

OFFICER FRANK ERHART



The Lifesaving Award is given to department personnel who, by their immediate actions, have saved a human life under unusual and/or extraordinary circumstances.



At 5:06 p.m., February 3, 2009, Officers Nick Lundgren, and his recruit Officer Elina Gee, were on patrol in the Northwest Precinct of Spokane when Officer Gee checked her MDC for waiting calls in their area.

Officer Gee saw there was a waiting call on the 2600 block of W Decatur of a suicidal male who was texting friends saying "goodbye" and that he was going to kill himself. The male had told one person that he was in his vehicle, in his garage, with the engine running. He then denied to another person that he was at his house. This call had been holding for two minutes.

Officers Lundgren and Gee responded to the house and requested another unit be dispatched to assist them. Officer Frank Erhart was dispatched.

Lundgren and Gee arrived first and began checking the garage. They did not hear anything inside, but immediately detected the odor of carbon monoxide emitting from the garage even though all the doors were closed. Officer Gee checked the man-door of the garage, found it unlocked, and entered with Officer Lundgren. They were immediately consumed with a thick cloud of gray gas.

The officers had difficulty entering the garage as it was a very small 1950's style detached garage and the vehicle inside was a full-sized Ford Bronco. When they opened the man-door, it struck the Bronco. Both officers observed the male subject slumped over in the driver's seat and heard he was not breathing, but rather taking in final gasps. Officer Lundgren searched the wall in the dark for a garage door opener but found none. He then instructed Officer Gee to try to get the main garage door open.

By this time, Officers Lundgren and Gee are being affected by the carbon monoxide and the intense heat inside the garage and both are coughing.



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Officer Gee was able to squeeze along the side of the Bronco to the rear where she tried to find the door lock. After several moments, Gee got the main garage door open.

Officer Erhart had arrived and ran into the garage. He went to the driver's door of the Bronco as did Officer Lundgren. Erhart grabbed a hold of the male subject and drug him outside with Lundgren's assistance. The male had lost his bodily functions and had foam coming from his mouth.

Once outside the garage, Erhart set the male on the driveway. He lifted the subject's upper torso up and rested it against his leg to establish an open airway. Medics were requested to expedite their response. Officer Erhart kept the subject in this position until the medics arrived.

While the officers were assisting the male, the Bronco began to roll backwards towards them. Officer Gee ran to the driver's doors and placed the gearshift into gear so it would not roll further. Officer Erhart had Gee place a cinderblock against the rear wheel as added protection for other emergency responders.

When the ambulance arrived, the male subject was quickly loaded and the ambulance sped to the hospital as the patient was in critical condition. This was later confirmed at the hospital.

Capt. Dan R. Daniels from the Spokane Fire Department investigated the incident and confirmed that the carbon monoxide levels inside the garage were tested, even after the doors had been open for several minutes prior to SFD arrival, and the levels were found to be still at a hazardous level. Capt. Daniels states in an email, "The response/investigation by your officers coupled with a sense of urgency surely played a role in this young mans' survival."

I would like to note that in interviewing Officers Lundgren, Erhart, and Gee, all minimized their actions, their disregard for their own safety, and the fact that if all of them had not responded in the sequence and fashion they did, with experience and without hesitation, the outcome of this incident would have been tragic. Officer Erhart stated that Officer Gee was coughing excessively and that he was worried about her safety and the effects the carbon monoxide was having on her.

I have spoken to the father of the above mentioned subject. He is in the medical field and knows the affects CO can have on a person. His son has recovered nicely and has been discharged from the hospital after being placed in the hyperbaric chamber three times. He wanted me to express to these officers that he cannot thank them enough for what they did for his son.

Officer Erhart, Officer Lundgren and Officer Gee were issued the Lifesaving Bar, to be worn on their uniforms. They will receive their Lifesaving Medals at our annual Employee Awards Ceremony in February of 2010.

