

***2013 Higgins & Langley Memorial Awards
in Swiftwater Rescue Announced***

For Immediate Release

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ASHEVILLE, NC, May 25, 2013—The Higgins & Langley Memorial and Education Fund is proud to announce the 2013 Higgins & Langley Memorial Awards, which recognize excellence in the field of flood and swiftwater rescue. This year marks the 20th Anniversary of these prestigious international awards.

Awards are presented to swiftwater and flood rescue experts worldwide in several categories: the Outstanding Achievement Award, Program Development Award, Special Commendation Award, Swiftwater Rescue Incident Award, and the rarely bestowed Lifetime Achievement Award.

The awards will be presented on Friday, May 31, 2013, at 7:30 PM, at the annual National Association for Search and Rescue (NASAR) conference – Sheraton Myrtle Beach Conference Hotel, 2101 North Oak Street, Myrtle Beach, SC 29577; telephone: (843) 918-5000.

2013 Higgins & Langley Awards

Lifetime Achievement Award

Jim Lavalley
Chilliwack, B.C. Canada

Jim Lavalley is a visionary leader, swiftwater rescue equipment designer/developer/tester, and master swiftwater, flood and ice rescue and boat instructor, who has had a worldwide impact on the growth and development of swiftwater/flood/ice rescue as a unique technical rescue discipline. He first garnered recognition in the 1970s as a river guide, running the wild rivers of Canada and providing rescue training to commercial rafting guides. As founder and president of Rescue Canada, Jim developed new rescue techniques to improve victim and rescuer safety based on the International Rescue Instructors Alliance standards. Jim's swiftwater boat operations programs are the foundation for the majority of training programs taught in Canada and the United States today. Jim has steadily worked to improve techniques, equipment and training programs for water rescue personnel to more successfully aid victims caught in life-threatening swift water. In 1997 Jim formed Force 6 Safety Products and began designing and building equipment unavailable anywhere else, including the innovative Force 6 Rescuer and Instructor personal flotation devices (PFDs) – creating a new standard for high float PFDs designed specifically for swiftwater rescue – and the weight forward Dart and Delta throw bags. In 2012, the new, innovative Force 6 RescueTec was introduced as the first and only PFD to meet the new USCG Class 5 Rescue Professional PFD Standard. Jim has been an international, court qualified subject matter expert since 1988, and continues to be the go-to person for swiftwater rescue problems. He is frequently contacted by public safety agencies and the courts that have swiftwater/flood/ice or boat issues and concerns. Jim has spent his entire career improving safety for people who live, work and recreate around the water. Procedures developed by Jim have been passed down from instructor to instructor resulting in thousands of swiftwater rescue personnel around the world benefiting from his vast expertise and experience.

Outstanding Achievement Award

FDNY Special Operations Command Task Force New York, NY

When New York was hit by Hurricane Sandy, the New York City Fire Department (FDNY) Special Operations Command Task Force divided the worst-hit areas of the city into Branches: Breezy Branch, Staten Branch, Rockaway Branch, Far Rockaway Branch, and Broad Channel Branch. In each of those branches dozens to hundreds of rescues were conducted as the storm surge overtook New York City's coastal zones in a disaster that inundated or washed away entire towns from the Jersey Shore to Nassau County. As the storm hit with full force, at night, FDNY rescue companies, operating in dangerous conditions, with 90+ mile-per-hour winds and churning, chest-deep floodwater, saved people trapped in flooded power plants and residential streets, on rooftops, and in the midst of several conflagrations with buildings burning. Without FDNY's robust water rescue program, countless lives would surely have been lost during this devastating super storm.

Rockaway Point Volunteer Fire Department Rockaway Point, NY

On the night of October 29, 2012, five members of the Rockaway Point Volunteer Fire Department's water rescue unit rescued more than 20 individuals from flooded homes and homes that were threatened by a large fire that claimed over 100 houses at the height of Hurricane Sandy. With their fire station flooded and their fire pumper truck and ambulance submerged, Capt. Michael Valentine, Lt. Brandon Riley, Lt. James Morton, F/F Michael Kahlau, and F/F Brian Doyle deployed two rescue boats and battled through the fierce storm, in extreme conditions, relying on invaluable training and skill to safely rescue everyone.

Program Development Award

New Jersey State Police Open Water Rescue Program

The New Jersey State Police Open Water Rescue Program was initiated when too many law enforcement, fire, and EMS agencies were sending first responders who were unequipped and not properly trained to manage dangerous water rescues, hurricanes and coastal flooding events. Unique to the rescue program is storm surge flood training, which requires specific planning, skill, and capability beyond inland flood and swiftwater rescue training. Since 2006, the Open Water Rescue Program has provided training to more than 1,800 police, fire, EMS, and lifeguard first-responders from over 100 agencies, preparing them for lifesaving missions during the many hurricanes, storms and floods which routinely strike the region.

Special Commendation Award

"Rescue for River Runners"

Jim Coffey
Michael McKay

"Rescue for River Runners" is an impressive educational video series that raises awareness within the recreational whitewater community about swiftwater rescue, including self-rescue, river hazards, and whitewater boating safety. Jim Coffey's expertise as a swiftwater rescue instructor, and Michael McKay's skill as a videographer, lend unique authenticity to each episode. The complete series is offered online, which ensures that river guides and paddlers worldwide have easy access to critical lifesaving information to help prevent deaths and injuries.

Swiftwater Rescue Incident Awards

Killeen Fire Department Technical Rescue Team

Killeen, TX

On the night of March 19-20, 2012, the Killeen Fire Department's Technical Rescue Team responded to a number of swiftwater rescue events in Class 4 floodwaters downstream from a low water crossing over the Leon River. The team's dedication to training and practice became evident as they evacuated more than 50 victims from rising floodwater and rescued three victims in harrowing danger in the river in a downpour of rain. Each victim posed a different, but equally difficult and hazardous problem. The first was stranded in the churning river on a midstream tree, the second was being swept downstream, and the third was trapped in her car with only a small pocket of air left. The team not only successfully rescued all three victims, but maintained their own safety as well. During the final rescue, the team's boat became entrapped on a dangerous, submerged "strainer" midstream in the torrent. With the proper equipment and training, swiftwater rescue personnel were able to free the boat and make it to shore safely. That every person in life-threatening danger was rescued is a testament to the Killeen Fire Department's swiftwater rescue training and capability.

Haw River Incident

North Carolina

On March 25, 2012 North Chatham Volunteer Fire Department received a call for two stranded canoeists on the flood-swollen Haw River. Swiftwater rescue teams from four agencies responded to the scene. Their training was put to the test as they located and rescued these two victims. When problems developed with one of the rescue boats, one rescuer was thrown into the water, one managed to grasp a tree limb, and one was able to stay with the boat. Because of the training and planning by the three responding agencies, both civilian victims and all swiftwater rescue team members went home safely after a job well done.

Special 20th Anniversary Awards:

Founders Award

Paul McMinn

Emily King

In 1993, Emily King and Paul McMinn were serving as co-chairs of the National Association of Search & Rescue (NASAR) Water Rescue Committee when Los Angeles County Firefighter/Paramedic Jeff Langley lost his life in a tragic helicopter incident. Paul and Emily proposed a modest award, named in honor of Jeff Langley and civilian Earl Higgins. The history of the Higgins & Langley Memorial Award parallels the history of the growth and development of emergency services-based swiftwater and flood rescue in the United States and worldwide. As we mark the 20th Anniversary of the awards, we offer special recognition to our founders, Emily King, an international expert in boating education and water rescue representing the National Safe Boating Council, and Paul McMinn, Assistant Recreational Director, South Bend Parks and Recreation Department, who developed and directed the Indiana River Rescue School for ten years.

Service Award

Fred "Slim" Ray

Slim Ray is an internationally-recognized authority on flood, swiftwater and whitewater safety and rescue with more than twenty years of experience in swiftwater rescue, including course development and instruction with Rescue 3, Canyonlands Field Institute, and the Nantahala Outdoor Center. He has written and lectured extensively on the subject. An active recreational kayaker, he has worked as a raft guide and canoe and kayak instructor both in the United States and abroad. Slim has been involved in the development and management of the Higgins & Langley Memorial and Education Fund – a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization – since its inception. After 20 years, Slim is retiring from the Higgins & Langley Memorial and Education Fund Board of Directors, and we are offering special thanks for his dedication, professionalism, vision, and steadfast support.

Background

The Higgins & Langley Memorial Awards were established in 1993 by the National Association for Search and Rescue Swiftwater Rescue Committee in honor of Earl Higgins, a writer and filmmaker, who lost his life in 1980 while rescuing a child who was swept down the Los Angeles River, and Los Angeles County Firefighter Paramedic Jeffrey Langley, a pioneer in swiftwater rescue who lost his life in a helicopter incident in 1993.

The Awards have increased awareness about the need for specialized swiftwater and flood rescue training and preparedness. Today, worldwide training certifications have increased and agencies have been inspired to develop viable water rescue programs to protect the public and rescuers alike.

The Higgins & Langley Memorial Awards are sponsored by Angel-Guard Rescue Curtain/Los Angeles County Fire Department, CFS Press, CMC Rescue, Inc., Esprit Whitewater, Fire and Rescue Concepts, LLC, K38 Water Safety, Liquid Militia, Mustang Survival, Ozark Rescue Suppliers, Rescue Canada, Rescue ONE Connector Boats, Rescue 3 International/Rescue Source, River Hydrology Designs, Sierra Rescue/Rescue 3 West, Sierra Rescue Tools LLC, SkyHook Rescue Systems, Inc., and Whitewater Rescue Institute, with additional support provided by the Rudi Schulte Family Foundation, Jon Stephen and Karen Langley Stephen, and the family of John B. and Shirley A. Rigg, as well as contributions from many generous individuals, including Marshall Parks and Leonard A. Martin.