

Tribune-Press

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GVFD honors two with "Firefighter of the Year" awards

By Dick Sterling

Past and present members of the Gouverneur Volunteer Fire Department took a break from training, ice skating, maintaining equipment and all of the other duties associated with keeping their members and building up to date, and paused to honor some of their own during the department's annual banquet on Saturday night at the Gouverneur Elks Lodge. Two dedicated members were also singled out with co-Firefighter of the Year Awards.

Members and their guests, as well as many other invited guests from other area departments, townships and agencies, enjoyed a prime rib dinner and then honored many of the individuals who make the department what it is, either through their dedication, years of service, or ability to be willing to learn.

Fire Chief Steve Young opened the annual recognition portion of the banquet by welcoming representatives from many area fire departments, including Morristown, Canton, Edwards, Oxbow and Richville, the Gouverneur Rescue Squad, state police and the St. Lawrence County Sheriff's Department were also thanked for working so well with the department.

Assistant Chief Joe Lacks mentioned the fine work that was being done by the explorer group that has formed in Gouverneur. "These 15-20 year olds are the future of firefighting in the community," said Mr. Lacks.

The group was formed last year for a trial period. "We were going to limit it to ten, but we now have 11 members, and they're doing a great job and absorbing all of the knowledge they can. These young folks are dedicated and willing to learn. I certainly have no problem in recommending that we extend the program into the future. It has certainly worked well for our department," said Mr. Lacks. Those who attended the banquet were certainly in agreement. The members of the explorer's group were brought to the front and recognized with a certificate.

Service awards were presented to many of the



Assistant Fire Chief Joe Lamb (left) and Fire Chief Steve Young (right) were both proud to present co Firemen of the Years Awards to Mike Hays and Tom Conklin. Both are entering their eighth year with the department and, according to Chief Young, both are very deserving. The actual award is below. (Dick Sterling photos)

department's members. Noting five years of service to the Gouverneur Fire Department were: Ryan Bogardus, Greg Crandall, Luke Hayden and Carl Prashaw. Andy Cowles was recognized for 10 years of service.

Others recognized included: Rick Sibley, for 15 years; Fred Delosh, for 20 years, Dominic Pistolesi for 25 years and Tom Cogan for 40 years of service.

Special awards were also offered to Steve Gale, for his service to both the department and our nation; and Barry Gale, who has been an intricate part of the department for 43 years.

FIREFIGHTER OF THE YEAR

Chief Young said that after an absence of six years, he was happy to bring back the Firefighter of the Year Award.

"I think the meaning behind this award is the dedication and time that some of these people dedicate to the organization. They are always willing to go that extra mile, always are ready to do whatever needs to be done, and you can rest assured that they will do it to the best of their ability. The award isn't always about rescuing someone from a burning building, sometimes the guys that you rely on the most should be offered a pat on the back," said Chief Young.



The 2009 awards for Firefighter of the Year were presented to Michael Hays and Thomas Conklin, who are both going into their eighth year as members of the Gouverneur department.

"They're both very active members. They're both well-trained and aggressive interior firefighters. They both do whatever they're asked to do and go out of their way to make this department better, whether it's helping with training, working out at the

new skating rink, or any other duty that might have to be completed. Both Mike and Tommy set an example for their fellow members. They are excellent mentors. I am proud to offer these awards to Michael Hays and Thomas Conklin."

After the award presentations those at the banquet enjoyed some music, dancing and laughter as those that packed the room certainly seemed to be having a wonderful time.

200 guests at St. James Gala raise \$34,000

By Rachel Riley

It's been 50 years since the establishment of Gouverneur's St. James School in 1960. This year, the theme of the annual St. James fundraising gala was celebration of 50 wonderful years...a birthday party of sorts. An unbelievably transformed gymnasium hosted nearly 200 party guests, all supporters of the school.

An elaborate silent auction, the selling of treasure chest keys, raffles and more enticed guests into participating for a chance to win great prizes.

The treasure chest keys may or may not open a treasure chest containing a prize. The top treasure chest prize was jewelry from Brown's Jewelers, won by Dee Hubbard. 300 gallons of fuel oil from Bush Fuels was won by John Tuttle, \$500 cash by friends of St. James was won by Tanya Sterling, queen for a day at Tangles Salon was won by Theresa Gillan, \$300 worth of gift certificates from local vendors was won by John Cloonan, a Stihl Chainsaw from Country Club Saws was won by Debbie Ward.

This year a couple each opened a treasure chest for a prize: Dan Mullin won the birthday surprise, which was a Casino gift certificate, watch, purse, and room at the Comfort Inn and Tina Mullin won the Spring Cleanup prize by BCS landscaping, Meola Enterprises, Foster's Landscaping and Northern State Cleaning.

"It was a very successful night," said St. James Principal Bridgette LaPierre.

Assemblywoman Dede Scozzafava even stopped in to help the Gouverneur Central Hospitality Club in the kitchen to prepare the catered full course meal.

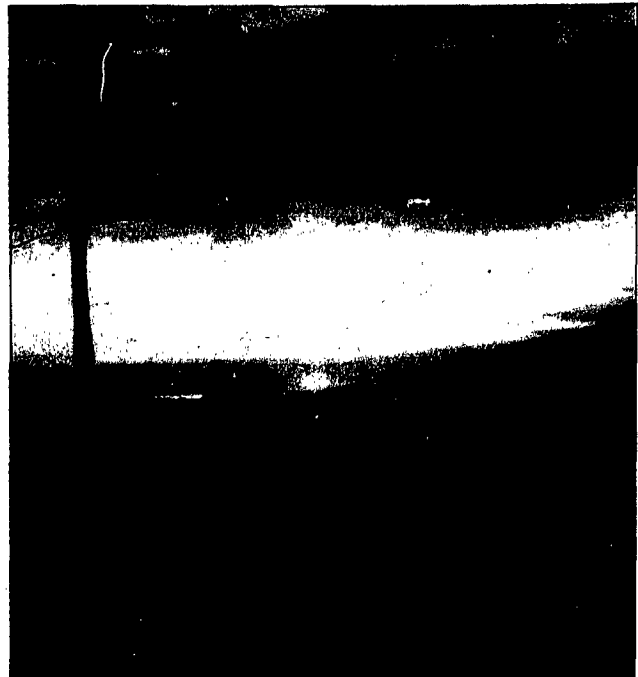
Sister Ellen Rose, a former teacher at the school, addressed the crowd with her reflections on foundations of St. James School.

"I was here very close to the beginning...a dividend is

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The Executive Committee in charge of organizing the Gala at St. James School, pause for a group photo during Saturday's event. Committee members are (from left): Dede Walters, Maureen Kloonan, Julie Wainwright, Clara Cummings, Jennifer Spellicy, and Bridgette LaPierre. Dan Mullin (above) rings the big bell for a prize. (Photos by Rachel Riley)



The days are getting noticeably longer. Even winter can make for a beautiful sunset. This late afternoon shot was captured while traveling through Gouverneur. (Rachel Riley photo)

Chief of Police Whitton recovering after suffering heart attack Saturday

By Dick Sterling

Gouverneur's top cop is home recovering after suffering a heart attack Saturday morning at his home.

"I'm okay now. I owe a lot to our wonderful hospital here in Gouverneur. They certainly know what to do in a crisis situation. We're very lucky to have E.J. Noble Hospital in a community of this size. If I would have had to go to Watertown or Ogdensburg, I'm not sure the result would have been so good," said Chief Whitton on Tuesday morning.

Mr. Whitton, who has been a member of the police force for nearly 39 years, and its chief for more than 20 years, felt some discomfort and other symptoms on Saturday morning. His family rushed him to the hospital where a blood clot was discovered in his heart. He was immediately given a drug to break up the clot and an ambulance was summoned to rush him to St. Joseph's Hospital in Syracuse.

A heart cath revealed some blockages and a stent was placed in one of the arteries. He remained in the hospital for observation over the weekend and was allowed to return home on Monday.

"A lot of people have been calling and checking up on me. I really appreciate that. This certainly isn't a pleasant thing to have to go through. But I'm sure I'll be alright," said Chief Whitton.

Two returning from vacation charged with felony drug sale

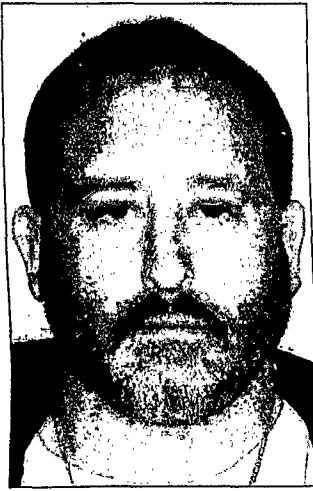
By Dick Sterling

The final two suspects in the January 25th drug sweep in the village of Gouverneur were arrested on Monday, shortly after returning from a Florida vacation, and were charged with felony drug sale offenses.

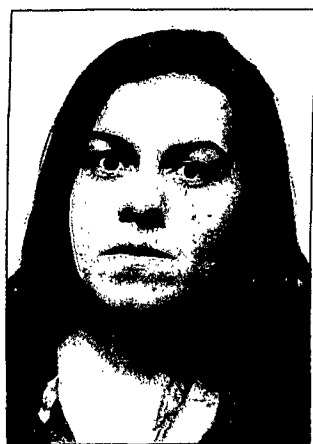
Gouverneur Village Police Sgt. Gordon Ayen reported that Troy Bigwarfe, 39, and Casey Lastella, 32, both of West Main Street, were taken into custody at their home at about 6:55 p.m. Sgt. Ayen, a member of the St. Lawrence County Drug Task Force, and coordinator of the January 25th bust that resulted in ten people being charged with felony drug sale counts, said that the couple were on the original list but had been vacationing in Florida. "We got word that they had returned from Florida, so we decided it was time to pay them a visit," said Sgt. Ayen.

Both defendants were charged with criminal sale of a controlled substance in the third degree, a class B felony. The two are alleged to have sold the painkiller oxycontin.

Bigwarfe and Lastella were arraigned before Justice John Riordan, and were remanded to the St. Lawrence County Correctional Facility on \$5,000 bail each or \$10,000 bond.



BIGWARFE



LASTELLA

Sgt. Ayen said that with Monday's arrests, it is unlikely that any further suspects would be charged in connection with the current sweeps.



Just call her champ!

Wrestling may not be the most popular sport for girls... but don't tell that to Aleesha LaBow, a fourth grade student at West Side School, Gouverneur. Aleesha, competing at 93-pounds in the age 8-9 class, took home the top prize at the Battle for the Belt Tournament at Indian River. Aleesha, who enjoys all sports, is in her third year of wrestling. She is the daughter of Shawn and Sandy LaBow, Gouverneur. Aleesha has wrestled in one all girl's tournament, in Syracuse, and was one of only two females to compete at Indian River. She won three matches by pin and the championship by a decision. In one match she was awarded a forfeit when the parents of her opponent would not allow him to wrestle a girl. Aleesha is living proof that you can overcome hurdles and stereotypes, even here in Gouverneur. (LaBow family photo)