

2024 SHSO Highway Safety Awards – Ceremony Script

The Safe Systems Emergency Medical Services Award

This award recognizes an individual or group who demonstrates dedication to and advocacy for highway safety, to improve statewide Emergency Medical Services that foster and advance Vermont's highway safety priorities.

The Recipient is: Richmond Rescue and its Director, Michael Chiarella

Richmond Rescue has been a dedicated EMS agency serving the Richmond community for many years. They are a combination EMS agency with about 35 active volunteers, 5 part time employees and 5 full time employees. This year, they are expecting to respond to around 1,400 911 calls in and around their community while also providing mutual aid beyond their service area.

What makes Richmond Rescue so deserving of this award is their dedication to improving safety for the EMS crews, first responders, and motorists on the section of Interstate 89 that they serve.

In addition, Richmond Rescue performs outstanding community service work for their community and beyond.

In 2024, Richmond Rescue became a "Pediatric Safe Program EMS agency." The Vermont Department of Health's Pediatric Safe Program is designed to recognize the commitment of agencies that are improving pediatric emergency care. Richmond Rescue has been a child passenger assistance (or car seat) station for many years with four child passenger safety technicians offering their expertise to families in the community to ensure that our littlest Vermonters are safely traveling on Vermont's roadways.

Additionally, Richmond Rescue holds babysitter training, CPR and AED lifesaving trainings. They also worked to ensure that Richmond is a HeartSafe Community. This lifesaving work includes putting AEDs into police vehicles to ensure quick and easy access to AEDs in an emergency, including highway related emergencies. Richmond Rescue's efforts have strengthened Vermont's Safe System efforts for post-crash care.

Richmond Rescue also offers a free bike helmet giveaway, annually providing around 100 free bike helmets (and ensuring properly fitting helmets) to members of their community and beyond to help reduce injuries during bike related incidents. It is estimated that they have given away over 500 helmets to youngsters since the inception of the program.

Due to their geographical location, Richmond Rescue's response area includes a section of Interstate 89 which experiences significant highway crashes. Because of this increased risk,

Richmond Rescue has focused on developing a robust response plan and training for these dangerous calls.

Richmond Rescue already had an extensive ambulance driver training program; however, they enhanced their Traffic Incident Management protocols to be as safe as possible not only for their crews, but their fellow responders, and other motorists in that area. Their Traffic Incident Management training includes “first on scene” safer positioning (to cover the responders working the crash in the event of other vehicles entering into the crash scene), flame and other safety signals use, and crash scene traffic diversion. This training is not typical of most EMS agencies, as fire departments often assume these roles with traffic crash scenes.

EMS plays a critical role in reducing highway related injuries and deaths nationally and in Vermont. Without the dedicated EMS agencies in the state to provide safe, effective emergency post-crash medical care between the crash scene and the hospital, there would be more victims of crashes with serious injuries and deaths attributed to highway related incidents. While all EMS providers and agencies play a critical part of this system, Richmond Rescue has gone above and beyond. They have worked tirelessly to promote safety, prevent injury, and ensure a rapid and safe response to highway related emergencies.

The Safe Systems Emergency Medical Services Award is presented to Richmond Rescue and Director Michael Chiarella in recognition of their outstanding post-crash care efforts and commitment to saving lives on our roadways.

The Safe Systems Engineering Award

This award recognizes an individual or team that has contributed to the community in an exceptional way by improving infrastructure or engineering as it relates to highway safety in Vermont.

The Recipient is: Ian Degutis, State Traffic Operations Engineer for the Vermont Agency of Transportation

Ian Degutis has served the Vermont Agency of Transportation since 2009. He began his career with VTrans as a Rotation Engineer in the Program Development Division. After he completed that rotation, he moved into a Traffic Design Engineer position, which he remained in until 2016. The Traffic Design Unit is responsible for designing traffic and intersection improvement projects, for both in-house designs and consultant designed projects. The Traffic Design Unit also provides technical assistance and traffic expertise to other sections within the Agency, and until the creation of the Transportation Systems Management & Operations Signal Operations Engineering group, in early 2015, Ian was responsible for operation and engineering maintenance of the Agency's traffic signals across the state.

Ian also worked as a Rail Bridge Management Engineer before returning to the Highway Division as the Traffic Mobility Engineer in 2017. In June 2018, Ian was promoted to his current position as State Traffic Engineer overseeing Traffic Operations Statewide. Ian's role as a leader in the Operations and Safety Bureau is evident. He brings his broad range of engineering expertise and recommendations to safety concerns to every project that he works on.

Within his current position, Ian works tirelessly to improve Vermont's traffic safety and mobility, ensuring that traffic control devices are in compliance with the federal Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. Ian and his team also evaluate and implement traffic performance and mobility analytical tools to improve statewide travel mobility. Ian also serves as the staff coordinator for The Vermont Traffic Committee, providing engineering reports for the Committee's review.

Ian's work is closely tied to the State Highway Safety Office, particularly with our Law Enforcement Liaisons when Ian is fielding inquiries and requests from the citizens of Vermont. Ian is very thorough in doing background work and research with his team while finding solutions to make the roadways safer.

For the past year he has also overseen the Highway Safety Improvement Program, or HSIP. The HSIP is a Federal Highway Administration program with the purpose to achieve a significant reduction in traffic fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads, including non-State-owned roads. The HSIP requires a data-driven, strategic approach to improving highway safety.

Ian has a passion for safety that goes beyond any job duties at the agency. Ian holds others accountable both internally and externally to improve safety for all users of the highway infrastructure that VTrans is responsible with operating and maintaining.

The Safe Systems Engineering Award is presented to Ian Degutis in recognition of his dedication and commitment to improving infrastructure and engineering as it relates to highway safety in Vermont.

The Fletcher Brush Educational Outreach Award

This award is presented to an individual for outstanding educational outreach in the promotion of highway safety priorities for Vermont citizens. This annual award honors Fletcher “Buster” Brush, who exemplified the notion of “service above self.”

The Recipient is: Richard Kearney, of the Vermont Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association

Since beginning his career in the field of traffic safety, Rich has made many important contributions to the profession. During his initial career training, Rich demonstrated a strong commitment to excellence and safety. He continues that commitment in his teaching, and he demands excellence from his students, with the ultimate goal of keeping them safe.

Rich frequently attends conferences and workshops at the state, regional and national levels. He has earned a number of certifications through the Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists. This enables him to meet the needs of an underserved population of drivers. Rich is always looking for new and different methods to improve his teaching, including new and unique methods to connect the driving task to his students. Most importantly, Rich shares his knowledge and passion with his colleagues.

Rich shares his passion for excellence and safety by giving presentations at conferences and workshops at the state, regional and national levels. He is a resource and mentor to his fellow teachers, and on multiple occasions has been called upon as a subject matter expert on a variety of traffic safety issues.

In 2022, Rich received both the “Vermont Driver Educator of the Year award” and the “National Teacher of Excellence Award.” That same year, Rich presented on his best teaching practices at the 2022 American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association conference. His willingness to share his knowledge and to mentor others are strengths that make Rich a leader in traffic safety.

Perhaps Rich’s greatest contribution to traffic safety is his leadership ability. He embodies everything that an exemplary driver educator should. He has served in leadership positions at the Vermont Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association and the New England Traffic Safety Education Association. He has recently been installed on the Board of Directors for the American Driver and Traffic Safety Association, where he will most certainly be an asset to the national organization.

The Fletcher Brush Educational Outreach Award is presented to Richard Kearney in recognition of his dedication and commitment to highway safety through educating young and novice drivers in our state.

The Rising Star Enforcement Award

This award is presented to a law enforcement officer in the first five years of their career who has shown exemplary work and passion for traffic law enforcement, while demonstrating teamwork and strong support for fellow officers and the community.

The Recipient is: Trooper Taylor Demick, Vermont State Police

Trooper Demick has been employed by the Vermont State Police since 2022. During his brief time stationed at the New Haven Barracks, he has demonstrated significant efforts in deterring poor vehicle operation, erratic driving, and apprehending impaired drivers in Addison County.

Trooper Demick has shown a pattern of excellence in his work with VSP. In September of 2024, Trooper Demick was recognized by Governor Phil Scott for his actions in saving the life of a distressed female experiencing a mental health crisis. Trooper Demick also successfully applied for and was accepted as a member of VSP's Tactical Services Unit this past month. His early appointment to the unit is a direct indication of his determination, dedication, and ability to successfully navigate complex and difficult situations. Trooper Demick is known for his willingness to volunteer and initiate efforts within the troop room. His disposition to assist and motivate others is an example for fellow law enforcement officers to emulate.

Trooper Demick's highway safety work is also outstanding. In 2023, Demick stopped 483 vehicles, resulting in 40 DUI arrests, all in an effort to keep Vermont roadways safe for our citizens. As of August 2024, Trooper Demick's efforts have resulted in 20 alcohol and drug DUIs, 322 motor vehicle stops and 54 total criminal arrests.

The New Haven barracks has plateaued in alcohol and drug related fatalities, with (1) impaired fatality each year for the last 3 years. Promoting roadway safety is one of the key goals and objectives for the New Haven Barracks. Trooper Demick's work ethic and consistent motor vehicle work has surely contributed to achieving our goals and saving lives on our roadways.

The New Haven Barracks has achieved a 114% increase in overall motor vehicle stops, a 243% increase in traffic tickets and a 73% increase in DUI related arrests. Trooper Demick's proactive actions and efforts have contributed to this increase of motor related incidents and contacts. This increase in motor vehicle enforcement has greatly enhanced the highway safety work being conducted in Addison County.

Trooper Demick, your outstanding highway safety work so early on in your career has been noticed and we have no doubt that you will continue to be a leader in traffic safety.

The Rising Star Award is presented to Trooper Demick in recognition of his exemplary work and passion for traffic law enforcement.

The Drug Recognition Expert Award

This award is presented to an individual member of the DRE Program who has demonstrated a commitment to education, enforcement, and community engagement to help decrease incidents of impaired driving.

The Recipient is: Officer Robert Gerrish, Lyndonville Police Department

Officer Robert Gerrish became a certified Drug Recognition Expert in 2022. Over the span of less than two years, Officer Gerrish has completed 65 drug impairment evaluations. He has completed over 25 so far in 2024.

Officer Gerrish is one of Vermont's most active Drug Recognition Experts. He is considered a leader in the Vermont Drug Evaluation and Classification program because of his work ethic, ability to inspire, and passion to teach and learn. Officer Gerrish is at the top of the list with drug influence evaluations conducted in Vermont.

Not only is he proactive in motor vehicle work and impaired driving enforcement, Officer Gerrish also runs the group chat for the northeast DREs, and is very motivating in getting his peers to respond to calls and increase the DRE response rate. Once a page goes out, he is the very first one to see which DRE is available for the call and is always willing to travel to wherever the need is, either on or off duty, many times sacrificing personal time with family and friends. Officer Gerrish also makes it a priority to respond to major crashes when a DRE is requested.

Officer Gerrish is constantly working to better himself by seeking out further education, and he consistently seeks feedback from his peers. Officer Gerrish takes what he learns and applies it to his work, but he also shares it with his fellow DREs.

Officer Gerrish was recently awarded the Vermont Drug Evaluation and Classification Program's 2023 DRE Outstanding Achievement Award. He continues to maintain his outstanding effort and work ethic in his field.

Officer Gerrish is a leader in impaired driving enforcement in the State of Vermont, making our roadways safer for all road users. He has shown dedication, passion, and commitment to Education, Enforcement and Community Engagement to help decrease the incidence of Impaired Driving.

The Drug Recognition Expert Award is presented to Officer Robert Gerrish in recognition of his efforts and commitment to serving as a Drug Recognition Expert in Vermont. Through these efforts, he has helped make our roadways safer for all users.

The Sergeant Michael Johnson Life Saver Award

Sergeant Michael Johnson was a driven and natural leader. He did not lead by dictating rhetoric; he led by doing. He led by example. He would never ask his Troopers to do anything that he would not do himself or that he had not already done. Sergeant Johnson was able to use his motivational skills to enhance the abilities of the Troopers that served with him. He possessed the ability to raise people's expectations of themselves and taught them to fulfill those expectations.

Sgt. Michael Johnson was a 16-year veteran of the Vermont State Police when he tragically lost his life in the line of duty on June 15, 2003. Sgt. Johnson was deploying spike strips in an attempt to stop a suspect fleeing from Troopers in a motor vehicle pursuit when the suspect struck Sgt. Johnson with their vehicle and killed him.

This award is presented to an individual who, like SGT. Johnson, has demonstrated an outstanding commitment to highway safety.

The Recipient is: Retired Captain Paul H. White, Vermont State Police, and Law Enforcement Liaison for the Vermont State Highway Safety Office

Throughout his 30 years of service as a Vermont State Trooper, and having served almost a decade as a Law Enforcement Liaison with the State Highway Safety Office, Paul White has dedicated over 33 years of service to the State of Vermont. His consistent and steady leadership in traffic safety work to not only keep the motoring public safe on our roadways, but all first responders safe, has been exceptional.

Starting as a Trooper in 1991, Paul rose through the ranks, serving as a Patrol Commander, Station Commander and Troop Commander. During his time at the Middlesex Barracks, Paul served the Town of Barre on the Traffic Safety Advisory Committee from 1999 to 2016. As a Sergeant, Paul served the State of Vermont as the Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Unit Supervisor from 2003 to 2007.

Paul's work as the Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Unit Supervisor included field inspections, law enforcement, and supervisory work. He coordinated all enforcement activities within VSP regarding enforcement on Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations and Federal Hazardous Materials Regulations.

From August 2007 to November 2013, Paul was the Station Commander at the VSP Middlesex station. It is the station commander's responsibility to manage manpower and other resources to stay ahead of potential problems which may develop in the station's area of responsibility, and to initiate proactive as well as reactive responses from personnel assigned to the station.

From November 2013 to December 2015, Paul was a Troop A Commander for the State Police. The Troop Commander is responsible for overall State Police operations and communications in

the respective Troop area. The Trooper Commander also serves in a dual role as Public Safety District Coordinator for the corresponding geographic area.

From December 2016 to the present, Paul has been a Law Enforcement Liaison for the VTrans State Highway Safety Office. Paul serves as one of two contracted LELs for the state. Paul has worked over the past decade aiding law enforcement agencies with funding for highway safety initiatives, training opportunities, technical assistance, guidance with High Visibility Enforcement campaigns, grant questions and more. LELs serve as a vital link and conduit between the SHSO and the state's law enforcement community. The LELs help promote and enhance state and national highway safety programs, initiatives and campaigns. They are responsible for planning, organizing, networking, promoting, recruiting, implementing, reporting, and evaluating law enforcement's role in traffic safety projects, activities, and achievements.

Paul served on the Vermont Highway Safety Alliance, the Drug Evaluation and Classification Program Committee, and several Vermont Criminal Justice Council committees. Paul is a subject matter expert routinely testifying to the Legislature and adding valuable education and expertise assisting with legislative bill reviews. He has been instrumental in the e-citation project where officer safety on the roadway is at the forefront of the project. He has been involved in the State's Traffic Committee, Traffic Incident Management working group, and so much more. Paul's advocacy for municipalities, County Sheriff's Departments, and local police departments has been part of his practice as an LEL since day one.

In addition to Paul's state police and law enforcement liaison service, he has served as the Chair of the Regional Dispatch Working group created by the Vermont Legislature, Chair of the Barre Town Selectboard, a trustee for the Vermont State Employees' retirement system, and was appointed to the Regional Dispatch Working Group by the Vermont Leagues of Cities and Town to represent municipalities, where he still serves.

Paul promoted and was a strong advocate for traffic safety initiatives as both a trooper and as an LEL. We thank you, Paul, for 33 + years of distinguished service through your influence, leadership and dedication to highway safety. Your lifetime of work has made the roadways of Vermont safer for all travelers. Paul's leadership, expertise and guidance to assist not only the SHSO, but the Agency of Transportation and all of our state partners, will be missed.

The Sergeant Michael Johnson Life Saver Award is presented to Retired Captain Paul H. White in recognition of his tireless dedication and commitment to making Vermont's roadways safer for all users.
