

Department of Public Safety News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 15, 2026

Governor Kehoe awards Missouri Public Safety Medals to first responders and civilians for heroic actions in 2025

18 law enforcement officers, 3 members of the fire service, a paramedic and 2 civilians who assisted first responders are honored

Governor Mike Kehoe this afternoon awarded Missouri Public Safety Medals to 22 first responders. Three of the awards were presented posthumously to individuals killed in the line of duty. The awards – the Medal of Valor, Governor’s Award, and Red, White and Blue Heart Award – are Missouri’s highest recognitions for public safety officers acting during critical incidents. The Governor also presented the Public Safety Civilian Partnership Award to two civilians for courageously assisting first responders during emergency situations in 2025.

"There is no greater honor than standing alongside the heroes who put their own lives at risk to protect their fellow Missourians," **Governor Kehoe** said. "Today, we recognized first responders who ran toward violence, confronted life-threatening dangers, and carried out extraordinary rescues – as well as two courageous civilians who stepped up when others needed them most. Tragically, three of the heroes we honored made the ultimate sacrifice in service to others. While their stories are different, each reflects the courage, selflessness, and instinct to serve that represent the very best of Missouri."

"The heroes we honored today possess a resilience, sense of duty and deep compassion for others that is emblematic of the characteristics that draw first responders to public service," **Department of Public Safety Director Mark James** said. "These lifesavers demonstrated once again how fortunate Missourians are to be served by our first responder community. We are also grateful to the civilians honored today, who displayed the same courage and agility as our first responder honorees. Finally, we are forever indebted to the Red, White and Blue Heart Award recipients, three of whom paid the ultimate price for their service to their communities."

Family members and colleagues were on hand for the award program at Missouri State Highway Patrol headquarters in Jefferson City. The award recipients and the acts for which they were honored are as follows:

Public Safety Civilian Partnership Award: Awarded to a civilian who has provided valuable or courageous assistance to members of a Missouri public safety agency in an emergency situation.

Jennifer Martin, nominated by Willow Springs Fire Department – On February 20, 2025, Jennifer Martin, a schoolteacher, was watching her son sledding in the family’s front yard when she observed a young neighbor walking on the iced-over pond across the street. The boy then disappeared through the ice. Martin had her son call 911 and ran to the edge of the pond. She then crawled across the ice to reach the child, who was struggling to stay above water. Martin mustered the strength to pull the boy out of the water, helped him crawl back to land and then walked him home. When the Willow Springs Fire Department and EMS arrived, they evaluated the boy

for hypothermia, warmed him in an ambulance and monitored his condition. As the sole witness to the child's plight, only Martin could play the role of hero. And that is precisely what she did: immediately summoning the courage to risk her own safety to rescue a child in a dire emergency.

Elizabeth Lord, nominated by Missouri Department of Transportation – On May 21, 2025, a MoDOT team was replacing a storm-damaged light pole in Jackson, Mo. The new pole rotated as it was being erected and hit an electric wire, causing an explosion and sending electrical shocks to three MoDOT employees. MoDOT team members pulled the two most seriously injured to safety and used a fire extinguisher to put out the flames that had enveloped them. MoDOT's Bryant Sheehy then began administering CPR to one of the team members. Elizabeth Lord, a certified nursing assistant, was driving her daughter to work when she witnessed the explosion. Understanding that CPR can be exhausting, Lord took over CPR from Sheehy. The victim coded twice, but Lord continued applying CPR and helped a police officer administer an AED shock. Jackson Fire Rescue arrived and Lord continued administering CPR as paramedics delivered a second AED shock. The victim's heart began beating again. The two injured MoDOT team members were flown to an ICU burn unit in St. Louis and have recovered. Lord, who has stayed in touch with the MoDOT team members, acted selflessly, as a Good Samaritan – stopping when a stranger needed help and becoming a true lifesaver.

Governor's Medal: Awarded to a group of public safety officers in recognition of acts above and beyond the call of normal duty during a critical incident in which the collective performance of the group was essential to the successful resolution of the incident.

Kenneth Carpenter Jr., Dusty Johnson, Adam Miles, Sami Tscherning, Poplar Bluff Police Department – On the night of March 14, 2025, an EF-3 tornado ripped through Poplar Bluff, causing major destruction. The officers responded through a maze of debris to Fox Drive, where a tree had crashed through a house, trapping the resident. Officer Tscherning, who was first on the scene, found the victim in her bedroom, pinned under a giant tree and debris. The woman was severely injured. Officers Carpenter and Miles arrived next. The officers began carefully clearing debris, to reach the victim. Lt. Johnson, who was called back to work after a 12-hour shift, was sent to the residence. As he entered the house, the large tree shifted, crashing deeper into the wreckage and increasing the danger. As the officers gingerly dislodged the victim, they learned no ambulances were available. With time of the essence because of the victim's severe injuries, the officers carried her to the bed of a police pickup truck. Lt. Johnson tended to the victim as Officer Carpenter navigated his way through several miles of debris to the hospital. Teamwork and quick thinking were essential under circumstances that demanded improvisation, compassion and skill to get the severely injured victim to lifesaving care at the hospital. Fortunately, the victim has made a full recovery. Lt. Johnson retired from the department in July after 19 years of service. Carpenter is now a member of the Missouri State Highway Patrol.

Elliott Barton, Todd Derr, Brandon Harrison, Jasmine Juarez, Justin McElroy, Derek Rice, Michelle Ritter, Nathaniel Stapleton, St. Joseph Police Department – On March 27, 2025, after a violent carjacking in downtown St. Joseph, Officer Juarez and Field Training Officer Stapleton located the vehicle, attempted a traffic stop and, when the two suspects took off, initiated what became a heart-racing 11-minute pursuit. As the driver raced through city streets and alleys, his accomplice fired at least seven bursts of shots at Juarez and Stapleton, striking the patrol vehicle. Stapleton returned fire when safe to do so. Detective Ritter joined the pursuit, and her vehicle also sustained gunfire damage. Officers briefly lost sight of the suspect vehicle, but Detective Harrison located it and attempted to block the vehicle, but the carjackers rammed his patrol car. Sergeant Derr then took the lead, executing two controlled strikes, disabling the vehicle. Both suspects then fled on foot. Detective Harrison managed to apprehend the driver. Detectives Barton and McElroy and Officer Rice pursued the armed passenger through residential yards and over fences. The gunman turned and pointed his weapon at Barton and McElroy. Facing an imminent threat to their lives, both detectives discharged their service weapons. Officer Rice also fired. The gunman was struck and pronounced dead at the scene. During a high intensity, life-threatening ordeal, all eight officers acted with professionalism and skill and safely ended a severe threat to the public. Derr has been promoted to captain. Stapleton has been promoted to detective.

Medal of Valor: Missouri's highest award recognizing public safety officers who exhibit exceptional courage, extraordinary decisiveness and presence of mind, and unusual swiftness of action, regardless of his or her personal safety, in the attempt to save or protect human life.

Dustin Kirkpatrick, Oregon County Ambulance District – On January 24, 2025, Chief Paramedic Kirkpatrick was first on the scene of a house fire in Koshkonong, with persons trapped. The house was fully engulfed and an elderly man on the porch stated his wife was trapped inside. Kirkpatrick pulled the man to safety and began searching for the wife without time to don his protective gear. He crawled into the smoke-filled, zero-visibility structure and located the elderly woman face down on the floor. He dragged the unresponsive woman from the center of the house. A firefighter helped him move the victim into the yard. An Oregon County ambulance had now arrived, and Kirkpatrick instructed the team to treat the elderly man while he treated the elderly woman, who was barely breathing. He began life-saving care, intubating the woman and establishing vascular access to administer critical medications. His intervention stabilized the victim's oxygen levels before she was transported to the hospital, where she recovered. Kirkpatrick acted selflessly, entering a burning home without protective equipment and delivering expert medical care to save the woman's life.

Justin D. Hedrick, Missouri State Highway Patrol – On the night of February 23, 2025, Trooper Hedrick was in South St. Louis County when he heard radio traffic that a sedan was traveling south in the northbound lanes of I-55. Hedrick entered northbound I-55 from Butler Hill Road and observed the sedan approaching him traveling in the wrong direction. He activated his lights and siren and used his air horn to attempt to slow down the wrong-way driver. He then reduced his own speed and, as the vehicle was about to pass him, intentionally struck the driver side of the wrong-way vehicle with the front of his patrol car. The maneuver forced the wrong-way vehicle off the roadway and disabled both vehicles. The driver was arrested for DWI. Trooper Hedrick suffered a concussion and injured wrist. Trooper Hedrick selflessly and unhesitatingly placed himself directly in the path of an out of control wrecking ball to protect the public.

Dustin W. Harrison, Missouri State Highway Patrol – On October 12, 2025, Missouri State Highway Patrol Trooper Harrison and Randolph County Deputy Sheriff Nate West were searching for a person of interest in a homicide investigation as part of an Operation Relentless Pursuit investigation. They received consent to search a Monroe County home occupied by family members of the person of interest. Understanding the danger and the need to make split-second decisions, they entered the house and encountered the person of interest armed with a handgun. He refused to follow the officers' commands to drop his weapon and then fired upon Harrison and West, seriously wounding West. Trooper Harrison advanced toward the gunman while returning fire without regard for his personal safety, intent on protecting Deputy West. Deputy West also returned fire, despite being wounded. Trooper Harrison assisted Deputy West out of the house and provided medical treatment. The Moberly Police Department SWAT team later entered the residence and found the gunman deceased. Trooper Harrison exhibited exceptional courage and professionalism in an extremely dangerous close quarters combat environment, protecting Deputy West, himself, and the community.

Zebulon H. Hoffman, Linn Fire Protection District – On October 21, 2025, Firefighter Hoffman, the Missouri Department of Conservation's primary fixed wing pilot, was training to operate MDC's helicopter. He and his instructor pilot were conducting training maneuvers at the Springfield Downtown Airport when the helicopter lost power and crash landed, flipping onto its left side. Despite suffering a crushed jaw and fractured vertebrae, Hoffman freed himself, escaped through the shattered windshield and immediately attempted to rescue his colleague. Ignoring his own pain, he repeatedly tried to lift the wreckage until he managed to free the instructor's pinned left arm. Emergency responders arrived after 35 minutes. Both men were hospitalized for three weeks, with Hoffman undergoing emergency trauma care and extensive reconstructive surgery. His heroic disregard for his own critical injuries to extricate his trapped colleague was a courageous act of resilience and perseverance.

Matthew Schneider, Troy Police Department – At about 5:40 p.m. on May 10, 2025, K-9 Officer Schneider was heading home from his shift when he heard a call for a high-speed crash with a trapped driver on Old Moscow Mills Road. He was first on the scene where a car had struck a large tree. The vehicle was engulfed in flames. The closed doors were inoperable. Understanding the imminent danger to the 23-year-old trapped victim who was in and out of consciousness, Schneider disregarded his own safety, relentlessly fighting heat and flames to access the cabin. He eventually forced open the passenger door, extracted the driver, and dragged him to safety. EMS began administering critical care to the driver who had sustained serious injuries and burns. The victim was flown to a hospital. Schneider's valiant intervention and split-second decision making in the face of imminent danger saved the victim's life.

Christopher A. Winter, Missouri State Highway Patrol – Just before 1 a.m. on December 7, 2025, Corporal Winter spotted a wrong-way driver traveling eastbound in the westbound lanes of U.S. 54 in Cole County. Winter notified Troop F, activated his emergency lights and siren and attempted to position his vehicle to stop the wrong-way driver. When the driver continued past him in the wrong direction, Winter had Troop F notify Jefferson City Police of the need for assistance, entered the eastbound lanes of Highway 54, drove parallel with the wrong way driver, running his lights and siren to warn oncoming drivers. Winter then accelerated to the next exit to attempt to cut off the driver again, but she was moving too fast. He re-entered eastbound Highway 54, again utilizing his lights and siren to warn multiple oncoming vehicles. Winter then overtook the wrong-way driver again, this time joined by several Jefferson City Police officers. After they crossed the Missouri River Bridge, Winter used a median crossover to enter westbound traffic. Positioning himself in the center lane, he shone his spotlight at the wrong-way driver. She slowed but attempted to pass Winter's vehicle, presenting further danger to the public. Winter then executed a precise, glancing strike to the front driver's side door area, bringing the vehicle to a stop. He then placed the uninjured driver under arrest for DWI. Over the course of just six minutes, Corporal Winter repeatedly put himself at risk and then improvised and successfully executed a maneuver for which there was no training, all to protect the public.

Red, White and Blue Heart Award: This award may be presented to any first responder who under honorable circumstances is critically, seriously, or fatally injured while performing official duties in the line of duty. The injury must require long-term treatment by a medical professional and considerable loss of time from duty.

Vernon Collett, Johnson County Fire Protection District – On March 8, 2025, as many areas of Missouri experienced dangerous wildfire conditions, the Johnson County Fire Protection District was dispatched to a reported fast-moving fire in a field in rural Johnson County. The fire had been started as a controlled burn but grew out of control. Captain Collett was first on the scene in his personal vehicle and began suppressing the fire with a fire swatter he traveled with in his vehicle. Captain Collett collapsed from a medical emergency. District personnel administered CPR. The Johnson County Ambulance District continued lifesaving efforts but were not able to revive him. Captain Collett faithfully served the Jackson County Fire Protection District for 29 years and, in a final act demonstrating his commitment to protecting the public, was first on the scene and immediately went to work attempting to control the fire.

Graham J. Hoffman, Kansas City Fire Department – On April 27, 2025, Firefighter-Paramedic Hoffman and his Kansas City Fire Department ambulance partner responded to a medical call from the Kansas City Police Department. After treating the patient at the scene, Hoffman was caring for her en route to North Kansas City Hospital when she pulled a knife and stabbed Hoffman in the chest, piercing his heart. A crew emergency was initiated, and additional fire and police responders arrived at the scene. Lifesaving efforts were performed as the ambulance rushed to the hospital and continued in surgery. Despite all efforts, Hoffman, 29, who had been a member of the fire department for three years, succumbed to his injuries. He had been murdered in an ambulance, a place where he had devoted his life to treating countless patients in need with kindness and compassion.

Jared Timbrook, Lee's Summit Police Department – At about 11 p.m. on June 1, 2025, Lee's Summit officers were dispatched to an apartment complex for a domestic disturbance. Officer Timbrook located the victim and suspect in the parking lot. The suspect tried to leave in his vehicle and then fled on foot when Timbrook attempted to detain him. Timbrook gave chase when the suspect ran between two garage units. The suspect then quickly turned and fired several shots. Officer Timbrook was struck and knocked to the ground. As he ran back past Timbrook toward his vehicle, the gunman fired additional rounds at Timbrook. Officer Timbrook remained calm and was able to provide a suspect description and direct responding units. The suspect was later arrested in Kansas. Officer David Stanley provided critical first aid, applying a tourniquet to Timbrook's upper left leg. Officer Madison Madden and Stanley loaded Timbrook into Madden's vehicle and transported him to paramedics staged outside the scene. Timbrook underwent surgery for four gunshot wounds – to his left arm and leg, his shoulder and chest. A ballistic vest stopped a potentially fatal shot to the torso. He returned to light duty with the department this year and continues to receive ongoing treatment for his injuries.

Henry Franklin, Sikeston Department of Public Safety – On October 6, 2025, the Mississippi County Sheriff's Office requested activation of the Sikeston Department of Public Safety Special Operations Group – a SWAT team – after a local farmer was found dead. It was believed that the killer was barricaded in the farmer's residence. Officer Franklin deployed as a member of the Special Operations Group and was shot and killed by the suspect who was concealed inside the residence during the service of an arrest warrant. The gunman died from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound. Officer Franklin devoted his life to courageously serving and protecting others, including almost 20 years in the military, two tours in Iraq, and over 12 years patrolling the streets of Sikeston as a member of Sikeston DPS. He died as he and other officers attempted to bring a murder suspect to justice. He will be remembered for bravely confronting violence and making the ultimate sacrifice so the community could live in safety.

Nominations are now open for heroic acts performed during 2026 and must be received by February 28, 2027. The nominating forms are available on the Missouri Department of Public Safety website at

<https://dps.mo.gov/medal/> (<https://dps.mo.gov/medal/>).

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