OFFICER STEPHANIE KENNEDY

The Medal of Merit is awarded to employees who distinguish themselves by meritorious achievement or service. Meritorious actions are those which clearly surpass that which is normally required or expected.

Residential fires always carry with them the fear that someone could be trapped inside. That fear is heightened when such fires are reported in the middle of the night. That is exactly what five of our officers faced in the predawn hours of December 3, 2006. The fire was reported at 307 E Nora and a child was still inside a burning apartment on the second floor. Corporal Kevin Keller and Officers Gene Baldwin, Jim Christensen, Jake Jensen and Stephanie Kennedy responded quickly, arriving ahead of firefighters. They tried several times to crawl under the smoke, but were continually forced back. Cpl. Keller and Ofc. Jensen even packed their shirts with snow which they tried to breathe through, but it wouldn't filter the smoke as it had become too toxic and hot for them to scale the stairs.

These officers didn't just wait for a fire crew. They secured the area around the building and gathered information on the child's exact location, which they gave to the first arriving firefighters. Using a ladder, fire crews quickly rescued the child who was not breathing and severely burned. Ofc. Christensen began CPR, which he continued in the ambulance and until the child was transferred to the Emergency Room personnel.

We wish this was a Lifesaving Medal, however, we all know it didn't turn out that way. Tragically, the two year old girl died, but that doesn't mean these officers were any less heroic. Fire Captain Mike Zambryski wrote, "My investigation revealed a slow developing fire that produced a large amount of smoke and soot. The fire burned at least 10 minutes prior to the occupants being alerted. The temperature at the ceiling would easily have been 800 degrees. In my opinion, the victim suffered her injuries before the 911 call was made. As a firefighter, I have been inside a burning house; the heat is nearly unbearable with our protective equipment on. I appreciate the efforts of these police officers. It was impossible for them to make entry without protective equipment." These officers' efforts to save the child's life surpassed what is expected of an officer at the scene of a fire.

It is for these meritorious actions that Officer Stephanie Kennedy was presented with the Medal of Merit.