

James Gordon Bennett Medal NYS Honorary Fire Chiefs Association Medal

FIREFIGHTER PETER G. DEMONTREUX LADDER COMPANY 132

August 30, 2010, 0427 hours, Box 22-0963, 175 Putnam Avenue, Brooklyn

Appointed to the FDNY on January 27, 2002. Previously assigned to Engine 248. Brother, Lieutenant Louis Demontreux, is assigned to Engine 154. Recipient of one unit citation, plus the Chief Ray Downey Courage and Valor Award from Fire Engineering Magazine, Daily News Hero of the Month and NY Rotary Club Service award. Holds a BS degree in Business Management from the College of Staten Island. Resides on Staten Island with his wife, Gina, and their children, Peter, Jr., Allison, Evelyn and Gwyneth.



Generally, brownstones are considered to be well-constructed and capable of withstanding the ravages of fire. This is possible since they are made of brick and stone, giving them their strength, but brownstones also contain fire and heat as do non-fireproof buildings. These factors offer the occupants security, but also make it challenging for firefighters initiating searches and rescues.

As strong as the exterior of these buildings are, they are nearly all wood on the inside, with open interior stairs that allow fire to travel quickly. This is further complicated by the lack of fire escapes (front and rear), since these are considered *private dwellings*. In reality, very few are private dwellings. The brownstone at 175 Putnam Avenue is a classic example--four stories, with limited access to the upper floors and rear of the building.

When the phone alarm came in for this Box, it was followed with numerous reports of people trapped inside the building. Engine 235 arrived first and gave the 10-75. Ladder 132 arrived a minute later and members immediately covered their positions.

Ladder 132 is a unit that has responded to numerous brownstone fires and, normally, their skills and training would make this a routine job. However, this was not a routine job.

At the third-floor window was a trapped victim; 60-year-old Henri Howell, who was in a very tenuous position with high heat and dense smoke pushing all around him. FF Peter Demontreux, the outside vent firefighter, climbed the aerial to the third floor and pulled Mr. Howell onto the aerial.

Once he had the victim safely on the aerial, Mr. Howell told his rescuer that his friend was still inside the burning apartment. Time was a critical factor; the inside team was still a floor below due to the amount of fire on the stairs and in the hall. FF Demontreux entered the third-floor window and began his search. Even with all the modern personal protective equipment (PPE), the heat and smoke drove FF Demontreux back to the window.

Meanwhile, FF Richard Myers, Rescue 2, had climbed the aerial and

began venting the adjacent window to allow some of the blistering heat and dense smoke to escape. Without hesitation, FF Demontreux turned back into the apartment to continue his search. Crawling on his hands and knees, as quickly as possible, he was able to reach the rear room where he found the other victim, the 51-year-old Clyde Mantany, who was at the window, trying to get some relief from the smoke and heat.

Knowing there was no fire escape and it would take time for a portable ladder to be brought to the rear or initiate a rope rescue from above, FF Demontreux determined the only way out was the window through which he came. Shielding Mr. Mantany as best he could, the firefighter led him back through the searing heat to the front of the building. As they entered the front room, the heat ignited into flame and engulfed both men, setting their clothes on fire. FF Myers, still at the aerial, immediately transmitted a *mayday*.

FF Demontreux, now on fire, with survival instincts telling him to get out, decided not to leave Mr. Mantany behind. Through this fully involved room and at extreme personal risk, he pulled the burning victim toward the window.

FF Demontreux, while being burned from the flames all around him, exhibited courage and tenacity by assisting the victim out the window to FF Myers, who was on the aerial. Once the victim cleared the window, FF Demontreux dove onto the aerial and both victim and rescuer were extinguished by members operating Engine 219's hand-line, which was positioned in front of the building.

Both victim and rescuer suffered extensive burns; Mr. Mantany received burns over 50 percent of his body, but is alive. Although it was destroyed, his protective gear saved FF Demontreux.

Words are inadequate to describe FF Peter G. Demontreux' heroic actions. He put his life on the line for another human being. His courage and professionalism reinforce the traditions of the fire service and FDNY and always will be remembered by those who witnessed this act of bravery. For these reasons, he is honored with the James Gordon Bennett Medal and the New York State Honorary Fire Chiefs Association Medal.--JTV



FF Peter Demontreux tends to the victim he rescued. Both victim and FF Demontreux suffered extensive burns.
photo by Damy Iudici