

LAUREL, MD - Congressman Steny Hoyer visited the U.S. Secret Service James J. Rowley Training Center today to present awards to firefighters from throughout Prince George's County for their service to the U.S. Secret Service Training Facility located in Laurel, and to pay tribute to them for fighting a major fire at the complex on January 18, 2004.

Over 55 firefighters from throughout Prince George's County responded to the devastating fire in January. Their efforts prevented major damage from occurring to the Secret Service's irreplaceable firearms collection, and to the historical Wilkie Building.

Congressman Hoyer gave the following remarks at the Awards Ceremony, as prepared for delivery:

"Today we recognize the dedication to duty and heroism of these fire fighters.

"We also recognize the spirit of cooperation that exists here in Prince George's County between the Secret Service, the fire departments and the community.

"By all accounts, the fire on January 18th was one of the most intense any of these firefighters had ever encountered. Yet without hesitation they battled the blaze, preserved the irreplaceable firearms collection, and prevented further damage to the historical Wilkie building.

"Eleanor Roosevelt said, 'You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing which you think you cannot do.'

"Everyday the brave men and women of our fire departments do the unthinkable. They face fear and risk their lives to protect the lives and property of our communities. To them it is just another day at the office, but to us it is the selfless acts of heroes.

"I want to take this opportunity to thank you not just for your efforts on January 18th, but for the risks that you take each day and the sacrifices that you make.

"Congratulations on the awards you are receiving today."

The firefighters and Departments receiving awards at the ceremony included:

Prince George's Fire Chief Ronald D. Blackwell, Lt. Col. Bill McGown, Bureau Chief #5 Denton Rourke, Battalion Chief #6 Victor Ferreira, Fire Investigators from the Cranford-Graves Fire Services Building, Breathing Air Company #44, Bomb Squad 53 of Firefighters Co 53, Advanced Emergency Medical Services - Paramedic Unit 49, Bowie Fire/EMS Station 19, Major Marc Bashoor, Laurel Fire Station 10, Greenbelt Fire/EMS Station 35, Laurel Rescue Squad 49, West Lanham Hills Fire/EMS Station 48, Volunteer Fire Fighters Company of Lanham, Hyattsville Volunteer Fire Station 1, Glendale Fire/EMS Station 18, Berwyn Heights Fire/EMS Station 14, Beltsville Fire/EMS Station 31 Volunteer Fire Chief Al Schwartz, Volunteer Operations Chief, Major James McClelland.

NOTE: Beltsville Fire/EMS Station 31 is responsible for coverage at the USSS training center. They were first due and arrived first on the morning of the fire.

Congressman Steny Hoyer; Deputy Director C. Danny Spriggs, US Secret Service; Prince George's County Deputy Fire Chief Darrell Odom; and Prince George's County Volunteer Fire & Rescue Association Chief Al Schwartz presented the awards.

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