is blind.

“It is always great to know that there are citizens in our community that are willing to take that risk for the sake of others,” said Fire Chief Ron Parrish. “It was a blessing that Tommy and Susan were in the right place at the right time, they made a difference.”

“I could not have done it without Susan’s help,” said Barber.

Barber has some experience in the fire service. In the 1980s, before he became blind, he went through the Fire Academy and served as a SLCFD firefighter for a year.

“Tommy and Susan showed tremendous bravery and courage, especially with him being blind,” said Lt. Tommy Neiman, who was one of the firefighters responding to the fire, and had nominated Barber and Laney for the Citizen Hero Award.

The resident Barber and Laney saved was taken to a local hospital and recovered. Both Barber and Neiman agreed that 3-5 minutes would have made the difference in the outcome.

“It is amazing that 25-30 years after his firefighting experience, Barber still remembered his basic training and saved lives,” said Commissioner Ed Becht, chairman of the Fire Board.

Both Barber and Laney were awarded the Citizen Hero Award at the November Fire Board Meeting.



Chief Ron Parrish awards Citizen Hero Award to Tommy Barber (center) as Lt. Tommy Neiman, right, looks on. Barber and Susan Laney saved a woman from an apartment fire in Fort Pierce in early September. Both were awarded the Citizen Hero Award at the November Fire Board Meeting. (Laney was unable to attend.)