2019 Governor’s Flood Heroes Ceremony
Short Bios

SPECIAL HONOREES

James Wilke - Posthumous

James Wilke was a Columbus farmer who lost his life after volunteering to help a driver stranded by floodwaters in Platte County. He is a Nebraska hero who selflessly served those in his community.

Nebraska National Guard Air Crew & Coordinators

The Nebraska National Guard Air Crew carried out high-risk hoist rescues under extreme weather conditions to locate and extract seven emergency responders who had capsized. The coordination of the team had to be incredibly precise demonstrating proficiency and commitment.

Magnificent Seven

The Magnificent Seven is comprised of firefighters and volunteers in the Fremont and Cedar Bluffs area. Shortly after setting out to rescue a stranded family by airboat, their boats capsized and the men were left in freezing and dangerous waters. Banding together, all men were rescued themselves by helicopter.

ORGANIZATIONS

Nebraska Airboaters Association

Nebraska Airboaters were essential to the success of numerous rescue missions across the state. All boaters gave their time and resources without any expectation of reimbursement. Because of the Nebraska Airboaters Association, these individuals had the knowledge to operate their boats in adverse conditions.

Nebraska Task Force 1

Nebraska Task Force 1 is an Urban Search & Rescue Task Force made up of highly trained emergency personnel from several cities across the state. These individuals are specially trained in water rescue and evacuated over 100 individuals. By working with local agencies, together many lives were saved by Nebraska Task Force 1.

INDIVIDUALS

Mark Arps

Mark Arps is the Colfax County Emergency Manager. When flooding worsened, Mark attempted to rescue stranded motorists while traveling through floodwater so strong it flowed over the head of his pick-up.

Sarah Bichlemeier

Sarah Bichlemeier is a high school junior from Monroe, Nebraska. While being rescued by lifeboat, Sarah selflessly gave up her seat to safety in order to reunite a mother and son.
Brad Brown

Brad Brown is a resident of Valley. He volunteered his airboat to take fireman to others in need of rescue. He also transported food and supplies to victims as well as feed to farm animals.

David Brown

David Brown is the Chief Deputy in Cuming County as well as a Nebraska rancher. When flooding struck, David assumed the role of County Emergency Manager and led successful evacuation and sandbagging missions.

Matthew Carter

Matthew Carter is the assistant chief of the Nickerson Volunteer Fire Department. One night, Matthew assisted in saving a passenger who had been ejected from the airboat he was on. He then continued onward to make another rescue.

Mike Coyle

Mike Coyle is a member of the Mead Volunteer Fire Department. By volunteering his own equipment, Mike was able to perform several rescue missions for both citizens and fellow firefighters in Saunders and surrounding counties.

Andrew Elsberry

Andrew Elsberry is a resident of Pierce who assisted Pierce Fire and Rescue on the first day of flooding. By offering to use his own boat, Andrew rescued 12 individuals over the course of several days. He also assisted the fire department with filling and placing sandbags to protect his community.

Brandon Evans

Brandon Evans is a member of the Ainsworth Volunteer Fire Department. Working with a fellow volunteer, Brandon rescued a woman clinging to a tree after she had been pulled from her vehicle and swept downstream.

Randy Fujan

Randy Fujan is a resident of Ames, Nebraska. When his subdivision was stranded without power and supplies, Randy kayaked across a rapid channel to reach his airboat he would then use to transport supplies to fellow distressed residents. In the following days, Randy used his airboat to transport individuals across the water so they could get to work and back.

Larry Geiger

Larry Geiger is a helicopter pilot from Lincoln. Using his helicopter, Larry transported numerous people between Columbus and Fremont. While in the air, he also looked for others who had been stranded or designated as missing and reported their location to authorities so they could be found.
Matthew Gentrup

Matthew is a member of the Nickerson Volunteer Fire Department. On the first night of flooding, Matthew was thrown from a rescue boat after it collided with a telephone pole. He continued on that evening to complete his final rescue successfully.

Nathan Gillaspie

Nathan Gillaspie works on a ranch near Spencer. Lowell Fisher called Nathan for help when his tractor had become stranded in swift-moving water. Nathan helped two other men navigate a boat through uncertain conditions to rescue Lowell from his tractor. When rain turned to snow, Nathan went on to assist in rescuing nine baby calves who had become stranded by the flooding.

Jim Hassenstab

Jim Hassenstab is a resident of Omaha and a volunteer pilot for Angel Flight Central, a group of pilots who volunteer their plane and time to transport people around the Midwest. When flooding isolated Fremont, Jim graciously offered to fly a woman to see her dying mother free of charge.

Justin Herring

Justin Herring is an airboater from Fremont who assisted with numerous rescues during the flooding.

Craig & Hollie Hittner

Hollie Hittner and her husband Craig are both residents of Fremont. Hollie is the secretary and treasurer of the Nebraska Airboat Association. The couple used their airboat to rescue individuals along the Platte River.

Dillon Horejsi

Dillon Horejsi and his father Mark are both residents of Schuyler. Alongside his father, Dillon saved a woman, her 9-month old son, and dog from floodwaters. They made several other rescues.

Mark Horejsi

Mark Horejsi and his son Dillon used their airboat to complete several rescue missions. The father and son team saved a stranded woman, child, and dog and got them to safety before more damage had been done to their home.

Michael Ireland, Jr.

Michael Ireland, Jr. is a resident of Fremont. He was a first responder using an airboat to rescue individuals who had been stranded.

Kyle Kern

Kyle Kern is a resident of Cedar Bluffs. Kyle used his business airboat to assist the Dodge County Sheriff’s Office in rescue missions in the Fremont Valley area.
Trent Kinney

Trent Kinney is a member of the Ainsworth Volunteer Fire Department. Working with a fellow volunteer, Trent rescued a woman clinging to a tree after she had been pulled from her vehicle and swept downstream.

Jim Kjeldgaard

Jim Kjeldgaard, alongside his father, orchestrated the Fremont Airlift of supplies and people when all the roads to Fremont were under water. Jim remained at the airport nearly 24/7 working tirelessly to make sure everyone in the community was getting the assistance they needed.

Greg Kjeldgaard

Greg Kjeldgaard is the vice president of Fremont Aviation. Greg organized the Fremont Airlift system that brought people and supplies where they needed to go. Nearly 100 planes carried hundreds of people and thousands of pounds of supplies.

Zachary Klein

Zachary Klein is a firefighter in Fremont. When the flood struck his town he stepped up and took leadership to make sure his community was taken care of. Zachary planned meetings with FEMA, the Red Cross, and is leading clean-up efforts.

Nir Levin

Nir Levin is the owner of Nirbuilt Airboats in Ashland. When the flooding began, Nir worked alongside the Yutan, Waterloo, and Mead Fire Departments to assist in rescue missions.

Brad Littrell

Brad Littrell is a resident of Fremont. Brad was one of the first responders rescuing stranded individuals by airboat in Fremont.

Terry Martensen

Terry Martensen is a member of the Monroe Volunteer Fire Department. He responded to a night call stating a driver had been trapped inside her vehicle by floodwaters. By operating a town tractor, Terry was able to rescue the driver quickly before the roadway was washed away.

Dusty Menking

Dusty Menking is the Fire Chief of the Nickerson Volunteer Fire Department. Dusty led several water rescues and evacuation missions to save farm families suffering from the flood. He also saved a man who had been thrown from an airboat during a rescue mission.

Austin Motacek

Austin Motacek assisted in the rescue mission of Lowell Fisher in Spencer. Austin captained the boat that pulled Lowell from his tractor, and he jumped out of the boat to help safely guide it back to the water’s edge after the rescue.
Jerry Motacek

Jerry Motacek of Verdel assisted in the rescue mission of Lowell Fisher from his tractor. By providing his flat-bottom boat, Jerry and two others were able to navigate through dark waters and rescue Lowell returning him to safety.

Rudy Novacek

Rudy Novacek is a member of the Nebraska Department of Transportation District 1 team. While guiding others to safety, Rudy saw a state trooper who had been stranded in his pick-up. Rudy immediately headed back into danger to help the trooper and led the entire group to safety.

Kipton Oetter

Kipton Oetter is an owner of Jack and Mary’s restaurant and a resident of Waterloo. Kipton risked his own safety to use his boat to rescue two fellow neighbors who had been trapped in their home. When recovery efforts began, Kipton used his resources to provide prepared meals to flood victims and to this date Kipton and his team have served hundreds of meals.

Matt Prochaska

Matt Prochaska is a resident of Schuyler. Matt worked hard to coordinate airboat rescues for community members. He also volunteered to help sandbag numerous homes and businesses.

Daniel Quismondo

Daniel Quismondo is a volunteer fireman for the Valley Fire Department. While his own home was damaged, Daniel spent hours making water rescues for fellow citizens in his community.

Cody Reynolds

Cody Reynolds is a member of the Fremont Rural Fire Department. Cody acted quickly when the flooding began and continued to help flood victims for several days after. He spent time traveling house to house to make sure all residents were able to get out safely and reach dry ground.

Autumn Rock

Autumn Rock is resident of Gretna. She coordinated airboat rescues as well as incoming donations of hay and supplies from all over the country. Autumn set up flood headquarters at Chance Ridge and worked to help farmers and ranchers clean up and care for animals once the flooding had subsided.

Chris Schlosser

Chris Schlosser resides in Fontanelle. He proved his bravery when assisting in airboat rescue missions, showing selflessness in the way he treated flood victims.

Steve Scigo

Steve Scigo is a resident of Fremont who offered to use his personal 5-ton military vehicle to aid the rescue missions of the Dodge County Sheriff’s Office. Working for 20 hours straight, Steve rescued residents from their homes as well as led 7 horses to safety. He also used his vehicle to transport sandbags.
Scott Selko

Scott Selko is a banker and member of the Mead Volunteer Fire Department. While completing a rescue mission, Scott’s truck began to sink, meaning he was in need of rescue as well. Once an airboat rescued him, Scott immediately headed back out to evacuate more people. He continued this for six days straight, rarely resting to eat or sleep in order to help as many people as he could.

Chuck Stanczyk

Chuck Stanczyk works as the Fullerton Highway Maintenance Supervisor for the Nebraska Department of Transportation. He ventured into the Cedar River’s floodwaters with his pickup to remove a fallen power pole that had washed onto a highway and to rescue a motorist whose jeep had run into the obstruction.

Anthony Trotta

Anthony Trotta, from Columbus, performed rescues by airboat in the aftermath of the floods.

Kyle Wagner

Kyle Wagner is a resident of Fremont. He completed several airboat rescues over the course of three days rescuing numerous people. Kyle showed true dedication and bravery while protecting his community.

Kim Wolfe

Kim Wolfe is a helicopter pilot from Elkhorn. He flew 10 hours or more each day lifting people and pets from stranded homes. Kim also flew paramedics and medical supplies into Waterloo after floodwaters had isolated the town and volunteered to take law enforcement and press up to survey the damage.

Kyle Woodgate

Kyle Woodgate is a resident of North Bend. He risked his own life to go to Fremont and provide medication to a baby in need. Kyle also assisted in airboat rescues and took over Fire Command when the fire chief was needed for emergency management.

William Zoucha

William Zoucha is a member of the Monroe Volunteer Fire Department. He answered the call to save a stranded driver and used a town tractor to reach her and pull her from her vehicle. When floodwaters receded the roadway was gone. William’s bravery and quick thinking allowed for the rescue to be successful.