

Ceremony awards first responders

By Molly A.K. Connors

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Two Franklin police officers were among 60 emergency responders recognized by the New Hampshire congressional delegation last night at the New Hampshire Police Academy in Concord for putting the safety of others ahead of their own.

Sgt. Richard Carlson and Officer Daniel Ball both received "Above and Beyond the Call of Duty" awards, Carlson for saving a suicidal woman from jumping off a bridge in June and Ball for rescuing a wheelchair-bound woman from a burning building in May.

Stories of such heroics by officers from the state police, the New Hampshire National Guard, the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, the Mountain Rescue Service, the U.S. Marshals Service and local departments across the state dominated the ceremony, which was attended by Sens. Kelly Ayotte and Jeanne Shaheen and Reps. Charlie Bass and Frank Guinta.

"They're individuals who have been wounded in firefights," Shaheen said at the start of the ceremony. "They've braved burning buildings to save lives."

The New Hampshire Congressional Law Enforcement Awards were established in 1998 by Bass and then-Sen. John Sununu at the request of New Hampshire law enforcement personnel. The awards honor both individual specific acts of heroism and careers of community service.

Carlson, 37, was on a routine patrol in Franklin when he came across a group of people at a bridge on Central Street, according to Vincent Baiocchetti, chief of the Belmont police and last night's master of ceremonies.

Carlson soon realized that a distraught woman was on the verge of suicide and sitting on a rail of the bridge.

Carlson reached out, grabbed her around the torso and started to pull her in, Baiocchetti told about 400 audience members.

"As he did that, the woman started to resist and started to slide out of his grip," Baiocchetti said. Carlson then told an onlooker to grab the woman's arm, and together they brought her to safety.

Ball, 29, was also on a routine patrol when he was called to a house with a kitchen fire, Baiocchetti said. When he arrived, he was told a handicapped woman was trapped in a rear bedroom.

"Without hesitation and before the arrival of fire department personnel, Officer Ball entered the building and located the handicapped woman," Baiocchetti said. "He then carried her from the

house before the fire spread closer to her room," averting a "potentially dangerous situation," he said.

Both officers said they were a little uncomfortable with the attention but felt the awards ceremony was good for the families that support them and other officers.

"It's wonderful for my family to come out and see," Carlson said.

Sgt. Tim Dow of the Northfield Police Department received an award for dedication and professionalism. A former police officer in Franklin, he has worked in Northfield since 1997, Baiocchetti said. Dow is the Drug Abuse Resistance Education, or D.A.R.E. officer, at the Southwick School.

About a third of the evening's awards went to 22 officers from the Mont Vernon, Milford, Amherst and state police who were honored for their work in the response and investigation of the 2009 murder of Kimberly Gates in Mont Vernon. Others were honored for rescuing trapped hikers on Franconia Ridge, capsized kayakers freezing to death and a woman held hostage at knifepoint.

The recipients are chosen by a committee of retired and active law enforcement personnel who review the nominations, which can be endorsed by citizens, police departments or other local officials. The members of the congressional delegation do not vote on the nominations.

"You'll never meet a more dedicated, thoughtful, caring, compassionate and tough group of individuals," Ayotte said.

Usually only about 40 officers receive citations, Baiocchetti said in an interview afterward, but the ceremony had been suspended from 2008 until now, so officers were honored for actions taken over the last three years.

While the subjects discussed were serious, the atmosphere was light as families took photos, the occasional baby cried and the New Hampshire Police Association's Pipes and Drums played rousing renditions of "America the Beautiful," "Amazing Grace" and "The Marine Corps Hymn" on drums and bagpipes, receiving some of the longest sustained applause of the evening.